

Effects of Farmers or Herders Conflict on Food Security in Benue State

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ABSTRACT

Increase in herds number, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compels the pastoralists to look for more pastures to feed the cattle. Also, improvements in human health due to better health services, increase human population who depend on food crops for survival. These imply that both the farmers and the pastoralists engage in fierce struggles for access to available arable land for cultivation and grazing that lead to conflicts. The intensity and variations of the conflicts depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the herdsmen graze their cattle. Many times, attempts by farmers to prevent them from causing havoc are met with stiff and violent resistance. Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured, killed while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking the opportunities to steal, raze houses, rape women and other innocent citizens are killed. The conflicts constitute serious threats to means of livelihood, food production, lives, property and development. The Fulani constitute the major owners and breeders of cattle that provide the main source of animal proteins and meat in Nigeria. The Fulani own over 90% of the nation's livestock population. The herdsmen and farmers crisis in Nigeria has gained significant attention due to its socio-economic and political implications. Scholars have extensively studied the conflict, offering diverse perspectives on its causes and consequences. For instance) argue that the crisis stems from competition for scarce resources such as land and water. The research adopted research needs theory. Secondary data were used.

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INTRODUCTION

Community security, safety and development are very essential in enhancement of governance and sustainability of development. However, there have been conflicts between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria in the last two decades. Historically, conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have existed since the beginning of life and human cultivation. (Daramola, 2006; Tonah, 2006). However, the degree of its intensity and frequency depends on the economic situation and other environmental factors. Increase

in herds number, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compels the pastoralists to look for more pastures to feed the cattle. Also, improvements in human health due to better health services, increase human population who depend on food crops for survival. These imply that both the farmers and the pastoralists engage in fierce struggles for access to available arable land for cultivation and grazing that lead to conflicts. The intensity and variations of the conflicts depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the herdsmen graze their cattle. Many times, attempts by farmers to prevent them from causing havoc are met with stiff and violent resistance. (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured, killed while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking the opportunities to steal, raze houses, rape women and other innocent citizens are killed. The conflicts constitute serious threats to means of livelihood, food production, lives, property and development (USAID, 2005).

The Fulani constitute the major owners and breeders of cattle that provide the main source of animal proteins and meat in Nigeria. The Fulani own over 90% of the nation's livestock population (Lamidi, 2016; Ingweye, 2016). The herdsmen and farmers crisis in Nigeria has gained significant attention due to its socio-economic and political implications. Scholars have extensively studied the conflict, offering diverse perspectives on its causes and consequences. For instance, Akinwumi and Olayiwola (2018) argue that the crisis stems from competition for scarce resources such as land and water. They emphasize the need for effective resource management policies to mitigate conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. Similarly, Onuoha (2017) highlights the role of ethnicity, religious differences, and political factors in exacerbating the crisis. The conflict in Benue state, has been a focal point for researchers due to its recurrent nature and severe impacts on the local communities. According to Abubakar and Osuji (2019), the crisis has led to the loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, and disruption of socio-economic activities in the area.

The Fulani people are a mass population widely dispersed and culturally diverse in all of Africa, but most predominant in West Africa. The Fulani generally speak the Fulfulde language. A significant number of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry grass lands of their environment, keeping isolate from the local farming communities, making them the world's largest pastoral nomadic group (Eyekpimi, 2016). They are massively spread over many countries, and are found mainly in West Africa and northern parts of Central Africa, but also in Sudan and Egypt.

In several places, herders have clashed with farmers and their host communities over cattle destruction of crops; farmers' encroachment on grazing reserves and indiscriminate bush burning by nomads that unremarkably results in loss of crops (Adeoye, 2017; Ofem & Inyang, 2014; Olaleye, Odutola, Ojo, Umar & Ndanitsa, 2010). Whereas several understand it as mere farming, pastureland and water dispute; others see it as reprisals in defense of live stocks from banditry in farming communities (Eyekpimi, 2016; Mikailu, 2016). Ofuoku and Isife (2009) noted that in Densina, Adamawa State, twenty-eight individuals were killed 2500 farmers were displaced and

rendered homeless. Similarly, Idowu (2017) submits that the violence has displaced over 100, 000 individuals in Benue and Enugu States and left them below the care of relatives or in makeshift Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps whereas several are still struggling to build their lives.

