



Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the Socio-economic implications of farmers - herdsman clashes on food security in Benue state, Nigeria. Benue State's area has increasingly become a battleground for agricultural competitors, primarily herders and crop producers in recent years. This scenario, which has wreaked havoc on the state's security system and operations, is a watershed moment in the country's general socio-economic decline. The paper used questionnaire as the primary source of data, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), field observations as well as documentary sources, as a framework for empirical analysis using simple percentages to investigate the impact of farmers-herdsmen conflict on food security in Benue State. The report looked at a variety of current literature on the origins, effects, and potential solutions to farmers-herders conflicts, narrowing it down from a global viewpoint to Africa, Nigeria, and the study area. A sample of 250 farmers was selected from the security hotspots in the conflict zones of Katsina-Ala, Logo, Kwande, Guma, and Gwer-west Local Government Areas and administered questionnaire. Findings from the study revealed that farmers have been subjected to a series of brutal attacks and killings 60(39.21%) by herdsman, widespread fleeing of farmlands by farmers, destruction of crops on farms and in storages 68(44.44%), and active colonization of native farmlands by farmers, all of which have posed a serious threat to food security. As a result of incessant attack, the productivity of agricultural produce has drastically become very low in the face of population growth as the primary source of conflict, and suggested cattle ranching and intensive farming under modernized norms as solutions to the persisting conflicts. Similarly, the research recommended that Federal and State authorities should as a matter of urgency end these conflicts by collaborating to establish functional ranches where cattle and other livestock are produced under international best practice., as well as the prompt departure of terrorist herders from regions they have violently colonized.

Keywords: Farmers, Herdsmen, Food security, Benue, Clashes

Introduction

Nature's endowments such as arable farmland were including well-flooded plains, mineral deposits and water resources, have always been in short supply, particularly in cultures where scientific and technological instruments

are used infrequently in the growth process (Dicken, 1992; Okoro, 2018). On the other hand, from prehistoric times to present era of contemporary civilization, a significant portion of human actions directed toward a meaningful life revolve around these natural

1050 Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

assets. The abundance of fruits and edible roots for example, drove the early man's roving lifestyle in terms of food collection for his livelihood. Similarly, when agriculture was discovered 15,000 years ago, the well-watered plains around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Middle East became a hub and a good site for human habitation, supporting Mesopotamian culture (Norton, 2008). The Nile and Niger valleys in Africa became settlement hubs, boosting food security even during dry seasons by allowing year-round farming and grazing. The preceding demonstrates that the extents to which agricultural productivity can be articulated are restricted over the world, implying a risk of conflict and violent disagreement if this constraint is not carefully and sensibly controlled by competing interest groups (Ayo, 2012). However, as years turned into decades and decades into generations, the application of scientific and technological innovation in food production to feed the burgeoning population remained severely limited, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where agriculture remained stuck in its most basic and primitive forms (FAO, 2021).

According to Peerzado, Magsi, and Sheikh (2018) and Saruni, Urassa, and Kajambe (2018), the current state of affairs, in which there are sharp disparities between population growth and agricultural innovation, points to

conflict between agricultural producers and other stakeholders in this vital sector. Similarly, society has undergone complex socio-economic advancements prompted by the industrial revolution, which have been tailored along the proliferation of settlements and urban centers based largely on radical industrialization and infrastructural expansion, with full potential for conflicts as all activities thereof tend to pressurize and thus close in on farmlands and grazing fields (Ujoh, 2014; Nwangwu, Mbah & Ike, 2020; Kwaghzende & Tyav, 2015).

As a result, the foregoing scenario has resulted in hostilities in various parts of the world. In South Asia, for example, (Dutta, 2020) notes that development projects in peri-urban areas that necessitated the resettlement of affected populations have resulted in a variety of conflicts during policy implementation. Conflicts between agricultural rivals in Africa have erupted into full-fledged bloodshed in a number of places. Farmers versus pastoralists over village boundary expansions, farmers versus pastoralists over farm encroachment on grazing fields, and farmers versus pastoralists over water resources were identified as three (3) forms of conflicts in Saruni, Kajembe & Urassa's (2018) empirical study on the Kilosa and Kiteto Districts of Tanzania, where they used questionnaires, observations,

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the basis for primary data collection and identified three (3) conflicts over natural resources.

