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Farmer-Herder Conflict in the Middle Belt and Threat to Food Security in Nigeria: Exhuming Evidences from The Benue State Experience

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Abstract

The Middle Belt, led by Benue state is regarded as the food basket of Nigeria due to its contribution to food production in Nigeria. Production of sufficient food for local and transnational consumption remains a major source of diet and foreign earning for a country. The near intractable farmers-herders conflict in Middle Belt, particularly in Benue State, spanning several years has effectively jeopardized food security for both local consumption and export. Many farmers now avoid going to farm out of fear of possible attack that often results to death, rape, maiming and destruction of cash crops, precipice for food insecurity. The study aimed to identify the causes, consequences and solution to the perennial farmers-herders conflict in the region. It employed secondary data and anchored in Eco-violence theory by Homer-Dixon. Documentary evidences revealed *inter alia* that quest to grab lands for grazing of cattle is the fundamental reason for herders' incessant attacks on the people and farms of Middle Belt, particularly Benue State. The widespread destruction of life and property, permanent maiming of citizens, the deep-seated mutual fear and discord, clashes and the discernible destabilization of Nigeria caused by these conflicts, underscore the urgent need for intervention. The study recommends measures such as, introduction of modern ranching and immediate and sustainable multi-dimensional action to disarm the conflicting parties.

Keywords: conflict, farmers-herders, farming, food security, hunger

Introduction

Conflict is usually a period of clash of interest which often results into senseless actions in pursuit of selfish interests. The perennial farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, particularly in the Benue State axis of the Middle

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Belt is a typical instance of conflict situation, with deeply negative impact on the dwellers. The Fulani ethnic nationality, known for transhumance, is at the centre of conflict with the autochthonous people of Benue State primarily to secure land space for grazing activities. This encroachment on the traditional farming land of the people for occupation and grazing purposes threatens agricultural output of the people of Benue State (Blench, [2010](#); Okoli & Atelhe, [2014](#)).

The history of Benue State has always been one known for the production of most Agricultural crops such as yam tubers, cassava, soybean, rice etc. The production of these important food items in Nigeria earned the State such sobriquet as food basket of the nation (Audu, [2013](#)). The perennial conflict situation between the indigenous people of Benue State and the Fulani herders led to a somewhat intractable level which led to escalated violence and displacement of thousands of indigenes from their ancestral communities, thus causing further deep in the socioeconomic fortunes of the people (International Crisis Group, [2017](#)). Besides, effects of climate change and uncontrolled population growth necessitated the increased influx of headers into the Middle Belt axis for grazing purposes, thus regular encroachment and disruption of food production activities of the people which is a direct threat to food security (Adamu & Ben, [2017](#); Olaniyan et al., [2015](#)).

The period from 2015 to present has witnessed an upsurge in most vicious conflict situation in the Middle Belt due to many reasons which include; pressure from rising population; weak institutions leading to weak and less proactive governance; uncontrolled influx of or proliferation of small firearms in the country (International Crisis Group, [2018](#)). Conflict between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt has become systemic with long standing hydra headed consequences such as destruction of crops, loss of livestock and farmlands (Ofem & Inyang, [2014](#)). These identified consequences are direct affronts and monumental disruptions to agricultural productions and agro markets which expressly affect security of food which is one of the main goals UN-Sustainable Development Goal 2 (UN Sustainable Development, [n.d.](#)). Besides socioeconomic losses, the people of the Middle Belt, particularly Benue State have as well been regularly depressed by the nightmare of existential realities such as violent loss of life, sources of livelihood and household properties which are confirmed disruptions to achieving UN-SDG (Nwosu & Enyinnaya, [2019](#)).