In recent times, there are rife cases of Farmers-Herders clashes in Benue State. Benue State as a state is under a severe internal socio-economic and security threat. At a more general level, the threat has special economic, political and environmental dimensions. Each of these dimensions has greatly affected the nation's stability and can be traced to the herdsmen and farmers clashes, ethnic militant armies, ethnic and religious conflicts, poverty, insurgency, armed robbery, corruption, economic sabotage and environmental degradation (Damba, 2007).

According to Homer-Dixon (1998), environmental scarcities contribute to violent conflict in many developing nations. In Benue State, the conflict between nomadic herdsmen and sedentary farmers is a leading resource-use conflict. The cause borders primarily on the competition to have access to land and freshwater (for grazing and farming), resources which have become acutely scarce (Audu, 2013). Massive desertification of vegetative lands and drought in Jos compel herdsmen to migrate toward the South in order to provide green pasture and water for their livestock. In the course of their movement down South, the nomadic herdsmen momentarily settle in farming communities where green vegetation and water are available. Disputes arise between herdsmen and farmers over allegations from both parties. On the one hand, farmers accuse herdsmen of destroying their crops by the encroachment of herded livestock on their farmlands and contaminating community water sources. On the other hand, herdsmen accuse farmers of poisoning, killing or stealing their cattle and denying them access to grazing routes (Edegbe, 2015).

The conflict has been responsible for the death and displacement of many people in various parts of Benue State. Fatalities are not limited to the conflicting herdsmen and farmers as innocent members of host communities are also casualties of the conflict. According to the Human Rights Watch (2013), the conflict between herdsmen and farmers significantly contributed to inter-communal violence and death of about 3,000 people in Benue State between 2010 and 2025.

METHOD

Conceptual Review Herdsmen

The Fulani originated from the Senegambia before spreading out into about 20 states which 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 but while some have moved into the cities, many are still living as seminomadic herdsmen. However, these group who own and rear herds of animals like cattle for commercial purposes are called Herdsmen. Fulani herdsmen or Fulani pastoralists are nomadic or semi nomadic herdsmen whose primary occupation is raising livestock (Iro 1994, p. 22). 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. They are

often armed and visibly move about with weapons (like daggers, matchets, 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 (The Vanguard, 2015 cited in Okoro, 2018). Due to their violent nature and associated killings, the group was recently described as the world's fourth deadliest militant group (GTI, 2015; Mikailu, 2016).

