



Effects of Farmers-Herders Conflicts on Food Security in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

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Abstract. The paper examined farmers-herders' conflict and its effects on food security in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. The study adopts the Frustration-Aggression Theory which posits that aggression is an outcome of frustrating a person's efforts towards a certain goal. Frustration caused by interference in goal-directed activity produces a 'readiness' for aggression which if 'triggered' can result in aggressive response. The data collected was through structured questionnaire and analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics. The results revealed that conflict has reduced the rate of food production which has led to loss of lives and property, displacement, poverty, and unemployment with its socio-economic consequences on sustainable development in Nigeria. Therefore, the study recommends that representatives of the host communities and the herdsmen should organize a public forum and part take in decision making process where issues affecting both parties are presented, and the procedure to restoring peace to most of the affected communities will be properly tackled. The process should involve all stakeholders (herdsmen and farmers) in the dispute resolution mechanism. The ranching method for cattle rearing should be properly and unanimously adopted at rearing location across the state with the herdsmen given the needed training for effective and efficient management of the ranching.

Keywords: Farmers, Herders, Conflict, Food Security

1. Introduction

Security threats in Nigeria has political, economic and environmental dimensions. Each dimensions have critically affected the stability of the nation which can be traced to many factors in which the Fulani-herdsmen appears to be a major factor. Most worrisome is the raping, killing and kidnapping of farmers by the herdsmen. Hardly a day passes-by

without news found in our national dailies on how these herdsmen attack communities and houses with sophisticated guns. According to Okereke (2012) and Bello (2013), the conflicts in most part of Nigeria especially between herdsmen and farmers are largely uncalled for as farmers can no longer farm peacefully because of Fulani herdsmen. Studies conducted by Okereke (2012) and Kasarachi (2016) have shown that serious conflict erupt between Fulani herdsmen and farmers leading to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers for fear of attack could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. The latest attacks by Fulani herdsmen are on the upsurge, with the latest attacks in February 2018 happening in Benue State, Taraba State, Nasarawa State and few cases of attack in other states. In recent times, the killings recorded by Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash has rampaged most communities displacing them of their farmlands and loss of their major source of livelihood. This is becoming unbearable with the Fulani herdsmen always having their ways leaving the farmers at their mercy. Herdsmen attribute the roots of the crisis to religious differences resulting in the killing of their cows while the farmers see the herdsmen as a threat to their crops and agricultural produce since the herdsmen allow their cows to feed on the farmer crops.

This recent wave of violence in Nigeria as observed by Kasarachi (2016) has disrupted socio-economic, religious and educational activities, political instability and threatened the national unity in Nigeria. These extra judiciary killings have forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety. The rate of insecurity occasioned by Farmers-Herders crisis in the north-central, middle-belt and southern parts of Nigeria has reduced the rate of food production in the country, thereby making farmers not to produce food in surplus as a result of fear of being killed in their

various farmlands. As such, it reduces the chances of food availability in the country (Osumah, 2018). Herder Farmer crises have not only directly impacted on the lives or livelihoods of those involved, but have also disrupted and threatened the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production and invariably the sustainability of livelihoods of rural communities (Moritz, 2010). Again, the crisis has reinforced circles of extreme poverty and hunger, destroys social status, food security and affects mostly the most marginalized groups which include women and children (Ikezue & Ezeah, 2017). The livelihood structure, food security and wellbeing of farmers are threatened and compromised as it further contributes to poverty, food and nutrition insecurity and poor health of farming in communities, with further escalation of conflicts. The instability caused by the incessant conflict between farmers and herdsmen, will likely lead to food shortages for the communities that depend on subsistence farming. Ismaila & Umar (2015) observes that the farmers-herdsmen crises have caused a sharp and substantial increase in prices for agricultural crop such as cowpeas, maize, millet, rice and sorghum. The rise in prices is mainly due to a decrease in agricultural output, uncertainties in markets and an increase in fuel and transportation. This therefore becomes a widespread and formidable challenge to food security in Nigeria as urgent and sincere steps are needed to be effectively taken by the Nigerian government to end these crises (Anter, 2015).