In Nigeria, particularly the farmers-herdsmen conflicts are largely attributed to a constellation of socio-economic activities involving population growth, industrialization and urbanization, all of which have negative impacts on the natural environment including changes in climate parameters such as increasing drought magnitudes, desertification, and longer dry seasons (Trikat, 2010; Tyavetal,2010; Gosh-Roy, 2016). As a result, pastoralists tend to relocate down south to the middle belt region in quest of greener pasture, and the Benue valley, with its abundant and luxuriant pasture becomes a hotspot for them.

. Pastoralists, on the other hand, face difficult realities in terms of space and pasture due to increasing population, industrialization, and urbanization, as Nwangwu and Enyiazu (2019) pointed out. As the Fulani herdsmen carry out terrorist attacks on farming communities across Nigeria, notwithstanding the farmers' desperation over the resultant destruction of crops both in storage and on the farms, massive trespassing in farmlands and destruction of crops have increasingly become the order of the day (Osimen, Edokpa&Daramoda, 2019; Enyi, 2016).

With the passage of time, the complaints and threats grew into a full-fledged escalation of violence that erupted concurrently in various parts of Nigeria, with high record levels in Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba States. In light of this, the purpose of this article is to investigate the conflicts between crop farmers and herders in Benue State and how it affects food security in the state and the country at large.

According to reports, the present scale of farmers-herders skirmishes in Benue State is more or less an invasion of Benue territory through what appears to be terrorist attacks, despite the fact that it is technically referred to as "banditry."According to Rufai (2021), banditry, which is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, has been looming since the colonial era, with a slew of negative consequences for socio-economic activities such as trans-Saharan trade and agriculture. He also emphasized that it was a non-state security groups' capable hands that eventually pushed banditry operations into the hinterlands and distant rural sides, where they operated under various identities and articulations.

This paper aims most fundamentally to empirically investigate the violent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State within the context of cause and effects and implication for food security in the state. To

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

achieve the aim, the following objectives are put forward to guide the study.

1. To identify the causes of farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Benue State.
2. To assess the extent of damage (if any) or the adverse effects of farmers-herdsmen clashes on agricultural development in the state.
3. To examine the implication of the lingering conflicts on food security in Benue State.
4. To recommend measures that can facilitate amicable and sustainable resolutions to the lingering conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Benue State.

The study area

Benue state is one of the 36 states of Nigeria and is located within the Middle Belt region of the country. The state lies within latitudes 7°40'N and 7°52'N and longitudes 8°25'E and 9°12'E with an area of about 34,059 km² (figure 1). The state capital is located 31km southeast of Abuja, the federal capital territory and shares boundary with Nassarawa state to the north; Taraba state to the east, Kogi state to the west, Enugu state to the south-west, Ebonyi and Cross River states to the south respectively. Based on Koppen's classification, Benue state has a tropical climate with two distinct wet and dry seasons with rainfall coming in the month of April to

October while the dry season lasts from November to March. Annual temperature averages between 21°C – 37°C while rainfall is between 1700mm to 1800mm which allows for luxuriant growth of vegetation of tall grass and wooded savanna which gives way to pockets of forests on the southern parts of the state.

Benue State is also blessed with mountainous terrain along its south eastern border in Kwande LGA with pockets of hilly terrains and other gentle undulating landscapes where the valleys are typically characterized by rivers and streams. Prominent among them is the River Benue which punctuates lots of the state's local government areas. Others include River Yooyo, Mkomun, Amile, Ambighir and Loko. A lot of these constitute good sources of crop cultivation including rice in flood plains as well as other grains and root crops alongside orchard farming even in dry seasons where fruits and market gardening through irrigation is widely operated. This type of favorable climate and water supply sources provide for high agricultural yields in both crops and livestock and the native Tiv farmers take ample advantage to embark on full scale agricultural production in assorted crops which gives them bumper harvest. It is this development that has according to Maser and Silva (2019) attracted the envy of the herdsmen who seek to take over the fertile

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

lands for their grazing activities through incessant attacks and brutal killings of the

native Tiv farmers, (Kwaghtser 2019; Modibo 2020).