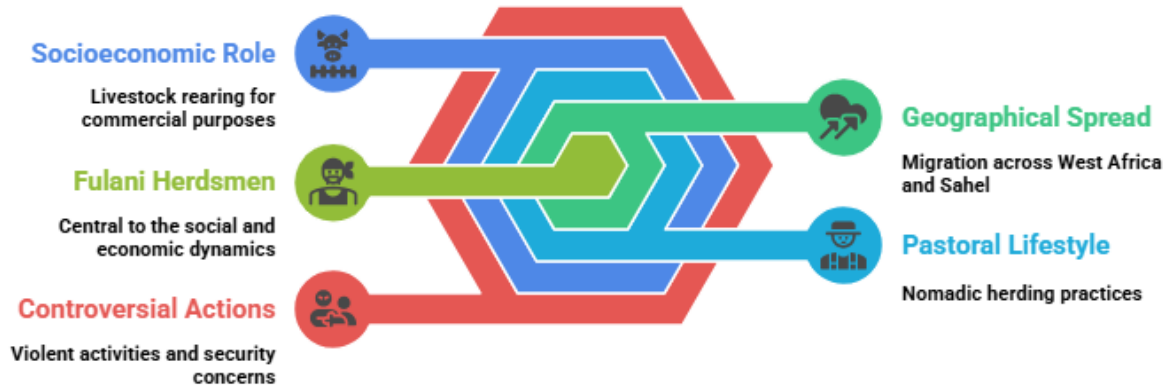


Figure 1. Fulani Herdsmen Dynamics

Farmers

are persons who engage in agriculture, raising living organisms for food or raw materials. The term therefore applies to people who do some combination of raising field crops, orchards, vineyards, poultry, or other livestock. Based on this broad definition, farmers are both the herdsmen who herd or keep livestock like cattle, goats and sheep, and crop farmers. However, for the purpose of this work, farmers are the crop farmers (those who raise field crops) also called peasant farmers/subsistence cultivators only. (John, 2018 cited in Solomon, 2021).



Figure 2. Farmers

Herdsmen-Farmers conflict

Herdsman-Farmers conflict is as old as the existence of man. It started from the children (Cain and Abel) of the first man (Adam). Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer according to Bible's account, however, Cain killed Abel in the field out of jealousy. Okoro (2018) averred that herdsman-farmer or herder-farmer conflicts are conflicts occurring between peasant farmers or subsistence cultivators and nomadic or transhumance livestock keepers. According to Hagmann (2003), there exist differences between 'herder-herder' conflicts and 'farmer-herder' conflicts. He maintained that herder-herder conflicts are usually conflicts between nomadic or transhumance 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 herdsman. It is herdsman rustling cattle of other herdsman, 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. Hussein, Sumberg, and Seddon (1999) see farmer-herder conflicts as comprising different types of conflicts, including ethnic conflicts, interest conflicts, resource disputes, political action, evictions, killings, cattle raiding and cattle rustling.

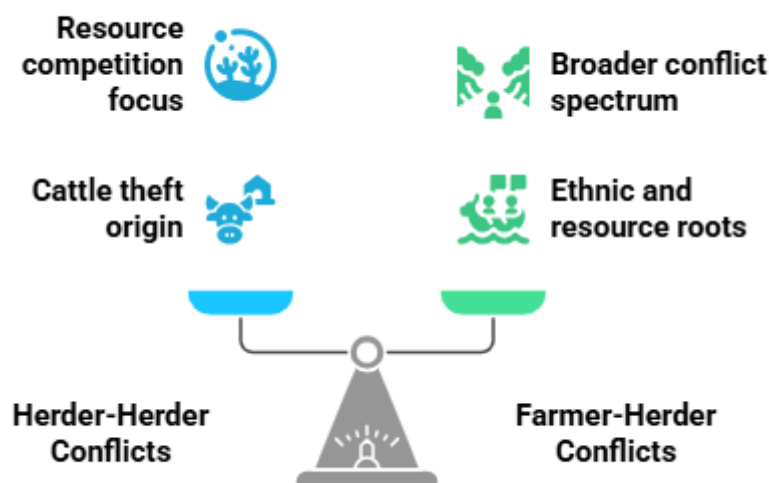


Figure 2. Comparing Herder and Farmer Conflicts

Food Security

Food security refers to a condition in which all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2012). This definition recognizes the multidimensional nature of food security, which encompasses not only the availability of food, but also the ability to access it. There are four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization, and stability (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,

2012). To be food secure, all four pillars of food security must be met. Availability refers to the physical presence of food in sufficient quantities. This means that there must be enough food to meet the needs of the population, including during times of crisis. Access refers to the ability of individuals to obtain food, which is affected by factors such as income, distribution systems, and infrastructure. Utilization refers to the ability of individuals to use food in a way that meets their nutritional needs. This includes having access to clean water and sanitation, as well as knowledge about food preparation and nutrition. Stability refers to the ability of the food system to withstand shocks, such as natural disasters or economic crises. A food system that is stable is resilient to such shocks and can quickly recover from them. This is an important aspect of food security, as it ensures that people have access to food even in times of crisis. There are several factors that contribute to stability, such as diversity in the food supply, effective risk management systems, and government policies that support food security.