Available data revealed that efforts have been made over the years to bring the farmers-herders conflicts in the Middle Belt to an end but they didn't work out. Such government attempted policies as establishment of grazing reserves; anti-open grazing laws and peaceful settlement through dialogue have failed to yield the expected result (Audu, [2013](#); Bello, [2013](#)). The failure of these policies was largely attributed to the inability of government to deploy political will in addressing the situation which should include unearthing the fundamental or root cause (s) of the conflict (Abbas, [2014](#); Onyekuru & Marchant, [2018](#)). Consequently, the people of the Middle Belt of Nigeria, particularly in Benue State have been enmeshed in endless conflict which has largely disrupted farming activities, resulting to exacerbation of food insecurity and hunger in the zone in particular and Nigeria in general (Olayoku, [2014](#)).

The resolution of the long standing conflict between indigenous people of the Middle Belt who are predominantly farmers and the Fulani herdsman should be the toast of every citizen of Nigeria given the strategic relevance of the region towards food production and security. Consequently, the fundamental thrust of this study is to identify the root causes of farmers-herdsman conflicts in the region and to make policy recommendations that could help address the menace.

Literature Review

As a documentary study, the literature review section takes on many sub-heads to comprehensively discuss the numerous variables contained in the topic. These variables include; concept of conflict; farmers-herders conflict; Historical Context of the Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria; Pattern of the Farmers-herders Conflict in Nigeria; food security, consequences of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria etc.

Conflict

Conflict is characteristically a phenomenon of disagreement between parties. It is driven by opposition and competition with primary reason of actualizing interests, value or resources (Deutsch, [1973](#)). Conflict exists wherever there are human beings, thus suggesting that it is an inevitable phenomenon among human race. This could justify why Rahim ([2002](#)) construed it as a social relation controlled by divergent interests among individuals or groups. Conflict can spring up from any segment of human society. It could be in the form of interpersonal disputes, intergroup

and international confrontations among States. Additionally, conflict can take various forms, such as verbal disputes, physical confrontations and structural inequalities (Pruitt & Kim, [2004](#)). In most cases, conflict could be interpreted as perceived or actual incongruity of basic interests among the concerned parties which often results to escalation of tensions and violent grievances (Galtung & Jacobsen, [2000](#)). In a contrary perspective, Follet ([1918](#)) cautioned that many people are usually too hasty to see conflict as entirely negative. The scholar stated that conflict is a social normal which can take right or left turn depending on the modus of management (Follett, [1918](#); Sapru, [2013](#)). Besides, a certain conflict is capable of leading to a social change capable of enhancing social cohesion and prosperity. Furthermore, Coser ([1956](#)), in corroboration with Follet maintained that not all conflict situations is with negative intent, stressing that such could serve as catalyst for social change, innovation and growth. Despite the severity of a conflict situation, there are efficacious management techniques through which it could be managed. At this juncture, it is apposite to explore the approaches to conflict management.

Approaches to Conflict Management

As diverse as human societies are, so too are the causes and approaches to conflict management. Over the years, scholars have devoted considerable effort to developing various approaches to effectively manage conflict situation. Some of the approaches are listed and succinctly discussed below:

Competing Approach

It has been established that one of the causes of conflict situation is acts of competition triggered by personal or group interest. Consequently, the intractable quest to achieve personal or group interests makes the actors to adopt assertive approach, perhaps at the expense of interests of others. Many scholars think this approach is non-democratic, inconsistent with natural justice, equity and good conscience. Some however, think it could be fitting in an emergency situation. It is widely construed that this approach is not predicated on personal interest of the leader, some actors however think that leader acting for a group must have elements of personal interest to protect. On the theory that the leader is acting on group interest, he will be seen working on win-loss principle, which is making sure he uses the available power to win for his group and cause a loss to the other group. This approach is in tandem with Morgenthau theory of power.

Avoiding Approach

The assertive principle inherent in competing approach is largely lost in avoiding approach, thus this underscores the uncooperative and unassertive nature of avoiding method of conflict management. This approach is marked with act of avoiding conflict and adopting a dilly dallying technique towards confronting the conflict. The adherents of this approach think it is a tactical way of postponing the conflict to perhaps a perceived better time (Best, [2006](#)). Avoiding approach to conflict management does not offer permanent solution to conflict situation because of its evasive attitude to issues. This, rather than effectively manage the problem, aggravates it.