Benue State have been greatly affected by conflict between farmers and herders and these conflicts always result into large scale destruction of lives and properties. The herders have acquired sophisticated arms as a means of defending themselves against cattle rustlers and armed bandits, and also used these weapons to attack communities that attacked their cattle when they encroached on their farmlands. This has led to reprisal attacks and counter attacks with monumental losses on both sides. Adisa, & Adekunle, (2010) asserts that addressing this issue requires a clear diagnosis of the root causes, evolution, impacts and implications as there are trading blames between the farmers and herders. The farmers accused the herders of allowing their cattle to destroy their farmlands without payment of compensation for the losses and damages done to their crops, while the herders accused farmers of cultivating on their stock routes and grazing reserves meant for them. The lives of farmers and herdsmen, women and children have been lost while others displaced from being landowners to tenants in IDPs camps. Again, as a result of destruction of farm produce by the herds of cattle, the local farmers are

exposed to poverty and unemployment since their major occupation is on farming, and their farm produce destroyed (Adisa, 2012). The farmers sojourn into cities to engage in one job opportunity or the other. The opposite is the case as they need to survive, and in the course of survival, they involve themselves in any sort of crime as a result of psychological frustration. This depicts a scenario of a popular quote where a hungry man is an angry man (Osumah, 2018). It is against this background that this paper assesses the effects of farmers-herders conflict on food security in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Concept of Farmers

Farmers are persons who engage in agriculture, raising living organisms for food or raw materials. The term applies to people who do some combination of raising field crops, orchards, vineyards, poultry, or other livestock. Farmer is a person whose main occupation or livelihood is the cultivation of land and planting of crops for both domestic and commercial purposes (Ajibefun, 2017). Farmers also raise living organisms for food, commerce or raw materials. The term farmer in this work is directly associated to people who do some combination of raising poultry, livestock and above all crops. A farmer may not necessarily have his own farm but may have the strength to carry his labor round as a commodity looking for a market, to enable him get some money and meet the basic needs of his family. Though in most developed societies, farmers usually have their own farms using modern machines for cultivation or using employees of the farm who are called farm laborers or workers (Agbedo, 2016). Based on this broad definition, farmers are both herdsmen who herd or keep livestock like cattle, goats and sheep, and crop farmers.

2.2 Concept of Herders

Herders are nomads whose primary occupation is raising livestock like cattle and sheep basically for commercial purposes. They move from one place to another in search of green grasses and water for their animals without a fixed pattern of movement (Okoro, 2018). The herders are usually Fulani who originated from the Senegambia before spreading other states that cut across west Africa and the Sahel as well as western Sudan and Central African Republic (McGregor, 2014). The people are found in large number in Nigeria with some found in cities, while many still live as semi-nomadic herders. These group

who own and rear herds of animals like cattle for commercial purposes are called Herdsmen, and their primary occupation is raising of livestock (Iro 2010). They usually move their herds from one place to another in search of pasture and fresh water. It is predominantly the occupation of the Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria who are often armed and visibly move about with weapons (like daggers, machetes, arrows etc.) to protect their livestock. The more disturbing issue about the Herdsmen is that they also block the highways with their cattle, rob and kidnap people, keep them captives in the bush and demand for ransom. The Herdsmen have also been involved in the rape of old and young women and burning of communities (Vanguard, 2018). Due to their violent nature and associated killings, the group was recently described as the world's fourth deadliest militant group (Mikailu, 2016).

2.3 Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a violent stage that manifest in the form of aggression, struggle or war. It is an inevitable fact of life as long as people live together with different views, idea and thoughts which are opposed to one another. Action Aid (1994) see conflict as a condition that lacks cooperation between social entities or clashes between people who have incompatible ideas or thoughts. Karl Max (1910) assert that conflict leads to ever changing relations within the existing social structure, but with a total structure undergoing change through conflict. Conflict is a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thoughts process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and sometimes perceptions which result in heated argument, physical abuses and definitely loss of lives, peace and harmony.