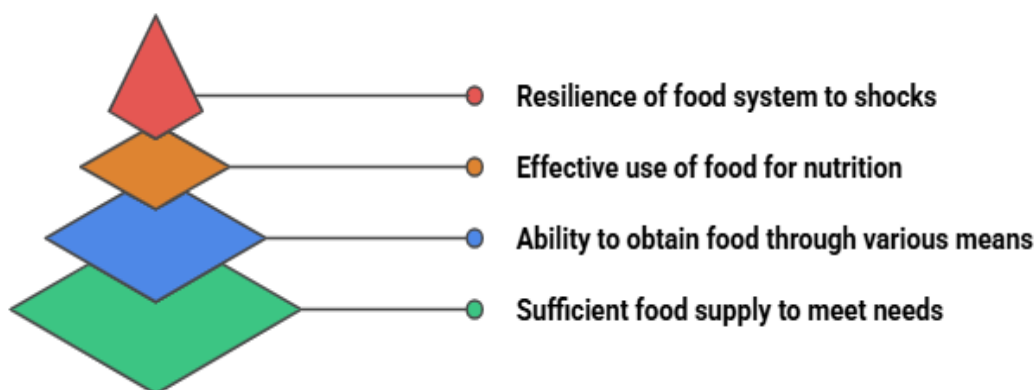


Figure 3. Pillars of Food Security

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Empirical Review

In this regard, the researcher will review the work of other scholars and researchers on similar topic. Adamu (2018) conducted research titled: "Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria: Evidence from Jos, Plateau State". This study examined the impact of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers crisis in Jos. The research employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including interviews, surveys, and data analysis. The findings indicated that the conflict has led to significant economic and social consequences, such as loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, displacement of communities, and disruption of economic activities. The study highlighted the need for effective conflict resolution strategies to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis.

Hassan (2019) conducted research titled: "Violence, Displacement, and Livelihoods: A Study of the Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in Benue, Nigeria". This empirical research explored the impact of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict on violence,

displacement, and livelihoods in Benue, Nigeria. The study combined fieldwork, interviews, and surveys to gather data and analyse the effects of the crisis. The findings revealed that the conflict has resulted in high levels of violence, mass displacement, and disruption of agricultural activities. Livelihoods of both farmers and herders have been severely affected, leading to economic hardships for the affected communities. The research underscores the need for sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms and policies to address the crisis effectively.

Mustapha (2017) conducted research titled: "The Fulani Pastoralist-Farmer Conflict in Nigeria: Perspectives on its Origins and Possible Solutions". This empirical review examined the origins and potential solutions to the Fulani pastoralist-farmer conflict in Nigeria, with a focus on Jos and other affected regions. The study was anchored on historical analysis, interviews, and survey data to explore the underlying causes of the conflict and proposed strategies for resolution. The research highlighted the complex interplay of factors such as land scarcity, climate change, ethnic tensions, and weak governance. The study argues for a comprehensive approach that includes land reforms, conflict mediation, improved security, and sustainable resource management to address the crisis effectively.

Osaghae (2018) conducted research titled: "Conflict, Violence, and Integration: The Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers' Clashes in Nigeria". This study focused on the Fulani herdsmen-farmers clashes in Nigeria, including the Jos region. It examined the historical, socio-economic, and political factors that contribute to the conflict and analysed its implications for national integration. The research highlighted the need for proactive measures to address the underlying issues, such as land disputes, grazing policies, and inter-communal relations, to foster peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers.

Olaniyan (2019) conducted research titled: "The Herdsmen/Farmers Crisis in Nigeria: A Case Study of Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State". This study provided an in-depth analysis of the herdsmen/farmers crisis in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. Through fieldwork, interviews, and surveys, the research explored the socio-economic and political dynamics of the conflict and its impact on the affected communities. The findings emphasized the urgent need for conflict resolution mechanisms, community engagement, and sustainable livelihood programs to mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis.

