

# Impact of Land Dispute on Economic Well-Being of Conflicting Communities in Anambra State

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## ABSTRACT

The study is focused on the impact of land dispute on the economic well-being of conflicting communities in Anambra State. Land is a vital natural resource that hosts and sustains all living things and its economic importance accounts for its use as the base for all economic activities. Dispute over land has a tremendous adverse effect on the economic progress of the disputing communities. The sample size of the study was 530 adult respondents. The respondents were selected through the process of categorising the communities of the study into six social sub-groups. Questionnaire guide, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) guides were used as instruments for the collection of quantitative data and qualitative data. The sampling technique was probability sampling procedure, to ensure that relevant individuals were met. Selection of the respondents from each of the population categories was done by proportionate stratified random sampling method. The study showed that any community involved in land dispute is always faced with challenge of backwardness of economic progress. No community with records of land dispute especially when it is violent, ever has provision or prospects of development because whatever will be built is built on land.

**KEYWORDS:** *Backwardness of economic progress, economic well-being, land dispute, and prospects of development*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the outstanding risk factors that strongly propel violence in most African countries and Nigeria especially is dispute over ownership of land or boundary dispute between individuals or communities, as well as struggle for access to land use between pastoralists and farmers (Conroy, 2014). Access to land is shown to be important to poverty reduction, economic growth, and the empowerment of the poor (Fabusoro, Matsumoto & Taeb, 2008). Land is a vital natural resource that hosts and sustains all living things namely; plants, animals and man. It is a fixed socio-economic asset that aids production of goods and services and hosts virtually all activities that take place on earth (Magel, 2001). Obioha (2013), affirms that land offers the base structure, and sometimes the only basis for social security throughout life among Africans. Obioha (2013), further emphasised that in most sub-Saharan African

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societies, land by its nature is regarded as the economic and subsistence base of a people. The economic importance of land accounts for its use as the base for agricultural activities in the predominantly agrarian societies in African continent. It forms the ecological background in which social, political and economic activities of a people are determined.

Worldwide according to Wehrmann, (2008), land remains an important natural capital for every nation, communities and individuals, and because of this, it is not unusual that there is land conflict across the world, especially in developing nations where a huge population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Yamano and Deininger (2005), and Deininger and Castagnini (2006), indicated that land-related conflicts are increasingly becoming a threat to rural

economic activities such as agriculture in most sub-Saharan African countries. Land conflict ensues according to Blench (2010), when a land user is perceived to be trespassing and infringing on the rights, values or amenity of another.

Conroy (2014), observed that Nigeria is a country rife with conflict; and disputes over land issues constitute a significant number of conflict events. Anyaoha, Chikaire, Ogueru, Utazi and Godson (2018), related that Nigeria has experienced conflicts, most often on land issues of grave proportions among several ethnic and religious communities in different regions and states. Best (2009), noted that in the North-central especially Benue and Plateau States, Southwest especially Shagamu, Lagos, Ife-Modakeke, and in the South-east, especially Umuleri-Aguleri, violent communal conflicts, resulting from land-related issues were most noticeable. The communal and oil-induced conflicts in the Niger Delta also increased in scope and intensity over the years.

Chikaire, Atala, Akpoko and Nnadi (2011), observed that land is probably the most important resource needed by man for his day-to-day existence. All human livelihoods and activities are directly or indirectly dependent on land at varying thresholds. Land connotes different meanings to the various user groups. For instance, builders, manufacturers, fishermen, miners, hunters and farmers have different specifications in their requirement for land for their production/services and because of the multiple demands for land, it is a primary source of conflict among various user groups.