2.4 Concept of Food Security

Food Security as a broad concept that cuts across many dimensions. It means access to sufficient food for healthy living. Food Security is the condition in which all have access to adequate food to live healthy and productive (World Bank, 2007). For Pottier (1999), food security involves interconnected domains with questions of agriculture, society, environment, employment and income, marketing, health and nutrition, and public policy. Eme, Onyishi & Uche (2014) defines food security as a situation when people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life. World Bank (2007) defines food security as a threefold concept such as food availability, affordability and accessibility. Food availability for households means ensuring sufficient food for the households through

production. Food affordability means a situation in which individuals can purchase food at a reduced price, while food accessibility is a situation where households have access to available food. The above definitions, no doubt, point to at least two parts of this complex concept: access to available food and adequate nutrient intake for sustainable health (Ojo, 2012).

3. Empirical Review

3.1 Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria

Farmers-Herders conflict is as old as human existence. The biblical account of God's creation witnessed the beginning of farmers-headers conflict. The bible records that Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer, and out of jealousy, Cain killed Abel in the field. Okoro (2018) averred that farmers-herders' conflicts are conflicts occurring between peasant farmers or subsistence cultivators and nomadic or transhumant live-stock keepers. Hoffman (2014) states that there exist differences between 'herder-herder' conflicts and 'farmer-herder' conflicts. He maintained that herder-herder conflicts are usually conflicts between nomadic or transhumant livestock keepers that arise between receiving groups over their territory's resources and incoming groups searching for water and pastures, and cattle raiding. Herder-herder conflict is a conflict that results from theft of cattle or other animals among the Fulani herdsmen. It is herdsmen rustling cattle of other herdsmen, or when un-experienced herders entrust their animals in the care of experienced herders under agreements, and when such agreements are breached conflict occasions within. The violent cattle raids among pastoralists in East Africa are examples of herder-herder conflicts. Farmer-herder conflicts comprise of different types of conflicts including ethnic conflicts, interest conflicts, resource disputes, political action, evictions, killings, cattle raiding and cattle rustling. The Fulani ethnic group comprise of mostly shepherds and cattle herders. They are rural pastoralists who migrate from one area to another and are mostly Muslims who speaks Fulfulde language (Gordon, 2000).

The Fulani group has a long history of migrating, and they have built relationships with various farming populations in Nigeria (Moritz, 2016). Fulani are known for herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry grasslands of their environment. But today, available grazing lands are decreasing, and livestock pathways are blocked in many areas, only a small portion of the grazing reserves were acquired, and are poorly managed. Majority of the farmer-herder

conflicts occurred between herders and farmers. This crisis can be understood as a problem of access to land for economic survival, which as a result has caused economic, political and environmental tensions in the country, especially in the Middle Belt and South of Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999 (Udosen, 2021). The clashes are occasioned by the destruction of farmlands by the herds of cattle belonging to the herdsmen. Naturally, herdsmen are migrants who leave their traditional abode in search of greener pasture for their flocks or livestock (Gordon, 2000). The migration is caused generally by the absence of good and veritable land for their livestock to feed on. The rate of desertification and deforestation in the Sahara Desert is at an alarming rate as Nigeria is part of the countries in Sahel region that experiences drought, desertification and deforestation (Blench, 2004; Abass, 2012; Okolie, & Atelhe, 2013).

Farmers-Herders conflicts happen to be one of the major challenges that have threatened the security and unity of the country in such a way that in recent times, Nigeria had recorded a significant increase in the number of cases associated with natural resource conflicts (Tanko, 2022). The clashes between farmers and pastoralists have become worrisome mainly in the wetland areas of the middle belt, west and central parts of the northern Nigeria. The farmer-herders conflict has caused major drawbacks in the growth of peace and security in communal coexistence between host communities and the herdsmen (Tonah, 2006). The farmers-herders conflict is a security issue that is complicated by various factors, one of which is the incessant increase in population such that as population increases, natural resources such as land, grasses, water, etc. that are essential for the survival of local communities are overburdened and highly competed for the livelihood of humans and animals. These competitions often lead to various conflict especially between farmers and herders whose culture, livelihood and sustenance is centered on the availability of these resources. Thus, natural resource conflicts are pervasive in Africa, West African sub-region especially Nigeria where this group of people are commonly found (Gbanite, 2001). However, farmer-herders' conflicts are often considered local, endemic, low-intensity conflicts and not wars; they have been largely ignored in the literature on violent conflicts in Africa and elsewhere (Lind & Sturman, 2002). Richards (2005) asserts that, ignoring these clashes is unwise because local conflicts may escalate into real wars that may lead to ethnic violence along the occupational boundary of farming and herding. Farmer-herders conflict disrupts not only lives and livelihoods of those involved; they also disrupt and

threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production.