Accommodating Approach

The driver of accommodating approach to conflict management is genuine cooperation. It is accommodating because the parties in conflict are usually interested in willfully working for the interest of other parties at the expense of theirs. The approach is less assertive and driven by principle of self-sacrifice to act in manners that could accommodate the interest of opposing parties. The approach can easily establish social stability within a very short period of time.

Compromising Approach

It adopts a negotiation strategy where the warring parties are ready to lose grounds to make sure there is mutual peace. As the name “compromising approach”, it has the attribute of you win and I win or we lose equally to ensure there is peace. This approach does not encourage avoidance of issues, rather it chooses to settle disputes through conscious decision to lose the contentious grounds in order to establish peace and maintain social homeostasis. This approach can work among powerful and highly contentious adversaries (Ekong, [2003](#)). It is however believed that peace deal reached through the instrumentality of compromising approach is usually durable. Other approaches to conflict management include; dominating approach; collaborating approach; confronting approach; problem-solving approach etc.

Farmers-Herders Conflict

Farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria is an age long unfortunate situation which has not only led to destruction of material resources but has also led to senseless killings, maiming and rape of innocent citizens particularly in

the Middle Belt and Southern regions of Nigeria. It could best be described as a kind of violent confrontation that claims either lives or wanton destruction of farmlands and household properties of victims (Francis et al., [2022](#)). It is an indisputable fact that farmers undertake agro activities for commercial or subsistence reasons. Most worrisome is that the efforts of the farmers (portions of land and crops) are the targets of the herders to serve as source of food to their animals at the existential expense of the farmers (Erunke & Aku, [2022](#)). This often leads to disagreement and conflict that usually claim lives and monumental destruction of property worth millions of naira by the Fulani nomads.

At this juncture, it is clear that two groups with unparallel ideological construct are in utter conflict. One believes the land is his and a major source of livelihood which is farming and other agribusinesses while the other, perhaps erroneously thinks that he has right to graze the animals on the land despite being people's farmlands. Inherent ideological incongruity between the farmers and Fulani nomads often sparks aggression and war that usually alters social structure and perception of one another (Nomor & Ominyi, [2021](#)). Furthermore, it is believed that the conflict is usually exacerbated in thought processes, attitudes, perceptions that swell to physical squabbles leading to killings, maiming and destruction of properties (Okoli & Addo, [2018](#)). It is proved beyond all reasonable doubt that the seemingly intractable conflict between farmers and Fulani herders in Nigeria has brought food security, agricultural production and general socioeconomic homeostasis in Nigeria to the lowest ebb in the last few years (Apenda, [2016](#)).

History of Fulani-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

Tracing the exact origin of the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria may be difficult. However, some scholars suggest that it dates back to the pre-colonial days. It was believed that there was a complex relationship between farmers and herders which was marked by unclear sharing of resources and interdependence (Smith, [2008](#)). The account of Bohannon ([1965](#)) suggests that the nomadic engagements of the Fulani herders was being controlled and regulated by customary laws and communal agreement during the pre-colonial era, thus ensuring peaceful coexistence. Sequel to historical account, farmers-herders conflict started in the 19th century as a result of certain non-populist policies of the British colonial rule. British colonial policies such as introduction of cash crops agriculture, alteration and

imposition of existing land boundaries that affected communal lands caused a landmark disruption of long-established grazing paths (Nadel, [2018](#)). The observation above created the imbalance that invented the yet-to-be-managed monster called farmers-herders conflict that rains pain, destruction of life and property, maiming, rape, hunger and fear in Nigeria.

