

ASSESSMENT OF FARMERS – HERDERS CONFLICTS IN BENUE STATE: IMPLICATIONS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed farmers-herders conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria and its implications on rural development. It specifically described the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents, identified the causes of farmers-herders conflict, and ascertained the perceived effects of farmers-herders conflict on rural development. Quantitative data were used for the study. The quantitative data was obtained through questionnaire administration to 400 proportionately sampled respondents from conflict areas. Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics, mean score from Likert scale, and content analysis. The result revealed that 58.5% of the respondents were male while 41.5% of the respondents were female. Most (37.2%) of the respondents were within the age range of 44-56 years. The major causes of conflicts between farmers and herders include; crop damage by cattle (M=3.7), pollution of water points (M=3.7), change in climate condition (M=3.5), perceived hatred (M=3.1), and land encroachment (M=3.1). The perceived effects of the conflict are; tension among occupant of host communities (M=3.7), loss of livestock (M=3.7), underdevelopment (M=3.6), loss of lives and properties (M=3.5), increase rate of poverty (M=3.4), destruction of basic facilities in communities (M=3.4), among others. The study among others recommends that; Benue State government should formulate policies that will reclaim the encroached cattle routes and create more grazing land and water points for the cattle, and these should be separated from that of farmers so as to avoid friction.

Key Words: Conflicts, Farmers, Development, Herders, Rural

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity of lives and properties of the citizen are challenges to meaningful development. An environment of terror frightens local and overseas investors. It suffices to say that at the heart of these conflictual situations lies disagreement of “who” gets “what” “when” and “how”. These conflicting situations have intensified the environment of tension, division among various groups and disunity which most times translate to open violence and animosity (Obi, 2019). The conflict between pastoralist and farmers has been a reoccurring decimal spreading all over the country and has led to the disastrous damage of rural infrastructure such as schools, health care centers, markets, social/business activities and human capital development of an incredible dimension.

The conflicts in Nigeria started on a mild tune, with few attacks in the northern part of the country, Jos and Benue to be specific, which after, spread to the other regions with different dimensions and varying degree of damages, both on human and properties (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010). These pastoralists continue to wreak havoc on innocent farmers in virtually all parts of the country. Equally, the issue of Boko Haram and climate change also posed a threat to the Fulani herdsmen to search for arable land for their cattle to graze. Boko Haram insurgency for instance has ravaged the north eastern region of the nation making the province difficult for nomads and their cattle for grazing (Adisa 2016).

According to Okereke (2012) and Barkindo (2017), the conflicts in most parts of Nigeria especially the Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes are largely uncalled for. Farmers can no longer farm peacefully because of Fulani herdsmen. The 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 produce thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmer for fear of attack could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. The attacks by Fulani herdsmen is on the upsurge, especially the attacks in February 2018 happening in Benue state, Taraba state, Nassarawa state and few cases of attack in other states.

Conflicts between farmers and herders over land contestations, crop damage, cattle rustling etc have been a common feature in Benue state which farmers and herders have lived with overtime featuring crop damage, livelihood loss, destruction of property etc with the conflicts often resolved through dialogue (The Benue State Government Committee on Conflict Resolution and Peace-building 2014). However, there has been a new trend in the nature and character of the conflicts since the beginning of 1999 according to the Benue State Emergency Management Agency(2014) which has been adjudged to be the most extensive and devastating of them all, been a build-up of many years. The brawls between farmers and herders are not only putting peace out of place, they are also threatening the sustainability of farmer-herder livelihoods hence the need to brace up to the conflicts (Moritz, 2010). However, unlike this study, other researchers of farmer-herder livelihoods and related issues have focused on examining either just the causes or the consequences or peace building and the sustainability of the farmer-herder practices in a single study using quantitative data, with little or no known efforts at examining the multiplier implications on rural, development. Another key dimension of this study is the content analysis of both farmers and herders' point of view regarding the causes and effect of the farmers-herders conflict. This study work focuses on the effect of Farmers-Herders conflict on rural development in Benue state from 2008-2018.

METHODOLOGY

The study area is Benue State, Nigeria with twenty-three (23) Local Government Areas (LGAs). Benue State is bordered by Nasarawa State in the north, Taraba State to the east, Ebonyi and Cross River states to the south and Kogi State to the west. It is a region rich in agriculture and the authorities like to refer to Benue State as the “food basket of the nation”. Crops grown include potatoes, cassava, soya bean, guinea corn, flax, yams and beniseed. Administratively, the State comprises three senatorial districts – Benue North East (Zone A), Benue North West (Zone B) and Benue South (Zone C). The State possesses potential for the development of viable forest and wildlife reserves. Quantitative and qualitative data were used in this study. Proportionate and simple random sampling technique was used to select four hundred (400) respondents for the study. The sample size distribution is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampling Procedure

LGAs	Projected Population for 2017	Proportionate Sampling
Zone A (Benue North East) Gwer	304,400	400 = 126
Zone B (Benue North West) Agatu	487,700	400 = 201
Zone C (Benue South) Guma	176,800	400 = 73
3	969,000	400