Furthermore, conflict is an inevitable feature of every human society and conflict over resources is not unnatural in societies where natural resources determine the means of livelihood and survival. The evolution of the human society itself attests to the fact that every individual and group in the society has experienced one form of conflict or the other, especially over resources which serves as the central part of their survival and social relations are not devoid of conflicts which usually lead to changes in social relations, adjustment and adaptation (Gefu & Kolawole, 2002). These conflicts are not only induced by scarcity of environmental resources, but are escalated by the feelings of neglect, marginalization and outright deprivation of the utilization of these resources. Also, conflict over resources has been found to arise as a result of scarcity, mismanagement, uneven allocation of resources and environmental related issues. Natural resources have been postulated to be a major driver of conflict, security risk, violence and civil wars in the 21st century and the attention of the world has shifted to the lethal roles that environmental resources play in conflict situation (Moritz, 2016). The reason for this postulation is the pivotal roles environmental resources play in the local and national economy of any state, irrespective of its level of modernity. The herdsmen have posed a major threat to food security in Nigeria through their violent harassment of farmers, especially in Benue State. They have engaged in so much violence and unrest that the Institute for Economics and Peace have classified them as a terrorist group. Not only do these herdsmen invade and destroy farms and farm produce, they intentionally allow their cows to graze on crops that farmers have worked hard to cultivate. This resource-driven conflict between farmers and herders have resulted in decreased access to land for food production. Farmers have become the target for kidnapping by gunmen, bandits and armed herdsmen across various geopolitical zones in the country (Egbuta, 2018).

The glaring insecurity issues in the country have led to a sharp rise in food prices owing to the substantial reduction in food production. Since July 2020, basic food items like beans, rice, millets, maize tomatoes etc. have witness a significant increase in prices thus, putting a lot of people at the risk of starvation. Also, there has been an upsurge in Nigeria's food import bill, as production levels no longer meets the country's ever-increasing demand for food. In light of these pressures on the production of food, investors

and entrepreneurs are discouraged from venturing into agriculture especially in areas bedeviled with these insecurity issues (Udosen, 2021). This had led to damage of crops, attacks on cattle, destruction of properties, killings of live and cattle rustling in Benue State. It is reported that climatic change, population growth, environmental degradation, government policies and insurgency activities are some of the major triggers of conflict and violence between farmers and herders (Suleiman, 2015). However, little or inadequate information have been documented, in respect to effects of farmer-herder conflicts on food security of rural households especially in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. As a result of the increasing trend of the conflicts in the State, it poses a key challenge and as such calls for an in-depth analysis of its effects on the food security of this rural households. It has not been sufficiently documented what the specific or inter-play of factors influencing farmer-herder conflicts in the study area (are/is). Furthermore, it is not well known what mitigation strategies are employed in the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the study area, neither is the effectiveness or constraints of these management strategies (Adebayo & Olaniyi, 2008).

Benue state is the nation's acclaimed food basket because of its rich agricultural production which includes Maize, Sesame, Cocoyam, Yam, Rice, Beans, Cassava, Sweet-potato, Millet etc. Most of the Benue population is predominantly farmers and hunters as well and that makes life interesting in the area. Unfortunately, the frequent clashes between herders and farmers in the predominant farming areas of the state have resulted in the destruction of lives and farmlands (Emmanuel, Yahaya & Mohammed 2019). In tandem to the forgoing, the then Governor reported that more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016 and that attacks by herders coming from more northerly states, and possibly also from Cameroon and Niger, had cost the state N95 billion between 2012 and 2014. Conversely, this implies that over 1,800 killed in herdsmen, farmer's clashes in Benue in three years (International Crises Group, 2017). This resulted to a decline in the number of farmers in the study area and the displacement of sedentary farmers has drastically affected the availability of agricultural product in the markets which also resulted to hike in prices of such products and make life difficult for an average citizen in Benue State (Duru, 2016).