Certain factors were responsible for the heightening of tension between the farmers and herders in Nigeria. After the departure of the colonial masters, Nigeria began to experience rapid population growth as well as fast urbanization and environmental depletion and ruins as a result of greenhouse emission caused by industrial revolution. These identified factors further led to competition for scarce resources between farmers and herders. While farmers tried to protect their farmland from being used as grazing land, the herders were pushing South Pole in search of green pastures for the cattle (Nmadu, [2015](#)). The Middle Belt region, particularly Benue State appears to be the worst hit by the incessant farmer-herders conflict in Nigeria. This is partly because the state is located in a geographical area that boosts what the herders need to feed their cattle. Besides possessing fertile land for agricultural produce, Benue State has land rich in vegetation, a great attraction to herders for feeding their livestock (Odoemelam, [2019](#)). Farmers-herders conflict has turned cataclysmic and bloody in recent times. This led to its labeling as the world's fourth deadliest militant group. It is on record that in about two decades, thousands of lives have been lost through such conflict. Furthermore, in February 2016, about 1,200 people reportedly lost their lives amidst farmers-herders conflict, 300 of whom were farmers in Benue State (Mikailu, [2016](#)).

The nature of farmers-herders conflict led to a situation where angry youths and local hunters have decided to arms and protect their communities against recurrent unprovoked attacks by Fulani nomads (Johnson & Okunola, [2017](#)). Investigations have often revealed that many cases of conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen are caused by the murderous behaviour of the herders. These clashes have persisted in Nigeria and seen to have escalated in recent times in states like Plateau, Adamawa, Benue, Enugu, Oyo, and Ondo. Specifically, herdsmen documented attacks in Benue state has resulted to many fatalities and casualties (Duru, [2016](#)).

Food Security

The importance of food to the existence of human being cannot be overemphasized. This is evident in its placement at the base of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where it is identified as a fundamental physiological necessity. One of the indicators of developed economy is its ability to adequately feed its citizens with keeping of reliable strategic food reserve in readiness to combat any potential food crisis. The target of agricultural activities, amongst others is to ensure operation feed your nation. This can strategically address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number two-zero hunger (United Nations, [2015](#)).

According to Abdullahi et al. ([2019](#)), Food and Agricultural Organization ([2002](#)) and Iji ([2021](#)), food security is a statutory responsibility of the state to ensure the sustenance of food consumption and, management of production and price fluctuations. In the World Food Summit, food security was conceptualized as unrestricted access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food very germane for healthy and active life (World Food Summit, [1996](#)). Effective food security situation usually has three fundamental scopes and they include; the availability aspect; accessibility and affordability aspects (World Bank Group, [2001](#)). These dimensions do have strategic implications in food security of a country. There must be consistency in the supply of food through the chosen channels of food production, importation etc. More critically, food security cannot be said to have been achieved if the public, irrespective of your financial leaning is not capable of buying sufficient food for self and households. Therefore, the system must ensure affordability of food by citizens of all economic status for adequate diet necessary for growth, vitality, production and healthy existence (Okoli & Addo, [2018](#)). Today, we have food availability in Nigeria and many countries of Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), but have serious problems of food affordability because many citizens across many socioeconomic statuses are not capable of satisfying their dietary needs because of high cost of food items. This is responsible for the mass protest against the present government of Nigeria that commenced in August 1, 2024, under the aegis of “endbadgovernance” 2024. Understandably, zero hunger can be achieved in a state when affordability dimension of food security is assured. Conversely, food availability and accessibility without affordability can spark food insecurity in a country.

Methodology

This research was conducted using a qualitative method of research. The documentary method of data collection was utilized. This involved the use of documents or existing data from textbooks; newspapers and magazines; published articles; government documents or gazettes, internet sources, pictures, graphs etc. This approach not only helped to address the "how" and "why" of the issue but also provided insight into the public understands and interpretation of the conflict. As a result, the study was able to draw informed findings, reach valid conclusions, and offer relevant recommendations.