Eze (2017) conducted research titled: "The Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria: A Study of the Jos Crisis". This study examined the Fulani herders/farmers conflict in Jos, Nigeria, and provided insights into its causes, escalation, and implications. Through interviews, surveys, and data analysis, the research analysed the economic, social, and political dimensions of the crisis. It highlighted the importance of addressing underlying grievances, improving security measures, and promoting dialogue and reconciliation for sustainable peace and coexistence.

Nkemdirim (2018) conducted research titled: "The Fulani Herdsmen/Farmers Conflict and Its Implications for Peace and Security in Nigeria: A Case Study of Jos, Plateau State". This study focused on the Fulani herdsmen/farmers conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, and examines its implications for peace and security in the country. It employed a mixed-methods approach, combining interviews, surveys, and data analysis. The

research highlighted the need for effective conflict management strategies, equitable resource allocation, and inclusive governance to address the root causes of the crisis and ensure lasting peace.

Akinwumi (2019) conducted research titled: "The Fulani Herdsmen/Farmers Conflict in Nigeria: A Case Study of Plateau State". This study investigated the Fulani herdsmen/farmers conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria, with a particular focus on Jos. Through interviews, surveys, and data analysis, the research examined the socio-economic and political dimensions of the crisis and its impact on peace and development. The findings emphasized the importance of community engagement, conflict resolution mechanisms, and sustainable land management practices to address the underlying causes of the conflict. However, as inciteful as the above empirical data are, none actually addressed the effect of farmers-herders crisis on food security in Benue State. This study will therefore fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework

According to Le Meur and Hochet (2010), theorizing herdsmen-farmer conflicts remains very difficult, since the actors, causes and dynamics are complex and varied. They believe that a combination of theories is needed to explain vividly the effect of farmers-herders crisis on food security. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the researcher adopts Resource Access Theory in understanding the effect of Farmers-Herders crisis on food in Benue State.

Resource Access Theory (RAT).

The RAT, which originated in 1970s, was propounded by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik. They believe that man is dependent on resources as access and control over it, defines man's basis of power and success. Hence, needing these resources they opined, means that strategies must be considered and adopted in order to maintain open access to resources. Jeffrey and Gerald (1978), however, observed that conflict has ever been a recurring decimal in the history of humanity as it is more often than not a result of competition for scarce resources in human society. Sikor and Lund (2009) make a vital observation that access to natural resources is often contested and rife with conflicts at many levels. As such, the need for people to legitimize their rights and access to natural resources has remained central in competition and contestation for national resources. According to the theorists, resource ownership and utilization have directly and indirectly defined the dimensions of most conflicts involving man since time immemorial. Of all resources, however, the land has remained an overwhelming source of conflicts among various user groups as well as individuals at varying threshold or degrees.

This theory helps in giving a better understanding of the prevalent herders and farmers crisis in Nigeria. The inability of the Fulani herdsmen to have unhindered access to grazing areas/reserves is to a significant extent responsible for why they often go into conflict with host communities and farmers in Nigeria. The theory sees access to a resource as the main cause of conflict and violence (Ikezue and Ezeah, 2017).

However, due to restricted access, the herdsmen have resorted to taking laws into their hands by forcing their animals into people's farmlands thereby destroying farm produce in the process. The herdsmen believe that they should have unhindered access to grazing routes which they see as their God-given right and any attempt to deny them this right will be challenged. On the other hand, farmers seem unwilling to allow the herdsmen access to their farmlands and this has always made them resort to violence to challenge the excesses of the herdsmen. In relation to this study, farmers-herdsmen crisis in the use of agricultural land is becoming fiercer and increasingly widespread in Nigeria, largely due to 'intensification and extensification' of production activities that are necessitated by increasing human population (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010). Therefore, the farmers need the land for cultivation while the herdsmen need the land for grazing and rearing of cattle. The ultimate cause of the conflicts between farmers and herders lies in the general degradation of resources and the increased competition for access and resources capture (Tonah, 2006). This theory is found useful in explaining herdsmen-farmers crisis in Nigeria.