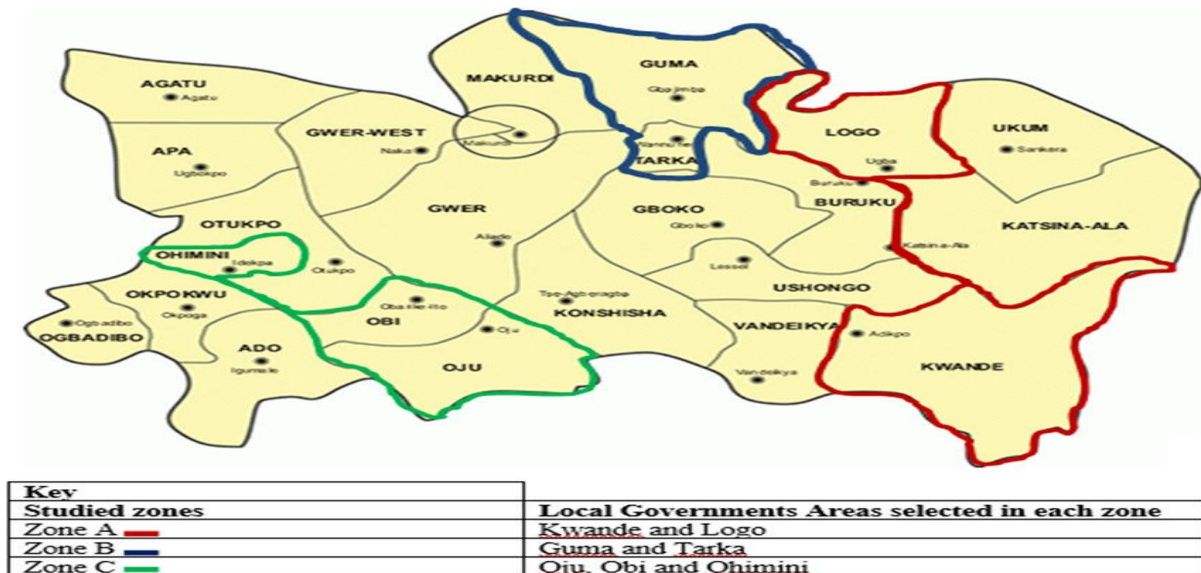


Figure 1: Source- GIS Unit, Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the “Conflict Theory” of the year 1859 by Karl Max. The basic tenet of the theory is that the endowments of nature are fixed in supply and as such the human society continues to perpetually compete for them. Within the scope of this study, the significance of this theory rests on the premises that land resources including water and vegetation are fixed in supply while the human and livestock population which depend on them continues to grow in size on daily basis. This state of affairs according to Okoro (2019), Oko&Okpiliya, (2019); Brotten and McDonnel (2020), has translated to growing competition which over the years has assumed dimensions of

violent conflicts over resource utilization and hence the farmers – herdsmen conflicts which is the focus of this study..

Methods and procedures

The paper is essentially exploratory in nature and it is focused on the objectives outlined earlier. In view of the nature of data collected, the analysis was done using descriptive statistics such as tables, frequencies and percentages. A quantitative data collection instruments using open-ended questions which covered all the study variables was used to collect the necessary data.