Empirical Review

Food insecurity can be regarded as one of the most severe forms of socioeconomic situation in a country. This accounts for why leaders, academics and civil society organizations work hard to figure out the best and most sustainable strategy to ensure food security in the world, especially on the African continent where the need is very pertinent. According to the findings of the study carried out by Castagnini and Deininger (2004) on the effect of land conflicts on agricultural productivity in Uganda, there was approximately 11 percent deficit in crop production. In a similar development, Messer et al. (1998) on a study that precincts on effects of land conflict on food production revealed that land related conflicts jeopardize agrarian production to average of 12 percent yearly. Auma (2016), conducted a study in the Northern side of Uganda to ascertain the effect of land conflict on food productivity. The study revealed inter alia; land conflicts negatively affects food production because the insecurity usually generated by conflict situation such as death, maiming, rape, destruction of farmland etc infuse different kinds of phobia in the people. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011), this pathetic situation creates a near intractable food insecurity problems increasing vulnerable classes in SSA countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda etc. Brinkman and Hendrix (2011) observed that besides food insecurity being one of the major fallouts of such conflict understudy, there is serious issue of massive displacement of citizens in the affected places leading to setting up of various camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). This scenario impinges on agricultural activities, thus negatively it affects food production. In Kwara State, Nigeria, Adisa (2012) conducted a study to know the extent farmers-herders conflict affect agricultural and

rural development of the state. The study found out that warring parties encounter loss of resources. The result further explained that farmers reported a 91% income loss, an 85% yield loss, and a 23% loss in stored products. Similarly, Fulani herders asserted losses of 14.3% in income, yields, and stored products. The study highlighted that though both parties suffered losses, farmers in the area suffered more than the Fulani herders because besides loss of material resources in the conflict, some farmers lost their lives, some permanently maimed, raped and subjected to perpetual trauma. Solomon ([2021](#)) embarked on a study to find out the impact of farmer-herder conflicts on the three dimensions of food security in Taraba State. The study was survey research with sample size of 285. Deploying p-table, percentage and Pearson Correlation as methods of data analysis, the study found out that farmer-herder conflict was significantly responsible for poor productivity, unstable food supplies, low food consumption, inaccessible food, and insufficiency of food availability in Taraba state. Study of same nature was carried out by Yakubu et al. ([2021](#)) to find out how farmer-herder conflicts impact on the ability of rural households' access to food in Gombe State, Nigeria. Regression model was used to analyze the primary data from 118 farmers and 112 herders respectively. The result showed a moderate insecurity induced hunger on both parties.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored in Eco-violence Theory. This theory is the brainchild of Homer-Dixon ([1999](#)). It highlights on emergence of conflicts or violence as a result of certain environmental deficiencies. Expounding on the theory, Homer-Dixon ([1999](#)) maintained that emphasizes on environmental scarcity, created by climate change, desertification, limited vegetation, drying up of water sources and limited land for both crop farming and animal husbandry. These limitations and scarcity of vital needs of both farmers and herders led to serious competition, further leading to social tension in a predominantly agrarian Middle Belt State of Benue. Therefore, the observed unhealthy competition between farmers and herders over limited resources in the Middle Belt, particularly in Benue State for survival, resulted to frequent farmer-herder conflicts.

Figure 1
Cultural Diversity of Middle Belt States of Nigeria



Note. Source: Wikipedia

Table 1
Language, Ethno-Religious and Sundry Information About the Middle Belt States of Nigeria

Major Indigenous Languages	Ethnic Groups	Religion	Demonym
Bole-Tangale; Biu-Mandara;	Tiv; Adara; Igede;	Christianity; Islam	Middle Belter and