Figure 4. Resource Access Theory

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the persistent conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Benue State has had devastating consequences on food security, socio-economic development, and communal harmony. The disruption of agricultural activities due to

violence, displacement, and insecurity has significantly reduced food production, increased prices, and heightened hunger and malnutrition, especially among vulnerable populations. This conflict has also led to the destruction of livelihoods, forced migration, and strained community relations, further undermining the resilience of rural communities. Beyond its immediate impact on food availability and access, the conflict has weakened the agricultural economy of the state, discouraged investment in farming, and overstretched the capacity of humanitarian response mechanisms. Women and children are particularly affected, as they face not only food shortages but also increased risk of violence and loss of access to basic services like education and healthcare. Addressing this crisis requires a multi-faceted and inclusive approach. This includes tackling the root causes of the conflict such as land ownership disputes, climate change-induced migration, weak governance structures, and lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms. There is an urgent need for comprehensive land reforms, the strengthening of security and early warning systems, the establishment of grazing reserves or ranches, and sustained dialogue between herding and farming communities. Moreover, development partners, civil society, and government agencies must collaborate to rehabilitate displaced persons, rebuild affected communities, and support sustainable agriculture through policies that prioritize peacebuilding, resource management, and climate-smart agricultural practices. Ultimately, achieving lasting peace and food security in Benue State and similar conflict-prone regions across Nigeria depends on strong political will, community participation, and long-term development planning. By fostering mutual understanding, inclusive governance, and equitable resource allocation, it is possible to transform the cycle of violence into an opportunity for reconciliation, resilience, and shared prosperity. Based on the research conducted on the effect of farmers-herders crisis on food security in Plateau State, specifically focusing on Benue state as a case study, the following recommendations are put forward: 1) Enhanced Dialogue and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: There is a pressing need for enhanced dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms between the herdsman and farmers in Benue State. Stakeholders, including government agencies, community leaders, and civil society organizations, should facilitate structured and inclusive dialogues to promote understanding, foster reconciliation, and address grievances. 2) Improved Security Measures: Strengthening security measures in the affected areas is crucial to mitigate the violence and protect lives and property. The government should deploy adequate security personnel and resources to areas prone to conflicts, ensuring prompt response to incidents and effective law enforcement. Community policing initiatives can also be established to enhance trust and cooperation between security forces and local communities. 3) Resource Management and Allocation: The competition for scarce resources, particularly land and water, has been a major driver of the conflict. It is imperative to develop and implement effective resource management and allocation policies that are fair, transparent, and inclusive. This could involve delineating grazing reserves and establishing mechanisms for conflict-free access to water sources, thereby reducing tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence. 4) Community-Based

Peacebuilding Initiatives: Engaging local communities in peacebuilding initiatives is vital for sustainable conflict resolution. Community-based organizations and traditional leaders should be actively involved in designing and implementing peacebuilding programs tailored to the specific needs and dynamics of the herdsman and farmers. These initiatives can include conflict resolution training, intercultural dialogue sessions, and the promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation. 5) Public Awareness and Education: Conducting public awareness campaigns and educational programs on conflict resolution, peaceful coexistence, and the economic benefits of collaboration between herdsman and farmers can foster a culture of tolerance, understanding, and respect. These initiatives should target both rural and urban populations to promote inclusive dialogue and dispel stereotypes and prejudices. Implementing these recommendations requires the commitment and collaboration of various stakeholders, including government authorities, community leaders, civil society organizations, and development partners. By addressing the root causes of the conflict, promoting sustainable peace building strategies, and fostering socio-economic development, Benue State can move towards a more harmonious and inclusive coexistence between herdsman and farmers.

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