Land conflict has its attending effects on the communities and individual groups that are involved in it. Anyaoha, Chikaire, Ogueru, Utazi and Godson (2018), noted that some people have lost their lives due to land fight and some incidences of land conflict create hatreds among the parties involved which goes on from one generation to another. Moreover, individuals and communities who lose their rights to land due to conflict find themselves in deep and excessive poverty, due to decline in productivity, food insecurity and enhanced food scarcity; and a fall on the income level, health challenges and retarded growth and development of communities. Land disputes often results in several deaths and severe injuries during conflicts especially in situations where it is a communal land dispute (Fischer & Ferlie, 2013).

Conflicts surrounding land issues are multi-faceted and complex, with dynamics that change over time, depending on the area of the country where they occur (Conroy, 2014). Certain factors namely;

ownership of a parcel of land, boundary between two parcels of land, or location of a land in dispute or even the treasure, resources or economy derived from a land usually lead to dispute over land. It could as well be as a result of power or population of a particular group over and against the opponent (Mienye, 2016). All land conflicts, no matter how peaceful or violent they are, negatively affect the economic well-being of the communities in conflict. Wehrmann, (2008), rightly observed that whenever there is a land conflict, someone suffers economic consequences. In extreme – but not rare – situations, people find themselves landless and/or without shelter, either driven away from their land, or their homes burnt down to ashes. Where there are many land conflicts, social stability within society is affected, as land conflicts undermine trust and increase fear and suspicion –often between formerly close people such as neighbours and family members. Violent land conflicts – or simply the fear of becoming a victim of them – can also have a traumatising effect on those who are or feel at risk. Land conflicts seriously slows down and undermines economic progress of a people.

Violent crime resulting from land conflicts is a pervasive problem in Anambra State, as it is in most other States of Nigeria (National Working Group on Armed Violence, 2013). Anambra State has witnessed a great number of inter- and intra-communal conflicts and violence arising from land related issues. Hostilities continue to simmer between Aguleri and Umuleri; between Nkwelle-Ezunaka and Ogbunike; between Abagana and Ukpo communities... (National Working Group on Armed Violence, 2013). In Anambra State precisely, the issues of land and boundary conflicts have resulted in a lot of economic hardship, and destruction of properties belonging to individuals and communities, political and social enmity between conflicting parties, destruction of social amenities, destruction of religious houses and church buildings. A great number of hospitals and schools have equally been vandalised because of agitation over a piece of land. A great number of people have as well been rendered homeless because of dispute over a parcel of land. It is against the background of the destruction of properties and amenities in the conflicting communities in Anambra State that this study intends to investigate in order to ascertain the impact it has on the economic life and sustainable development of the conflicting communities in the State and the entire State at large.

### **Objectives of the Study**

To investigate how land conflict affects the economic and sustainable development in Anambra State.

## Literature Review

### Land Dispute affecting Economic and Sustainable Development

Land is a very strategic socio-economic asset, particularly in poor societies where wealth and survival are measured by control of, and access to, land (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2005). In every land there is the socio-cultural dimension. Land is central to continuity of life, indispensable in physical development and complex in social relations of production in the economic world (Abegunde, 2010). Oyerinde (2005), Ayo (2002), and Asiyanbola (2008), in their independent studies, noted that land is an impetus of development; and at the same time an impediment to development in the built environment due to conflicts attending to it. Conflict over land is often combined with strong economic, spatial, cultural and emotional values. There are indications that man's complex socio-economic, cultural and physical attachments to land have placed land in a sensitive and unique position. Conflict interests among communities to secure territories, conserve socio-economic resources and carry out physical development activities and practice customs and traditions on land have given birth to untold crises over the ages (Abegunde, 2010). Justino (2004), observed that human attachments to land have resulted in conflicts that have affected millions of people and resulted in lost opportunities in terms of social disorder, economic depression and destruction of housing and basic infrastructure in the physical development of communities.