Major Indigenous Languages	Ethnic Groups	Religion	Demonym
Ebira; Gbagyi; Idomoid; Igala; Jukunoid; Kainji; Ngas;Nupe; Plateau; Savannas; Tiv; Yoruba; Hausa; Fulfulde and Kanuri	Gbagyi-Gbari; Igala; Jukun; Igede; Idoma; Kamberi; Nupe; Tangale; Tarok; Huba; Buji; Chamba; Ebira; Mambila; Ngas; Mumuyeetc	Traditional Religion	

Table2*Verifiable Attacks on The People of Benue State by Fulani Herdsmen*

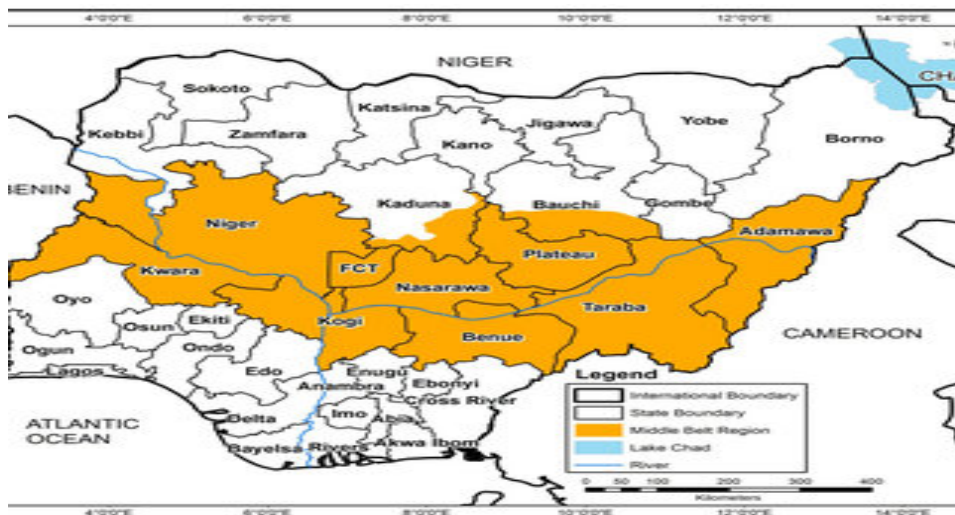
Attacked Location	Incidence/Fatalities	Source
Ayati Village, Ukum LGA	No few than 50 people killed	(Punch, 2017)
Across many communities in Benue State	500 people reportedly killed in 2023	(ACN International, 2024)
Gwer West LGA; Gwer East LGA and Apa LGA	28 persons including 6 security operatives; 17 and 14 separate victims recorded	(Atungwu, 2024)
Attacks in over 50 communities between January 2023 and February 2024	Over 2,600 killed within the State by Fulani herdsmen- Amnesty International	(Vanguard, 2024b)
Benue communities	Attackers demand monthly levies/taxes of N20M from Benue farmers	(Vanguard, 2024a)
Benue communities	Two million Benue farmers sacked from ancestral homes in camps 7 years after	Vanguard, 2024
Guma LGA	Attack killing 115(2013); 84(2014);	(Nucha et al., 2024)

Attacked Location	Incidence/Fatalities	Source
Logo LGA	29(2015); 0(2016); 4(2017); 94(2018) 0(2013); 63(2014); 96(2015); 94(2016); 12(2017); 70(2018)	(Nucha et al., 2024)
Agatu LGA	158(2013);43(2014); 188(2015); 518(2016); 0(2017); 4(2018)	(Nucha et al., 2024)
2021 Oju&Konshisha clashes	Violence erupts in renewed Ojo- Konshisha communal crisis: Killings and destruction of farms	(National Record, 2021)
2023 ImandeLortim&TseVambe Clashes	492 persons affected; 12 fatalities; 36 injuries; rest form IDPs	(International Organization for Migration, 2023)
2024 herdsmen attack on Benue community (Gwer West LGA	7 Farmers were killed	(Duru, 2024)

Note. Source: Compiled by the author from multiple documentary sources, 2024

Figure 2

Map of Nigeria (Coloured Part) Showing the Middle Belt States



Source: Nomishan et al. ([2021](#))

