

Mitigating the Impact of Communal Conflicts on Agricultural Investments in the Niger Delta

Conflict Briefing: October 2024



Figure 1: A woman harvesting cassava in a farm in the Niger Delta. © PIND Foundation 2024.

Executive Summary

This conflict briefing explores the link between communal conflict and economic development, focusing on how violence affects agricultural productivity and investment. Using data from PIND's Partners for Peace (P4P) Peace Map and interviews with key stakeholders, including farmers, herders, and investors, the study analyses how communal conflict impacts agricultural livelihoods and investments. The findings indicate that land competition is a major driver of communal violence, causing substantial disruptions to agricultural activities. Local responses to these challenges include the hiring of local vigilantes to protect farmers and crops and adopting group farming practices, where multiple families collectively cultivate a plot of land. However, to more effectively address these issues, the report

recommends strengthening community-based platforms for conflict resolution, prioritizing livelihood-supporting peace initiatives, and utilizing early warning systems to protect agricultural investments and promote sustainable growth.

Introduction

Communal conflicts, including clashes between herders and farmers, are widespread in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, where disputes over ownership, access, and usage are primary causes of violence. Land is a vital resource that communities depend on for subsistence and livelihoods. In the Niger Delta, it holds additional significance as a cornerstone of communal identity, social legitimacy, and political representation.^{1, 2} Consequently, disputes over land access and resources

have been leading causes of violence and insecurity. Statistics indicate that between January 2014 and December 2023, communal conflicts led to over 800 fatalities in the Niger Delta (see Figures 2 and 3).

Apart from the loss of human life, communal violence also imposes massive socio-economic costs, including the destruction of property and the disruption of livelihoods.³ Conflict over land is a prevailing issue that is affecting agricultural investments and economic development in the Niger Delta.

This conflict briefing examines the intersection of communal conflict and economic development in Nigeria's Niger Delta, focusing on how communal violence impacts agricultural productivity

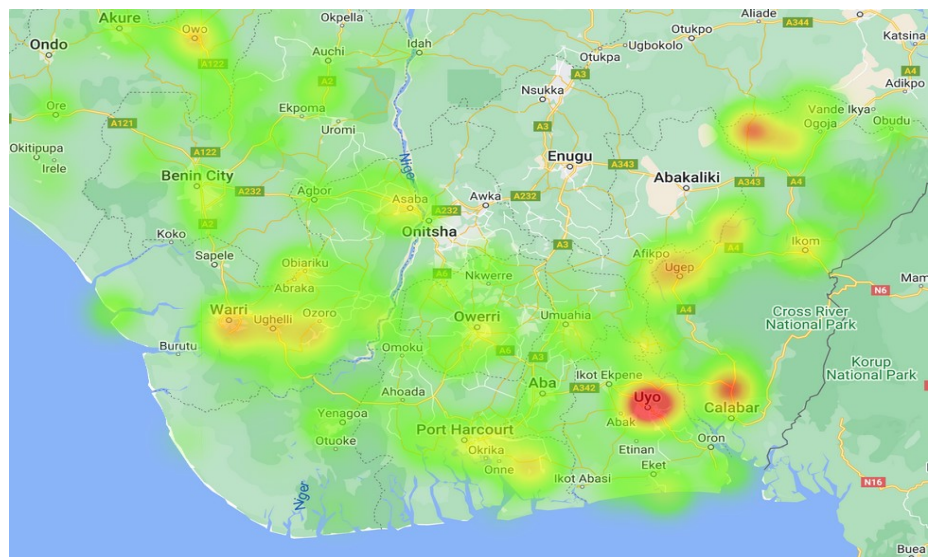


Figure 2: Heat Map shows geographical concentration of communal violence in the Niger Delta, January 2014 - December 2023. Sources: Nigeria Watch and ACLED data, integrated on PIND's P4P Peace Map (www.p4p-nigerdelta.org)