The human attachments to the value of land make it a consistent matter of dispute. Land and boundary dispute has multiple implications ranging from loss of human life, destruction of farm lands and produce to socio-economic and political implications. Bello (2013), affirmed that the loss of human lives, land, animals, plants, and crops, resulting from land disputes has many security, social, political, and economic implications in relation to sustainable development. Land in Sub-Saharan Africa has been subject to conflict, conquest, expropriation and exploitation thus resulting in the many discrepancies even to the point of socio-economic backwardness. The socio-economic positions of different groups of people involved in land conflict are always not so commendable (Bob, 2010). Obviously, no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of disunity, rancour and conflicts. Development can only be sustained in an environment free of rancour, disunity, killings, destruction of lives and properties. Indeed, conflicts and development are two parallel lines that can never meet. Conflict situations do not

allow for any meaningful development (Onwe, Nwogbaga, & Nwakamma, 2015).

Colletta, Kostner and Wiederhofer (1996), cited in Abegunde (2011), writing on land conflicts and their implications to sustainable development, noted that all types of conflicts on land entail significant private and social costs in human environment. Conflicts over land and natural resources are obstructing the efforts of the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and other key development priorities in the areas of the environment, peace and security and democratic development (International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, 2006). Social and economic development for most of the African population is relied on the access to land, since majority of the population depends on land and land-based resources for their livelihoods (Sekeris, 2010; Zwan, 2011). According to Azadi and Vanhaute (2019), land plays a central role in the economies of developing nations; and it is a significant asset for most people without which they cannot do much. Any conflict on land therefore, will affect adversely the socio-economic development and progress of a people since land is the fundamental resource for the rural area residents to increase their agricultural productivity (Asgele, Kassa, Sisay & Gebremedhin, 2015). Jin Zhou and Luo (2018), emphasised that land is the basic carrier of all human production and living activities. According to them, economic activities do not occur without land. Therefore, if any land is in dispute, economic process and development on the land will be frustrated. No meaningful investment will ever take place on a land that is in dispute, until the dispute is reasonably resolved.

Obiakor (2016), indicated that the dangerous phenomenon of land and boundary conflicts has impeded the socio-politico-economic development of most communities. These conflicts have created increased animosity, sense of fear and insecurity among the people that once shared fraternal relationship. This has posed a great threat to the security and development of the concerned communities, states and the country at large. World Bank Report (1988), cited in Uyang, Nwagbara, Undelikwo and Eneji (2013), noted that land, as a unit for agricultural production provides the needed fulcrum upon which a sustainable development would blossom. Agricultural production till date remains the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, despite the exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the country for more than five decades. It is the main source of food for most of the population. However, over the years, the agricultural sector has witnessed a

tremendous decline due partly to scramble for scarce economic resources leading to communal land conflicts with adverse effects on food security. These conflicts have been a dominant factor of food insecurity in most rural communities in the developing countries (Uyang, Nwagbara, Undelikwo and Eneji, 2013).

### Theoretical Frame Work

Conflict theory and rational choice theory were employed as the theoretical framework to guide the study. Conflict theory explains the basis of violence in any sector be it an organised sector or unorganised sector. Conflict theory generally surrounds the idea that most struggles in society happen because of conflicts between different social classes or groups. Individuals and groups have aggressive impulses when it comes to vying for that which they desire and which may not be immediately to everyone; and these impulses are expressed in all relationships (Aluko, 2017). The aggressive impulses could be seen in what Collins (1993), identified as emotional resources. It is the emotional resources which propel one to struggle in order to come into possession of the much available material resources.

Rational choice theory on the other hand, adopts a utilitarian belief that man is a reasoning actor who weighs means and ends, costs and benefits, and makes a rational choice (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). Rational Choice Theory insists that crime is calculated and deliberate. All criminals are rational actors who practice conscious decision making, that simultaneously work towards gaining the maximum benefits of their present situation. In land dispute, there is always an element of choice to quest for, and struggle aggressively to take possession of that which belongs to another, not minding the consequence of such action.

### Study Hypothesis

Respondents will differ significantly by length of residence in the study area and perceived effects of violent land conflict.

### Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods research approach which Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2006), defined as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques...into a single study or set of related studies. In a phrase, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2006), defined mixed method research as an 'integrative research'. The mixed methods research requires the researcher to collect the qualitative and quantitative data either in phases (that is, sequentially) or at the same time (that is, concurrently). This study employed the concurrent

mixed method approach in collecting and analysing the data.

Anambra State is the study area, with a particular focus on Umueri and Aguleri; and Nkwelle-Ezunaka and Osile Ogbunike in Anambra East and Oyi local government Areas respectively. Anambra State is one of the States in the country where land disputes are pervasive problem (Onwuzurigo, 2011). The choice of the four local communities was purposive for the very reason of meeting the requirement for the study; that is communities with records of violent land disputes. From the four communities, six population categories were identified, namely town union, elders' forum, women's wing, youth wing, age grades, and vigilante group. Membership of the categorised groups is on representative capacity except the age grades. The target population obtained from the categorised groups was twenty-seven thousand, two hundred and seventy-seven (27,277). The sample size of the study comprised 530 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula. The sampling technique was probability sampling procedure, to ensure that relevant individuals were met. Selection of the respondents from each of the population categories was done by proportionate stratified random sampling method.

Four sessions of Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the four communities of the study; while nineteen (19) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were also conducted through snowball and purposive sampling techniques, with families who were direct victims of violent land disputes in the communities. The researcher got the consent of the participants in both FGDs and KIIs to record their voices in the course of the discussions. The analysis of the data for the study is mixed analysis which involves the concurrent order of analysis. The quantitative data collected from the field were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The qualitative data from both FGD and KII, QDA Miner software was used in the analysis of the discussion and interview transcripts.

### Analysis of Research Objective:

The thematic issue of the study which is: Land dispute and economic and sustainable development in Anambra State is discussed below.

**Research Objective:** To investigate how land dispute affects the economic and sustainable development in Anambra State.

The respondents were first asked how land is a factor of economic and sustainable development. The findings are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: How is Land a Factor of Economic and Sustainable Development?**

Variable	Frequency Percentage (%)
Land is central to a community's livelihood	64 12.2
Everything about a community is hinged on land	96 18.4
Land is a foundation of a community's economic and developmental well being	321 61.4
Land is an asset of great value to a community	42 8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>523 100.0</b>