Causes and Impact of Farmers-Herders Conflict in The Benue State Middle Belt of Nigeria

The documentary and literature review evidences highlighted on causes of farmers-herders conflicts in the study area. Consequently, some of these causes are succinctly outlined below;

- Herdsmen deliberate grazing of cattle on the people's farmland which automatically brings farmers investment for the season to unprofitable end.
- Herdsmen's possession and use of lethal and unauthorized weapons against the farmers for speaking out against destruction of their farmland.
- Pastoralists' penchant for acquisition of farmers' land for grazing purposes
- Farmers' retaliatory actions or reprisals in self-defense against herdsmen's attacks.
- Farmers resistance to the obnoxious or (perceived and real threats) attitudes of herders towards them and their farmlands
- Weak governmental institutions and non- deployment of political will to address the menace
- Personal interest of major players in the system.

Impact of Farmers-Herders Conflicts

- Displacement of farmers and ruthless obstruction and disruption of farming activities.
- Destruction of farmlands and livestock is recurrently recorded by the conflicting parties (poisoning and rustling of cattle).
- Chain of distribution of agricultural yields is severely disrupted.
- The trajectory of food security which are food availability; accessibility and affordability are equally obstructed thus creating high food shortage which is the major cause of high cost of food because of disequilibrium between demand and supply.
- Recurrent loss of revenue by the two warring parties
- Ultimately, fatalities, increased humanitarian crisis leading to numerous IDPs, raping and maiming, senseless destruction of farm and household

properties (most of which are borne or suffered by the farming communities) are usually on the increase.

Figure 3

Herder Grazing Cattle in a Rice Farm In Benue State(July,2018)

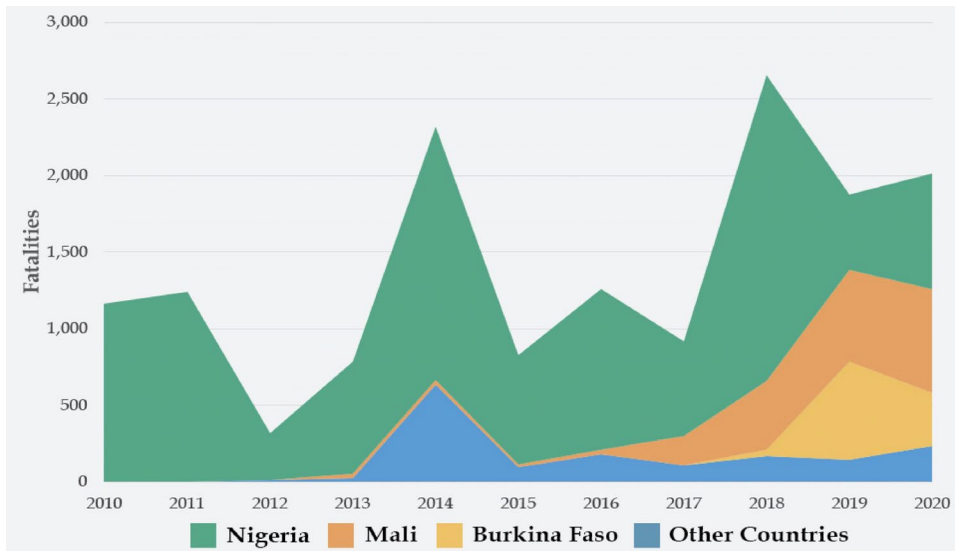


Figure 4

One of the Mass Burials of Victims (Farmers) of Herdsmen Attack in Benue State (International Crisis Group, [2018](#))



Note. Source: Orsar ([2024](#))

Figure 5*Trends in Farmer-Herder Violence in West Africa*

Note. Source: Brottem ([2021](#))

Figure 6*Herdsman Destroy Yam Seedlings and Cassava Farms in Benue Community*

Note. Source: Godwin ([2018](#))