Primary data obtained through questionnaire administration and interview schedule were analysed using descriptive statistical tools and mean score from Likert scale. The Likert rating is a method of ascribing quantitative values to qualitative perception to make it amenable to statistical analysis (Umeh *et al.* 2018). The five (5) point Likert scale model used in this study is as presented below:

Strongly Agreed	SA	5
Agreed	AG	4
Undecided	UD	3
Disagreed	DG	2
Strongly Disagreed	SD	1

The mean response to each item was calculated using the following formula:

$$X = \frac{\sum Fx}{n}$$

Where:

\bar{X} = Mean response

Σ = Summation

F = number of respondents choosing a particular scale point,

x = numerical value of the scale point

n = total number of respondents to the item.

The mean response to each item was interpreted using the concept of real limit of number. The numerical value of the scale point (response modes) and their respective real limit are as follows:

Strongly Agreed

SA = 1 point with real limit of 0.5 – 1.49

Agreed

AG = 2 points with real limit of 1.50 – 2.49

Undecided

UD = 3 points of real limit of 2.50 – 3.49

Disagreed

DG = 4 points of real limit of 3.50 – 4.49

Strongly Disagreed

SD = 5 points of real limit of 4.50 – 5.49

Decision Rule: the values summed to get 15 and divided by the number of values to get 3 as the mean. Variables with mean value of 3.0 and above were accepted and hence, respondents agree to that particular item but variables with mean score of less than 3.0 implies disagreement with the particular research item.

The qualitative data for this study were analysed using content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results for this study were presented and discussed on the following sub-headings; socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, causes of conflicts between herders and farmers, effects of farmers-herders conflict, and qualitative perspective.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socio demographic characteristics of the respondents are described in Table 2. The characteristics considered in this study include; gender, age, marital status, religion, educational qualification, years of residence, occupation, number of cattle and size of farm. The results in Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were male. The age distribution of the respondents shows that they are in the active production age. Married respondents dominated the respondents with 65.8% practicing Christianity and 17.2% practised Islam.

Majority of the respondents (60.5%) had resided in the study area for 16 years and above, this duration of residency was crucial in ensuring that respondents has good knowledge of the historicity, cultural values and geographical spread to give sound and valid knowledge of subject matter of study. This is very good for this research because the respondents will be able to give first-hand information needed for this research.

Table 2 shows that 72.6% of the respondents practice farming, 24.8% of the respondents practice cattle rearing and 2.5% of the respondents practice both cattle rearing and farming. Findings on farm size shows that 19.0% of the respondents had less than 1 hectare of land, 22.3% of the respondent had 1-2hectare of land, 37.5% had 3-4hactare of land, 15.2% had 5-6hactare of land and 6.0% had 7ha and above.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N=395)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	231	58.5
	Female	164	41.5
Age (in years)	18-30	104	26.3
	31-43	80	20.3
	44-56	147	37.2
	57 and above	64	16.2
Marital Status	Single	80	20.3
	Married	259	65.6
	Divorced	28	7.1
	Widow/Widower	28	7.1
Religion	Christianity	260	65.8
	Islam	68	17.2
	African Traditional Religion	44	11.1
	Others	23	5.8
Educational Qualification	Primary	112	28.4
	Secondary	171	43.3
	Tertiary	112	28.4
Years of Residence	1-5 Years	36	9.1
	6-10 years	68	17.2
	11-15 years	52	13.2
	16 and above	239	60.5
Occupation	Farming	287	72.6
	Cattle Rearing	98	24.8
	Farming and cattle rearing	10	2.5
Number of Cattle	None	23	5.8
	1-100	206	52.2
	101-200	78	19
	201 above	88	22.3
Size of Farm	Less than 1 ha	75	19.0
	1-2ha	88	22.3
	3-4ha	148	37.5
	5-6 ha	60	15.2
	7 ha and above	24	6.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Causes of Conflict between Farmers-Herders

The perceived causes of farmers-herders conflicts by the respondents are presented in Table 3. The table presents the mean analysis of identified items causing farmer-herder conflicts in the study area. Items whose mean score are less than 3.0 were rejected as contributing factors to the causes of farmer-herder conflicts, while items whose mean score are 3.0 and above were accepted.

Table 3: Causes of Conflict between Farmers-Herders

Causes	SA	AG	UD	D G	SD	MS	Decision
Crops damage by cattle	319	20	6	24	24	3.7	Accept
Land encroachment	227	68	64	12	24	3.1	Accept
Inadequate grazing reserves	160	92	103	16	24	3.0	Accept
Lack of access to water points	160	92	103	36	32	3.0	Accept
Killing of stray cattle	184	48	40	40	83	3.0	Accept
Pollution of water points	156	115	60	32	32	3.7	Accept
Indiscriminate Bush Burning	136	79	100	48	32	3.0	Accept
Land tenure system	56	131	56	64	88	1.6	Reject
Disregard to rules and regulations	72	91	112	20	100	3.0	Accept
Change in Climate condition	44	75	108	60	108	3.5	Accept
Land use policy that vested control of land to Government Authorities	44	75	108	60	108	3.0	Accept
Family Problem	32	24	115	116	108	2.0	Reject
Financial Problem	32	44	127	92	100	2.4	Reject
Perceived Hatred	207	144	8	12	24	3.1	Accept
Overall Mean = 2.8055							