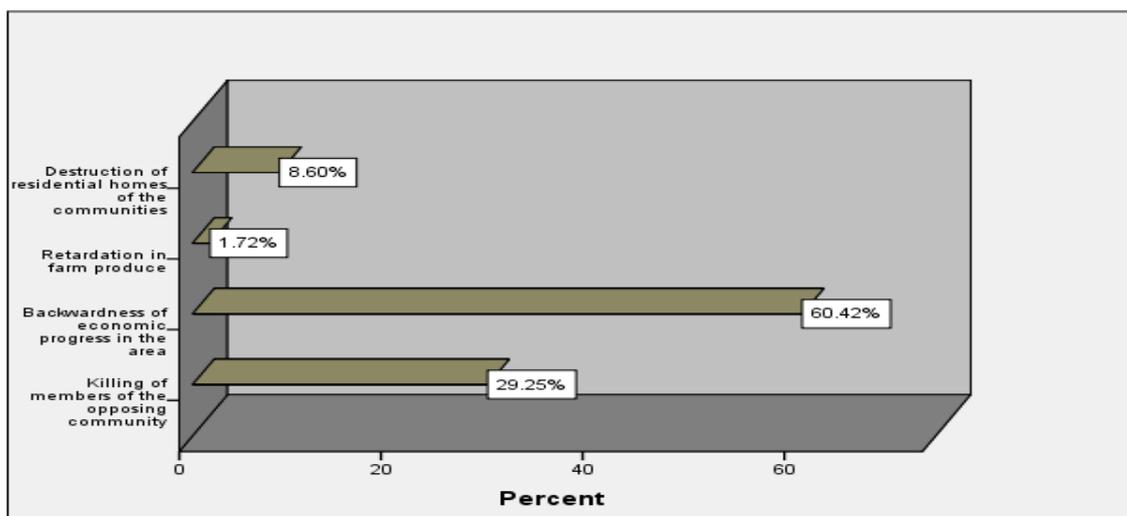
Field survey, 2020

Majority of the respondents 321 (61.4%) in table 10 indicated that land is a foundation of a community's economic and developmental wellbeing, while 42 (8.0%) of the respondents held the opinion that land is an asset of great value to a community. The opinion of the majority is in agreement with the findings of the qualitative data of the study. In the FGDs, the participants indicated that land is an essential economic asset which serves as a foundation for economic progress and sustainable development. In the FGD at Nkwelle-Ezunaka, a participant noted that;

Land is a great economic asset from which everybody wants to make a living. People perceive land as a valuable material possession and a great source of money and wealth which they cannot easily give up... No community or individual would want to lose such asset as land knowing that it is a great wealth in itself, a source of great wealth and the foundation of their existence as a people (**Male, 59 years, lawyer, Urban dweller**).

The respondents were further interrogated on what could be the likeliest effect of violent land conflict between two conflicting communities. The findings are presented in figure 2.

**What is the likeliest effect of violent land conflict between your community and a neighbouring community?**



Field Survey, 2020

**Figure 1: The Likeliest Effect of Violent Land Conflict?**

Figure 1 shows that a majority of 60.4% of the respondents noted that backwardness of economic progress in the area is the likeliest effect of violent land dispute, while 1.7% of the respondents were of the view that retardation in farm produce is the likeliest effect. The finding is in agreement with the findings of the qualitative data. In the FGD in Umuleri, a participant established that;

The volatility of the region has deprived it of much physical development. Many of the people who buy land in the region do not build anything solid and meaningful in terms of company or industry... People, who build residential homes that are tenatable, on the land they bought; and who are not indigenes of the region, build very low cost houses; all in the fear of what might happen anytime. The battles were fought over the ownership of some parcels of land within the region. Lives were lost on both sides of the divide. Yet over the years, population of the indigenes had almost doubled but economic progress is still moving with much difficulty. The region is obviously so backward economically when compared to other regions of the State, all because of violence consequent upon land dispute (**Male, 63 years, building contractor, rural dweller**).

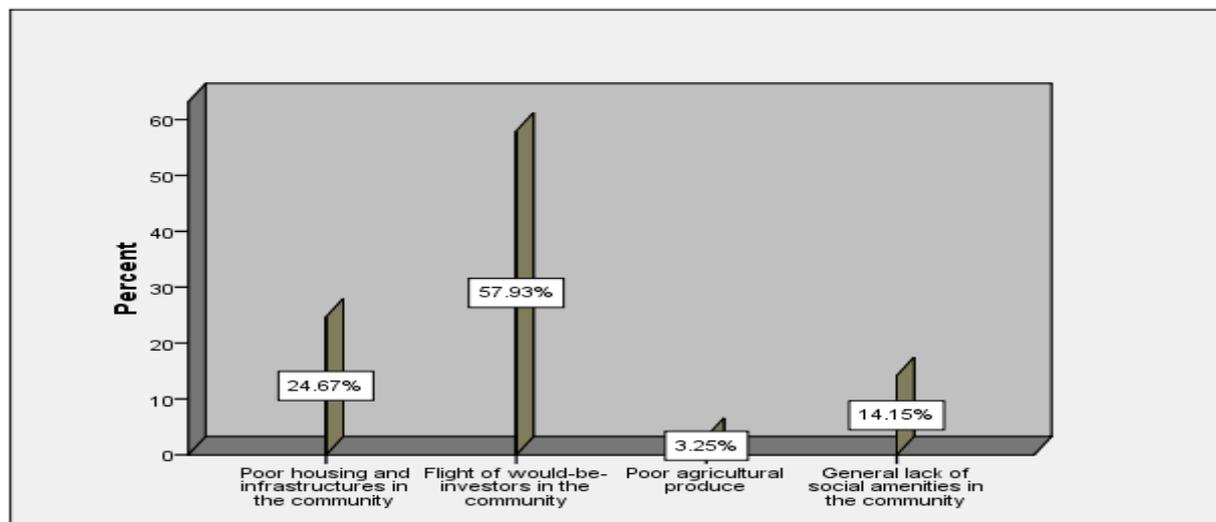
**What is the greatest adverse effect of land conflict on economic and sustainable development in your community?****Field Survey, 2019****Figure 2: Greatest Adverse Effect of Land Conflict on Economic and Sustainable Development**