Trends and Dynamics of Violent Communal Conflicts in the Niger Delta

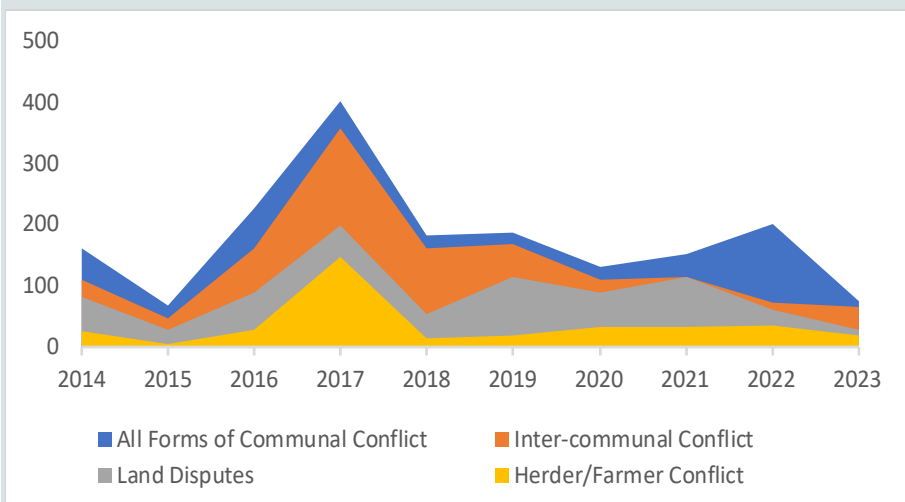


Figure 3: Communal Conflict Related Fatalities in the Niger Delta from January 2014 - December 2023. Sources: Nigeria Watch and ACLED data integrated on PIND's P4P Peace Map (www.p4p-nigerdelta.org)

and investment. It delves into the underlying causes trends, and dynamics of these conflicts, underscores their effects on agricultural investments, and proposes actionable recommendations for government, investors, civil society organizations, peace actors, and other key stakeholders invested in the region's security, peace, and economic development. The brief draws on data from [PIND's P4P Peace Map](#), and insights from interviews with 44 key stakeholders, including farmers, herders, investors, community leaders, and peace actors in conflict-affected communities across Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Ondo States.

Background and Context

Nigeria's Niger Delta region, located along the Gulf of Guinea, spans over 70,000 square kilometers and includes 185 of Nigeria's 774 local government areas (LGAs) across nine of the country's 36 states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. According to the 2006 population census, the region has over 30 million people,

representing more than 23 percent of Nigeria's population, with an estimated density of 265 people per square kilometer.

The Niger Delta is culturally rich, with over 40 ethnic groups speaking more than 100 languages and dialects, where traditional livelihoods primarily center on farming and fishing. Historically, the region has experienced significant conflict over land rights and control of land-based resources, with land serving as the foundation of the local economy and a core component of social identity and political mobilization.⁴ Disputes over access to land and resources, including oil and gas, fueled calls for resource control, which escalated into armed insurgency.⁵

The demand for land for both livelihoods and subsistence has intensified conflicts among communities, businesses, and individuals. Recent data shows that inter-communal land disputes are among the most severe and prevalent types of conflict in the Niger Delta (see Figure 3).

Drivers, Trends and Dynamics of Communal Conflicts

The high frequency of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta arises from a complex mix of factors, including cultural diversity, ethnic tensions, historical grievances, resource-based political allocations, socio-economic disparities, demographic growth, and climate challenges.^{6, 7} These conflicts frequently manifest as land and boundary disputes, leadership struggles, and ethno-sectarian hostilities.⁸

Research shows that competition for land and associated resources is a key driver of communal conflicts in the region, with economic expansion, population growth, and environmental changes, including climate-induced displacement and migration, intensifying land demand.^{9, 10, 11}

Most land-related conflicts center on issues of ownership, access, and usage. A community leader from Oyadama, Cross River State, observed, *"Communal conflicts are usually caused by the struggle for land during farming seasons and grazing of cattle in villages without the consent of landowners."* A pastoralist leader from Oba-Ile, Ondo State, added, *"The absence of designated cattle routes makes it hard for herders to guide their cattle, leading to clashes with farmers."*

Over time, land disputes have taken on ethno-sectarian and organized criminal dimensions, including violent farmer-herder clashes that result in the destruction of farmland, loss of lives, and internal displacement.¹² A youth leader in Ayede-Ogbese, Ondo State, noted, *"The conflict between herdsman and farmers has fueled violence and insecurity. Farms are abandoned due to attacks, affecting our livelihoods, as farming is our primary occupation."*

Communal conflicts over land access and ownership are increasingly associated with criminal activities, such as banditry, kidnapping, and the proliferation of ethnic militias, worsening regional violence and insecurity.¹³ As a farmer in Ochon, Cross River State, explained, *“Beyond the loss of lives and property, land ownership and boundary disputes have led to rising incidents of rape, armed robbery, and kidnapping.”*