Field Survey, 2019. NOTE: SA = Strongly Agree, AG = Agree, UD = Undecided, DG = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, MS = Mean Score

Table 3 indicates that crop damage was identified as one of the major causes of Fulani-Herdersmen Conflict, with 3.7 of the respondents attesting to this, land encroachment without permission from the owners of the land 3.1, was also identified as a major cause of the conflict between the two groups with 3.7 of the respondents attesting to this. Also, inadequate grazing reserves were also identified as factor instigating the conflict between farmers and Fulani herdersmen 3.0. Lack of access to water point 3.0, killing of stray cattle 3.0, pollution of water point 3.7, indiscriminate bush burning and perceived hatred were identified as the major causes of Fulani herdersmen conflict. However land tenure system was not recognized with score 1.6, family problem with mean score 2.0 and financial problem with 2.4 were not recognized as causes of Fulani herdersmen and farmers conflict.

Effects of Farmers-Herders Conflict

The perceived effects of farmers-herders conflict and its implications on rural development in the study area is presented in Table 4. With an average mean score of 3.5, it was discovered that farmers/Fulani's herdsmen crisis have led to destruction of basic facilities (3.4), loss of yield due to conflict (3.0), loss of live stock (3.7), displacement of victims (3.4), collapsing of social activities such as buying and selling (3.4), leads to underdevelopment (3.5896), leads to underdevelopment (3.5896), loss of lives and properties (3.5), increases rate of poverty (3.4) and with an average mean score of 3.7, it was discovered that farmers/herdsmen crisis leads to tension among occupants of host community. Between February 8 and July 17, 604 farmers and locals were killed in Agatu, Guma, Logo and Tarkaa local government area of Benue state.

Table 4: Perceived Effects of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Rural Development

Effects	SA	AG	UD	DG	SD	MS	Decision
Destruction of basic facilities e.g. schools, health care centres etc	323	16	32	8	16	3.4	Accept
Loss of yield due to conflict	331	48	8	8	0	3.0	Accept
Loss of live stocks	319	44	0	24	8	3.7	Accept
Displacement of victims	339	56	0	0	0	3.4	Reject
Collapsing of social activities such as buying and selling	351	36	8	0	0	3.4	Accept
Leads to underdevelopment	347	24	24	0	0	3.6	Accept
Loss of lives and properties	379	16	0	0	0	3.5	Accept
Tension among occupant of host community	379	0	0	0	16	3.7	Accept
Increases rate of poverty	311	24	24	0	36	3.4	Accept
Overall mean score = 3.45337							

Field Survey, 2019. NOTE: SA = Strongly Agree, AG = Agree, UD = Undecided, DG = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, MS = Mean Score

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that crop farmer and cattle herder conflicts in Benue State Nigeria centred on the cattle owners and crop farmers. The causes are seen in terms of competition on land and cattle trespass. Periodical struggle for scarce resources has degenerated into violent conflicts in Benue State between crop farmer and cattle herder. These conflicts have become more intense, widespread and destructive.

Since most of the cattle herders do not own or possess the rights to land, they depend absolutely on open land to feed their cattle. Government policies on agriculture, especially the all-year Fadama farming are threats to cattle herders' access to pasture. However, additional farms acquired and encroachments of traditional cattle routes have drastically reduced the grazing space for the livestock to access pasture areas and water points. Furthermore, the use of police and courts to resolve conflicts between cattle herders and crop farmers by government has been ineffective. This has contributed to the frequency of the clashes with its multiplier effect on rural development. Based on the findings from this study, the following policy recommendations are made:

1. The Benue State government should formulate policies that will reclaim the encroached cattle routes and create more. In addition, water points for the cattle should be separated from that of farmers so as to avoid friction.
2. Laws in the conflicting areas, are not adhered to, therefore, government should intervene through the Agro pastoral Commissions, which would be charged with the distribution of land and resolution of conflicts. This is to legally define and practically demarcate the boundaries between grazing and farmlands. This could be achieved through law enforcement agents to make sure these boundaries are respected. In view of this rapid population pressure and declining farmlands, there is a need to adopt improved farming techniques, the farmers should adopt intensive cultivation by using improved seeds and farm inputs.
3. Loss of properties and lives were revealed as the highest consequences of herders-farmers' conflict in Benue State. The study recommends that the religious leaders, traditional leaders, farmers/cattle herders' associations should make more efforts in preaching the implications of the conflict on the people and the community in general. The Herders should adopt a cattle ranching in Benue State in order to cope with the rapid demographic pressure on the grass fields in Benue state. They should embark on fodder production such as growing of Guatemala and Bracharia to feed the cattle in times of scarcity during the dry season.

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