Figure 2 shows that 57.93% of the respondents indicated that flight of would-be-investors in the community is the greatest adverse effect of land conflict on economic and sustainable development, while 3.25% of the respondents believed that poor agricultural produce is the consequence of land conflict on economic and sustainable development. The view of the majority of the respondents is corroborated by the findings of the qualitative data. In the FGD at Nkwelle-Ezunaka, it was observed that due to violence over the land in the area between Nkwelle-Ezunaka and Ogbunike, the land had been allowed to lie fallow for decades with no meaningful development going on in it. It was indicated that no reasonable person would go to buy land in a violent region. A participant noted that;

Whenever there is land conflict, development in any shape or form seems to be completely alien. No individual or even government endeavour to invest in such a place. Land is the hallmark of every development; ... it is the most important means of production. Everything that has to do with production and development is founded on the land. The conflict between Nkwelle-Ezunaka and Ogbunike over land dispute has kept the communities in serious reverse gear for decades now **(Male, 67 years, a retired police officer, rural dweller)**.

The study further disclosed that no meaningful development takes place on a land in dispute. The FGD at Aguleri disclosed that not even government invests meaningfully in a volatile area where violence can rise up at any time and destroy everything put on the land. The absence of government in such a place is a discouragement to private investors who would have capitalised on the government's presence to embark on development of the place. A participant remarked;

Besides economic progress of Otuocha which the battle over land in the area seriously retarded, there is no meaningful physical presence of the State government in the area save for the State High Court, general hospital and Police Station in the area. No government in its right senses would invest in an area where people are violent ... Under the situation of violence in the region no meaningful development either from the people in the area or from outsiders has really taken place. **(Male, 58 years, lawyer urban dweller)**.

**Study Hypothesis:**

**Respondents will differ significantly by length of residence in the study area and perceived effects of violent land conflict.**

To test the hypothesis a cross-tabulation between length of residence and the likeliest effect of violent land conflict between two conflicting communities was carried out (Table 2).

**Table 2: Respondents' Length of Residence and their perception of the Likeliest Effect of Violent Land Dispute between two Conflicting Communities**

Length of residence	Likeliest Effect of Violent Land Conflict between two Conflicting Communities				Total
	Killing of members of the opposing community	Backwardness of economic progress in the area	Retardation in farm produce	Destruction of residential homes of the communities	
Below 15 years	67 (32.7%)	115 (56.1%)	3 (1.5%)	20 (9.8%)	205 (100.0%)
16 years and above	86 (27.0%)	201 (63.2%)	6 (1.9%)	25 (7.9%)	318 (100.0%)
Total	<b>153 (29.3%)</b>	<b>316 (60.4%)</b>	<b>9 (1.7%)</b>	<b>45 (8.6%)</b>	<b>523(100.0%)</b>

$$X^2 = 3.047, df = 3, P = 0.384, N = 523$$

Length of residence is implicated as a variable influencing how the respondents perceive the likeliest effect of violent land conflict between two conflicting communities. A critical view of the table above shows that 63.2% of respondents who have lived for 16 years and above within the study area hold the view that backwardness of economic progress in the area is the likeliest effect of violent land conflict between two conflicting communities. This view is equally shared by respondents who have lived for below 15 years in the study area. The calculated value of chi-square ( $X^2$ ) is 3.047, while the critical value of chi-square at 0.05 level of significance with a degree of freedom (df) of 3 is 7.815. Since the computed chi-square value (3.047) is lesser than (<) the critical/table value (7.815), we reject the hypothesis which states that respondents will differ significantly by length of residence in the study area and perceived effects of violent land conflict. In other words, the length of residence does not influence how one perceives the effect of violent land conflict.