The data for the study was collected using focus group discussions (FGDs) and

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

structured interview schedule on 153 farmers selected purposively from three communities of the security hotspots in the farmers-herdsmen conflict zones. conducted in Ayilamo, Jato-Aka and Yooyo communities which are three of the security hotspots in the farmers-herdsmen conflict, One Hundred and Fifty (150) farmers who are living victims of the conflict were randomly sampled and administered 150 questionnaires respectively with 50 in each of above communities in Logo, Kwande and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas respectively including three communities leaders in the ratio of one from each of the communities totaling 153 respondents. Similarly, focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out with the aid of field assistants drawn from these communities. It is worthy to add here that all the farmers from Yooyo and Jato-Aka are refugees

from Yooyo and Moon Districts respectively whose farmlands have been totally colonized by herdsmen till date. Data obtained from the focus group discussions and field observations served as reinforcement for the questionnaires responses.

Results and Discussions

Analysis of primary data in this study is based on the objectives of the study all of which have several questions geared towards meeting their demand. As such, an objective by objective procedure is adopted in the analysis.

Objective 1: "To identify the causes of farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Benue State"

Question 1: "What are some of the immediate causes of the farmers-herdsmen clashes in Benue State?"

Table 1.1 Responses on the primary causes of farmers-herdsmen crisis

S/N	Response	Expected frequency	Observed frequency	Percentage%
1.	Pressure on land: Vegetation and water	153	54	35.29
2	Destruction of crops	153	70	45.75
3	Destruction of houses	153	29	18.95
Total			153	99.99

Source: Authors fieldwork, 2021

Table 1.1 shows that 54 respondents representing 35.29% of the total respondents agreed that population pressure are responsible for the farmers-herdsmen conflict. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of 70 responses representing 45.75% of the total responses ascribed the farmers-herdsmen clashes to destruction of crops while 29 respondents

standing for 18.95% of the total respondents opted for destruction of houses as being the main cause of the violence. It is therefore very clear that the major causes of the farmers-herdsmen clashes are destruction to crops which is the main stay of the economy of the study area which is a direct result of population pressure on land resources.

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

This finding is in line with the result of empirical studies in the Sudano-Sahel of Sub-Saharan Africa by Brotten and McDonnel (2020) in which activities of herdsmen in their numerous ethnic ramifications of the Berbers, Moors, Saharawi and the Toubous in Chad, the Baggara in Sudan's region of Dafur as well as the Fulanis who are large ethnic groups with over a hundred sub-clans have been studied. The findings from same shows that competition over resources is the underlying cause of the farmers-

herdsmen conflict and only a pressurized atmosphere emanating from population growth that translates to such competition and the ensuing clashes.

Objective 2: "To assess the extent of damage or the adverse effects of farmers-herdsmen clashes on agricultural development in Benue State.

Question 4: "What is the extent of damage done by the herdsmen-farmers clashes to you as a farmer or your community in general?"

Table 2.1: Responses on the magnitude of damage done by clashes between farmers and herdsmen.

S/N	Response	Expected frequency	Total frequency	Percentage%
1.	Damage to crops on farms and in storages	153	68	44.44
2	Brutal killings through incessant attacks	153	60	39.21
3	Burning of homes	153	25	16.33
Total				99.99

Source: Authors fieldwork, 2021

Table 2.1 is a tabulation of the responses on the extent of damage caused by the farmers-herdsmen clashes. The table shows that 68 farmers representing 44.44% of the farmers stated damage to crops both on field and under storage as being the destruction level of the conflicts between farmers-herdsmen. In another direction, 60 farmers representing 39.21% listed brutal killings of farmers in villages as some of the destruction done by the conflicts.

In the same vein, 25 farmers representing 16.33% of the farmers sampled stated burning down of homes as the other aspect of damage caused by the conflicts.

Question 5: "Would you agree that the terrorist herdsmen have taken over farm lands in the study area? If yes, to what extent?"