Communal Violence and Insecurity in the Niger Delta

Communal conflict is a major source of insecurity in the Niger Delta, resulting in loss of life, destruction of livelihoods, internal displacement, and weakened social cohesion. This instability creates a security vacuum often exploited by militias and criminal gangs. A leader of the Ondo State chapter of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) - a socio-cultural group representing Fulani pastoralists - stated, *“Kidnapping and cattle*

theft have added a criminal dimension to the herder-farmer conflict, eroding trust between the two groups and increasing tensions. Criminal groups, including kidnapers, make it too dangerous for herders to enter forests for grazing, causing greater pressure on farmlands.”

Criminal activities like kidnapping weaken the state’s law enforcement capacity, further destabilizing the region. A woman leader in Ozoro, Delta State, noted, *“The conflict between herders and farmers has increased crime rates. Some of our youth are resorting to theft as their farms are destroyed, and herders are also kidnapping locals. We’ve set up community vigilantes for protection, but clashes sometimes occur with herders.”*

This pervasive insecurity undermines the government’s ability to deliver essential services like healthcare and infrastructure, worsening socio-economic challenges and grievances that further weaken regional security and development.

The Economic Costs of Communal Conflicts

Conflict is a major barrier to development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs.¹⁴ Violent conflict destabilizes economies, with the impacts often persisting long after the violence ends. Communal conflicts hinder economic growth by causing loss of life, displacement of labor, disruption of livelihoods, and community devastation.¹⁵

The Niger Delta has been heavily affected by communal conflicts over land and land-based resources, with significant consequences for communities, agriculture, and the broader economy.¹⁶ The agricultural sector, vital to livelihoods and the local economy, has been vulnerable to communal conflicts, particularly between herders and farmers. Recurrent conflicts over land disputes have disrupted farming and reduced agricultural productivity, with significant implications for food security and economic stability.



Figure 4: A herder grazing cattle near a cassava farm in Odiguetue community in Ovia North East LGA, Edo State. © PIND Foundation 2024



Figure 5: A farmer transporting a sack of cassava with a motorcycle in Ikare community in Ikare-Akoko LGA, Ondo State. © PIND Foundation 2024

According to 75% of respondents, communal conflicts, especially land and boundary disputes and farmer-herder clashes, have severely impacted agriculture, food security, and the local economy. A farmer in Ohoror, Delta State, described the situation: *“Beyond the loss of life and destruction of homes, the conflict with herdsmen affects both farming and trade between communities. People are now afraid to go to their farms. The conflict has also reduced food supplies, and we are now buying garri [cassava flakes] instead of producing it ourselves.”*

Apart from immediate losses, these conflicts often disrupt the transport of agricultural goods, leading to rising food prices, limited access to goods, and worsening food insecurity. A substantial 96% of respondents reported that recurrent communal conflicts have led to increased food prices. A trader in Obubra, Cross River State, explained: *“Farm produce prices have risen as more people abandon farming due to land conflicts. Finding enough local rice is difficult because the conflict has made it harder to transport rice from farms to markets.”*

The economic impact of communal conflict extends beyond agriculture and food security, affecting key indicators such as income, consumption, employment rates, trade, and investment. The cumulative effects of violence, internal displacement, infrastructure damage, and disrupted economic activities leave long-term impacts on economic development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and livelihood insecurity. The insecurity associated with communal conflict has also weakened the region's capacity to attract local and foreign investment, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Impact on Agricultural Investments

Communal conflicts have significantly hindered agricultural investments in the Niger Delta. These conflicts often result in the destruction of farmland, reducing crop yields and diminishing farmers' incomes. This discourages both local and foreign investors, who view the region as high-risk, fearing that their returns may be diminished by violence and instability. Furthermore, disputes over land rights create uncertainty that makes it difficult for investors to secure land for agricultural activities, further discouraging investment. An investor in oil

Financial institutions are hesitant to extend loans to farmers due to the increased risks, limiting opportunities for agricultural expansion. Disruptions in transportation and supply chains compound the issue, leading to higher post-harvest losses, increased transaction costs, and inefficiencies across the agricultural value chain. These challenges reduce the profitability of investments and weaken investor confidence.