#### Discussion of Findings:

The study showed among other factors that serve as benefits of land in relation to economic and sustainable development, that land is a foundation of a community's economic and developmental well-being. Everybody knows that land is the most valued asset in any physical and developmental project one intends to embark upon. These findings are consistent with the findings of earlier study by Azadi and Vanhaute (2019), who indicated that land plays a central role in the economies of developing nations; and it is a significant asset for most people without which they cannot do much. Equally, Jin Zhou and Luo (2018), in their own study observed that land is the basic carrier of all human production and living activities. According to them, economic activities do not occur without land.

The study disclosed backwardness of economic progress in the community involved in violent land conflict as the likeliest effect of such violence. No community with any record of violent land dispute ever has provision or prospects of development because whatever will be built is built on the land. The study further showed that whenever there is violent land dispute between two conflicting communities, the two communities experience very serious setbacks on their economic ladder of progress. These findings are in agreement with the findings in earlier studies on the matter. Oyerinde (2005), Ayo (2002), and Asiyanbola (2008), in their independent studies asserted that land as an impetus of development can become at the same time an

impediment to development in the built environment due to conflicts attending to it. Conflict over land is therefore often combined with strong economic, spatial, cultural and emotional values. Hypothesis two states that respondents will differ significantly by length of residence in the study area and perceived effects of violent land conflict. The result showed that there is no significant difference ( $X^2 = 3.047, df = 3, P = 0.384$ ) in the perception of the effects of violent land conflict and the length of residence of the respondents. Thus, it indicates that the length of residence does not determine how a resident perceives the effect of violent land conflict. This could be understood by the fact that the impact of the violence is still obvious in the area, such that anybody that comes into the community would not take much time to perceive the effect of the violence in the area, seen in dilapidated buildings and companies that were never resuscitated after the violence.

In the same vein of backwardness of economic progress, the study reveals that land conflict affects economic and sustainable development by driving the would-be investors away from the conflict zone. The study showed that many foreigners in the conflict region (Otuocha) left the region after the prolonged violent land conflict; many companies and industries equally left the region. Today the region is still recovering from the effects of the violent conflict in it. These findings were in accord with the findings of earlier study by Asgele, Kassa, Sisay and Gebremedhin (2015), who in their study noted that; any conflict on land will affect adversely the social

and economic development and progress of a people since land is the fundamental resource for the rural residents to increase their agricultural productivity. Investors would always be reluctant to embark on any investment project in land-conflict zone.

### Conclusion

Land dispute between individuals and communities has been a recurrent risk factor among human beings. This is so because land is an important resource to poverty reduction, economic growth and basis for sustainable development. Land is also a cause of conflict because it is scarce and limited while human population is geometrically increasing. Land conflict therefore has a negative toll on economic well-being of a people or community that is involved in it. Development can only be sustained in an environment free of rancour, disunity, destruction of lives and properties. Indeed, conflicts and development are two parallel lines that can never meet. Conflict situations especially where it has to do with land, do not give room for any meaningful development to take place. Land dispute often distabilises the socio-economic and physical development of most communities, leaving the dwellers with hardship especially economically. Since land conflict is always turning back the wheel of economic progress and sustainable development in any conflicting community, government should be very proactive in using security machineries to ensure that timely intervention is initiated towards resolving every land dispute before it escalates. Once the land dispute is properly settled, investors will be encouraged to invest on the land.

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