4. Causes of Farmers-Herders Conflicts in Nigeria

There are a number of factors that causes conflicts between herders and farmers in Benue State. These conflicts have been traceable to the policy gap and underdevelopment of grazing lands, land ownership system and utilization, increase in production due to increase in population, climate change, induced competition for resources, poverty, insurgency, armed robbery, corruption, economic sabotage and environmental degradation (Fasona, Adebayo & Olufemi, 2016). Ofuoku & Isife, (2009); Adoji, (2013) corroboratively assert that the main cause of farmers-herders' crisis has been the change in climate occasioned by the absence of adequate rainfall, poor grazing land for their animals and lack of coping mechanisms by the herdsmen, others include:

Land Conflicts: Conflicts between farmers and herders can be understood as a problem of access to land. The beginning of the 21st century witnessed an expansion of agriculturist population and cultivated land at the expense of lands in the Middle Belt. In politically unstable region, it has never been possible to ascertain a legal title to land for every farmer and herder. As a result, transhumance routes of herders were no longer available especially in the context of global warming as this has caused a continuous movement of herdsmen southwards in search of land or pasture for their animals. This has pitched them against farmers, leading to crisis and destruction. Farming along the Benue River accounts for over 20,000 tons of grain annually, and this same area is also a fertile ground for herdsmen to feed their cattle. Thus, farmlands within the river bank areas are the mostly affected by the movement of the herders resulting in a number of clashes (Egbuta, 2018).

Climatic Crisis: Deteriorating environmental conditions, desertification and soil degradation have led herders from Northern Nigeria to change their transhumance routes. Access to pasture land and watering points in the Middle Belt became essential for herdsmen travelling from the Northern part of the country. Egbuta (2018) asserts that climate is a critical factor in the activities of herdsmen and farmers. He further states that changing climatic condition also referred to as global warming is no doubt taking toll on the survival of herdsmen and farmers business. The herdsmen change of transhumance routes to the south in search of available space has pitched them against farmers and the host communities. This global phenomenon is affecting many parts of the world with attendant consequences, including the Farmer-herder crisis.

Population Growth: Population growth has worsened this conflict. It has pitted many southern

communities and farmers against the Fulani. One of the causes of conflict is the growing population of Nigeria's cattle population to 25 million cattle in Nigeria, and the number of cattle is expected to increase to 60 million by 2050 (Fabiya & Otunuga, 2016). A large amount of food and water is required to satisfy massive numbers of animals when they travel on farms' lands. Fabiya & Otunuga (2016) asserts that farmers accused the herdsmen of failing to control their cattle and allowing them to damage crops while the herdsmen also accused farmers of stealing their cattle and sheep.

Resource Factor: Competition over scarce resource would increase the likelihood of the conflict (Pruitt & Kim, 2014). The cattle herders' search for land and resources became one of the major causes of fighting. Desert and droughts have swallowed 70% of grassland and droughts appear more frequently. Disagreements over the use and allocation of food and resources such as grazing areas between herders and local farmers are intense because of the interest of both parties (Ismaila & Umar, 2015). Additionally, they have been several arrest of suspected herdsmen who carried dangerous weapons, and farmers accused them of damaging their crops and failing to control their animals. However, the herdsmen believed that weapons were needed to defend themselves from attacks from farming communities who tried to steal their cattle.

Security Factor: The conflict between herdsmen and farmers is becoming a regional security threat. As a result, the local authority is weakened in the enforcement of the agreement between the groups. Ningxin (2018) reports that thieves stole approximately 60,000 cattle in recent years, and many herdsmen have to arm themselves with weapons to protect their cattle and homes to ensure security. The government prioritizes the conflict as a threat to national security. The then president took some swift actions and tried to control the conflict, but did not successfully battled the menace to a standstill. The conflict became a threat to Nigeria's national security because violent actions have caused deteriorating living conditions, and it will ultimately lead to more conflicts and breakdown of order in the region (Adama, Atelhe, & Emmanuel, 2017).