Additionally, communal conflicts drive production costs as farmers and agribusinesses must invest in security to



Figure 6: Cattle grazing along a road in Oyadama community in Obubra LGA, Cross River State © PIND Foundation 2024

palm production in Biase, Cross River State stated, *“Communal conflict over a land dispute is making it very difficult for us to acquire additional land for our oil palm plantation. Once you indicate interest in buying a piece of land for large-scale farming, different communities and individuals will show up to claim ownership. This is affecting our expansion plan.”*

Besides the difficulty in acquiring land for large-scale farming, instability in conflict-prone areas reduces access to credit and financing for farmers and agribusinesses.

protect their assets and workers. Price volatility increases due to supply shortages, leading to inflation and unpredictable returns. As a cocoa dealer in Ile-Oluji, Ondo State explained: *“Cocoa farmers are moving away from large-scale farming to small-scale farming because of conflict over land disputes. This is causing supply shortages and driving up the prices of cocoa.”* The cumulative effects of unstable agricultural markets that are caused by these conflicts are hindering investment and economic development in the region.

Resilience in Conflict-Impacted Communities

At-risk communities have built resilience through self-help mechanisms such as local vigilantes and group farming, reducing violence and strengthening social cohesion. In collaboration with peace actors, civil society organizations have played a key role in fostering social cohesion and supporting vulnerable groups through capacity building.

Informal networks and intergroup dialogue have also been helpful in conflict resolution. The leader of a pastoralist community in Nasarawa (a popular herders' settlement), Cross River State, explained: *"We obtained the permission of the community head before we settled here with our cattle. Both farmers and herders used the same stream for irrigation and grazing, and this was causing conflict. We formed a committee to mediate between the two groups and find a peaceful resolution. The herders found an alternative source of water for their cattle."*

Early warning systems, supported by mobile technology and social media, have been instrumental in predicting and preventing violence, enabling more effective responses.

Livelihood diversification has also been vital in coping with the disruption of agricultural activities. Off-farm activities like artisanal businesses and trading have contributed to economic recovery and long-term resilience in many conflict-affected communities. A community leader in Igarra, Edo State, who is also a farmer, noted: *"Killing of farmers and destruction of crops because of land disputes have forced many big farmers to go into small-scale farming. Many people have also abandoned farming for other type of work like trading, mining, and transportation."*

Despite some successes, these coping mechanisms have failed to meet the long-term food security and livelihood needs of many communities. As a result, agricultural productivity has declined, investments in the sector have been abandoned, and confidence of investors has eroded.

The Way Forward

Mitigating the impacts of communal conflict on agricultural productivity and investments requires a multistakeholder approach that integrates economic development initiatives with peacebuilding efforts. This strategy fosters diverse partnerships that identify synergies between peacebuilding and economic initiatives, ensuring that development interventions are conflict-sensitive and effectively address the socio-economic drivers of communal conflict and instability in the Niger Delta.

Recommendations

1. To strengthen ongoing peacebuilding efforts, stakeholders should prioritize establishing community-based platforms for dispute resolution. Multistakeholder local peace platforms designed to incorporate traditional institutions and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms can significantly reduce communal conflicts by drawing on customary conflict resolution practices. Targeted capacity-building initiatives that blend traditional and modern conflict resolution models will reinforce community-led mediation efforts. By integrating traditional approaches with ADR techniques, these platforms can foster inclusivity and enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution at the grassroots level.

2. To address the root causes of communal conflicts, stakeholders should prioritize peacebuilding initiatives that strengthen community livelihoods. This approach should include proactive engagement with relevant government agencies to enhance security collaboration through Police Community Relations Committees (PCRC) and promote public awareness of land rights. Such efforts can help reduce land-related disputes and foster a more stable environment for agricultural investment, livelihood security, and sustainable economic growth.
3. Investors should support Peace Impact Investing to ensure that development interventions are conflict-sensitive. This strategy protects investments and addresses the underlying socio-economic drivers of instability.
4. Agribusinesses should adopt conflict-sensitive project design and Conflict-Sensitivity Analysis to anticipate and mitigate the unintended effects of their operations on local communities. By adhering to the "Do No Harm" principle, businesses can better manage risks to their operations and staff while fostering positive community relations.
5. Peace and development actors should leverage information technology and data insights, including data-driven early warning systems, to effectively mitigate communal conflicts and insecurity, safeguard agricultural investments, and promote economic growth in the region.

Endnotes

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