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

Table 2.2: Responses on colonization of territory by herdsmen

S/N	Response	Expected frequency	Observed frequency	Percentage%
1.	Takeover of farmlands 1-3 years	153	48	31.37
2	Forceful takeover of farmlands and compounds over 4 years	153	68	44.44
3	Forceful occupation of large portions of communities 1-4years	153	37	24.18
Total			153	99.99

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 2.2 above shows numerous responses to the effect that the herdsmen have actually taken forceful possession of lands belonging to the native farmers. Earlier, table 2.1 reflects on the magnitude of conflict. Consequent upon the two tables derived from the empirical investigation, it is therefore clear that the conflict has cost farmers a great deal involving their lives, crops, compounds and farmlands alongside other fortunes that count in their sustenance.

This finding corroborates with those of Ibekwe, Oli & Nwanko (2018) and Nwangwu & Enyiazu (2019) as earlier reported. The former using secondary data sources against the background of the conflict theory by Karl Max arrived at conclusions that farmers-herdsmen

clashes have grievous consequences such as loss of lives, livestock and properties, distrust and a general food insecurity. They recommended a ban on open grazing and that Federal Ministry of Water Resources should improve on the management of water resources. The latter also reflected same view in their analysis of nomadic pastoralist and its effects on human and food security in Nigeria.

Objective 3: "To examine the implications of the lingering farmers-herdsmen conflicts on food security".

Question 6: In the face of these lingering violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen, what are the prospects of agriculture in your locality?

Table 3.1 Responses on prospects of agricultural productivity

S/N	Response	Expected Frequency	Total Frequency	Percentage%
1.	Impossible to cultivate due to land take-over by herdsmen	153	56	36.60
2	Destruction of crops and seeds on farms and storage	153	70	45.75
3	No takeover of land but deadly insecurity on	153	27	17.64

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

farms		
TOTAL	153	99.99

Source: Authors fieldwork, 2021

Table 3.1 reflects on prospects of agricultural production and food security as found on the field from farmers responses. From the table, it is clear that the prospects of agricultural productivity are bleak and this translates to gross food insecurity. This finding is in line with the views of Mawoli and Abdul (2020), in which they contended that the general lack of consensus between federal and state governments on the crisis between herdsmen and farmers across geopolitical zones and two different religions of Islam and Christianity is seemingly intensifying the clashes making crop and livestock production difficult and thereby worsening food insecurity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study analyses the implications of farmers –herdsmen clashes on food security in Benue state, Nigeria. The study concludes that food security in Benue state and the country in general would continue to suffer negative setbacks unless the root causes of the conflicts are addressed in view of the current crisis ridden situation that has characterized the study area. The study discovered that the disputes were primarily fueled by population expansion, rising industrialization, and urbanization, all of which were exacerbated by shortcomings in production processes.

Thus, the following recommendations are necessary for sustainable conflict resolutions between the native Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Benue state, Nigeria

Federal and State authorities should as a matter of urgency end these conflicts by collaborating to establish functional ranches where cattle and other livestock are produced under international best practices. Alternatively, the federal and state authorities should exercise good leadership and political will by summoning the feuding parties on a dialogue table for settlement and restoration of peace and order in the affected area.

Where possible the herdsmen should be provided financial assistance subject to recovery to enable them set up ranches for the grazing of their cattle and other livestock. The same thing should be applied to farmers to enable them embark on full scale modernization of agriculture.

The stakeholders and government should ensure strict compliance to the anti-open grazing law enacted by Benue state government including other state in Nigeria. Government should make radical and immediate agrarian and

Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

pastoralist reforms that seek to objectively address inadequacies within the two aspects of food productions so as to boost food production that will cater for a growing population. Poverty eradication should be given top priority at all levels of governance.

Poverty reduction is central to many activities under development planning. It is the poor that live and depend directly on the environment. Desperation among the poor translates easily to violent conflicts in all human societies. Government at all levels should ensure an objective cross-border monitoring by improving security in the study area. This can be achieved through the use of security forces and mobilizing the civil population on some needed policy decisions.

The armed forces must be given new orientation based on the ethics of their profession as there is no more sanity within them and the masses are no longer satisfied with their performance especially in terms of protecting lives and property and have been widely accused of taking side during conflicts.

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Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

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Analysis of Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers - Herdsmen Clashes on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria

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