5. Theoretical Framework

5.1 Frustration-Aggression Theory

This theory was postulated by Dollard & Miller (1939), and later refined by Berkowitz (1969). The theory states that aggression is an outcome of

frustrating a person's efforts towards a certain goal (Myers, 2007). The theory further posits that frustration caused by interference in goal-directed activity produces a 'readiness' for aggression which if 'triggered' can result in aggressive response. Rationis (2014) who asserts that the trigger could be an insignificant element of behavior such as a casual joke, gesture or mild criticism which would normally be overlooked, but to the frustrated individual who wait for an opportunity to show his frustration, may provoke aggressive response or reprisal. In application to this study, the goal or aim of every farmer during planting season is to have a bountiful harvest, then sell the farm produce and make profits. On the other hand, the herdsmen would always want to have well fed and healthy cattle and be able to make profits as well. When any of these expectations are not realizable, either by the herd (cattle) eating up and destroying the farmers' crops or that the farmer encroached on grazing reserves or use water reserved for cattle to irrigate their farms, aggression would be triggered. Either of the parties that feel frustrated to achieving their economic goals may decide to reprise as to show displeasure and as a result conflict will occur. Furthermore, a clear readiness for aggression could be linked to the Fulani's justification on why they attacked Agatu communities of Benue State and massacred hundreds of persons. This scenario depicts three years of frustration against the Agatus and perhaps repeated unsuccessful plots for attack, until the farmers' reaction on crops destruction by the herds triggered the aggression from the herdsmen.

6. Research Methodology

Agatu is one of the Local Government Areas in Benue State created in October 1996 with its headquarters in Obagaji. The population of Agatu Local Government Area is estimated at 195,466 inhabitants with the areas comprises of towns and villages such as Agbachi, Akolo, Akpeko, Egwuma, Ebete and Obagaji (NPC projection, 2016). Most of people are subsistence farmers growing rice, maize, guinea corn, yams, millets etc. *The research design used for this study is a survey design method with a structured questionnaire used as instruments for data collection from the respondents, while the secondary data was sourced from journals, textbooks, newspapers and online-peer reviewed. The questionnaires were administered to one-hundred and fifty (150) respondents drawn from six (6) communities in Agatu Local Government Area with twenty-five (25) questionnaires each administered to each of the community, but only one-hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were filled and returned. Also, in-depth interviews were conducted with the*

community chiefs to elicit information where the questionnaires could not explore in details. The results were analyzed and presented in tables using descriptive statistics such as percentages and

frequency counts on a likert-scale of strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed and disagreed with the use of a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

7. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Respondent views on the Causes of Farmers-Herders’ Conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State.

S/N	Causes of Farmers-herders Conflict	Strongly Agreed		Agreed		Strongly Disagreed		Disagreed		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	Land ownership system	49	40.8	37	30.8	19	15.8	15	12.5	120	100
2	Climate change	63	52.5	43	35.8	5	4.16	9	7.5	120	100
3	Increase in population	54	45	39	32.5	17	14.2	10	8.3	120	100
4	Competition for resources	31	25.8	68	56.7	9	7.5	12	10	120	100
5	Environmental degradation	43	35.8	59	49.2	7	5.8	11	9.2	120	100
6	Security Factor	35	29.2	61	50.8	17	14.2	7	5.8	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The table above shows that 86 (71.6%) of the respondents asserts that the cause of farmers-herders’ conflict was due to land ownership system, a situation where the herdsmen could not have access to pasture lands for grazing of their cattle, and in the process, they end up destroying farmers’ crops leading to conflicts. Also, 106 (88.3%) of the respondents were of the view that the cause of farmers-herders’ conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State was as a result of climatic change. The deteriorating environmental conditions, desertification and soil degradation have led herders to change their routes in order to gain access to pasture land and water became essential for the herdsmen. This climatic change is critical for herdsmen to change their routes in search of available space as a result, pitched farmers and the host communities. The study also found out that increased in population was due to increase in production as seen from the analysis that 93 (77.5%) of the respondents affirmed that as population growth increases, the cattle population also increases as well and a large amount of food and water is required to satisfy massive numbers of animals when they travel on farms’ lands which has resulted in farmers accusing herdsmen of failing to control their cattle and allowing them to damage crops while the herdsmen also accused farmers of stealing their cattle and sheep. More so, 99 (82.5%) of the respondents were of the opinion that competition for available resources was the cause of farmers-herders’ conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. The herders’ search for land and resources became one of the major causes of dispute. The disagreements over the use and allocation of food and resources such as grazing areas between herders and local farmers become intense because of the interest of both parties. Environmental degradation is also a cause of farmers-herders’ conflict as these respondents constitute 102 (85%) of the total respondents. Soil degradation have led herders change their transhumance routes to have access to pasture land and water that are essential for grazing from other parts of the country. While 96 constituting (80%) of the total respondents affirmed that lack of security constitute conflict among farmers-herders as many herdsmen have to arm themselves with weapons to protect their cattle to ensure security.