Figure 7

Victim(Samuel Odey)whose Cabbage Farm was destroyed by Fulani Herdsmen



Note. Source: (Asishana, [2022](#))

Figure 8

StoredYam Seedlings Burnt by Fulani Herdsmenbelonging to Benue farmers (Asishana, [2022](#))



These pictorials are proved cases of targeted attacks at food security. The herders adopted a three-pronged attack strategy; attacking the farmers with intention to kill, maim or rape them; attacking the farms with intention to destroy the cash crops and attacking the harvested products with intention to inflict losses on the farmers. Besides, these attacks are intended to effectively cripple the next farming season because it is either the farmers are attacked and killed as the case is in fig2 or the farm is destroyed as the case is in fig2 and 6, or the harvested and stored farm produce are attacked and destroyed to make it very difficult for farmers to raise seedlings for the next farm season as the case is in fig4, 5, and 6.

Recommendation for Policy Action

A national security matter of this magnitude should be addressed deploying tact and strategy, with great sense of objectivity and strict application of extant rules. The major concern of the study is to identify the effects of farmers-herders conflict on food security. However, the conventional security of life and property cannot be separated from it. This informs the urgent and genuine need for the trio of government, farmers and herdsmen to articulate feasible means of addressing on permanent basis, the immediate and remote causes of the conflicts. On its part, government should ensure that guns and other unauthorized lethal weapons are taken away from the herders because the availability of these weapons provokes them to attack at will. Strict and enforceable penalty should be statutorily made available for both herders and farmers to know so that they will be properly guided. Besides, the operators of cattle business should be enlightened on the fact that they are capitalists whose business is purely for personal interest and thus should not grow it at the expense of other people's sources of livelihood. The government should ensure domestication of cattle business to minimize open grazing which according to the findings of the study, is a leading cause of farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria. Since this menace is a national embarrassment, the Federal Government, in collaboration with sub-national governments (states and local governments) should establish conflict management institutions or agencies with the responsibility to mediate and reduce tensions in the system.

Furthermore, Nigeria security agencies should be professional enough, deploying hi-tech detective security gadgets to identify the peace-loving herdsmen from the murderous ones and act accordingly. Besides finding lasting solution to the crisis, food security should be given due attention by

the government, which is a critical aspect of this study. This includes supporting and encouraging farmers and herders who have genuinely suffered economic setbacks as a result of the recurrent conflict in the economic sub-sector of Nigeria. Such support should involve the provision of funding, seedlings, farm implements, and other necessary enhancements. For example, beyond their reparable loss of lives, data presented earlier highlights the destruction of farm produce meant for sales and profitability and others show preserved seedling for next farming season. The intervention of government and development agencies is needed to reduce the burden and incidence of losses on the farmers and also help to reduce acute food shortage in the system. Finally, peace between the duo cannot be except they are willing to work for it. The government should ensure tremendous limitation of incidents of reprisal, either by farmers or herders. The umbrella bodies of the warring parties, for example the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and its farmer counterpart in the Middle Belt should complement the effort of government and sundry agencies at peace building by engaging on enlightenment campaign aimed at making their members appreciate the advantages of peaceful coexistence over atmosphere of tension, killings, destruction of properties, mutual suspicion and rivalry. If such steps are conscientiously taken, reports of poisoning and rustling of cows, destruction of farmland and attacks on life and property being daily occurrence in the region would be reduced drastically. Climate change that causes desertification was identified as one of the reasons herders push up south for vegetation, thus contact with farmers' farmlands. It is therefore pertinent that government should help in any way it can to support provision of water in the North for cattle farmers as it provided irrigation facilities to crop farmers. Government should take the lead with strong intention to engage the warring parties to figure out sustainable strategies to mitigate the negative effect of the crisis on food availability, sustainability, affordability and shrinking Nigeria's GDP.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data availability statement is not applicable as no new data has been created.

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