Respondent views on the Effects of Farmers-Herders’ Conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State.

S/N	Effects of Farmers-Herders’ Conflict	Strongly Agreed		Agreed		Strongly Disagreed		Disagreed		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	Reduction in Population	54	45	41	34.2	10	8.3	15	12.5	120	100
2	Increase in Prices of Goods	73	60.8	25	20.8	8	6.7	14	11.7	120	100
3	Destruction of Farm Land	45	37.5	52	43.3	13	10.8	10	8.3	120	100
4	Food Insufficiency	11	9.2	86	71.7	7	5.8	16	13.3	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The table above shows that 95 (79.2%) of the respondents affirmed that the farmers-herders’ conflict had led to the reduction in population as many of the inhabitant in the affected communities had lost their lives while others are refugees in other neighboring communities. Also, there has been an increase in prices of goods and services in the country as this is seen from data collected from

respondents that 98 (81.7%) of the responses were in affirmative order as this increases in prices has affected the livelihood and income of the populace. More so, 97 (80.8%) of the respondent asserts that many of the farmers in the communities have lost their farmlands to herdsmen and this had affected the people’s agricultural production because they no longer go to their farmlands to plant crops for herders

to destroy. This have affected food sufficiency in the country and 97 (80.8%) of the respondents were in affirmation that farmers-herders' conflict had affected food stuffs. The study conducted by Okereke (2012) and Kasarachi (2016) have shown that, serious conflict erupts between herdsmen and farmers leading to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers for fear of attack could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. This wave of violence as observed by Kasarachi (2016) has disrupted socio-economic, religious and educational activities, political instability and threatened the national unity in Nigeria. These extra judiciary killings have forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety. The rate of insecurity occasioned by Farmers-Herders crisis in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State has reduce the rate of food production in the country, thereby making farmers not to produce food in surplus as a result of fear of being killed in their various farmlands. As such, it reduces the chances of food availability in the country (Osumah, 2018), and have reinforced circles of extreme poverty and hunger, destroys social status, food security and affects mostly the most marginalized groups which include women and children (Ikezue & Ezeah, 2017). The livelihood structure, food security and wellbeing of farmers are threatened and compromised as it further contributes to poverty, food and nutrition insecurity and poor health of farming in communities, with further escalation of conflicts.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Farmers-Herders conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria is majorly caused by herders' destruction of crops on farmland by the cattle belonging to the herdsmen in the host communities. However, the paper critically examined how farmers-herders' conflict has led to loss of lives and property of farmers and herdsmen, displacement, poverty, unemployment and food insecurity, with its socio-economic consequences on sustainable development in Nigeria. Based on the study, the following recommendations were made: that the representatives of the host communities and the herdsmen should organize a public forum and part take in decision making where issues are presented, and the procedure to restoring peace to most of the affected communities. The process should involve all stakeholders (herdsmen and farmers) in the dispute resolution mechanism. Also, ranching method of cattle rearing should be properly and unanimously adopted at rearing location across the state with the

herdsmen given the needed training for effective and efficient management of the ranching. There should be a proper re-orientation for the essence of social interaction irrespective of the religious and ethnic background to the people and the Government should be fair in its resolution and implementation of decisions. More so, there should be sincerity in tackling farmers-herders' crisis to a standstill, with good political will by politicians, in order to prevent further occurrences of such conflicts not only in the affected areas. In addition, the farming/herding profession should be formalized with structures that can protect the farmers, herdsmen and their properties. Services that promote financial inclusion such as banking, life and health insurance should be introduced into the farming communities.

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