

Security Strategies and The Management of Armed Conflict in Benue State

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ABSTRACT

Armed conflicts happen to be one of the major challenges that have threatened the security and unity of the North-Central Nigeria especially in Benue State. The state has been rocked by attacks emanating from the conflict, which has been seen as a new wave of violence which primarily stems from disputes over grazing areas for cattle. The necessity to provide food of crops and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever-growing demands, has led to extensive use of land. The conflict has demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized, with reverberating repercussions nationwide. As a result, this paper examined the use of dialogue and infrastructural development to resolve the farmers/herders' conflict in Benue State from 2008 – 2024. The paper adopted the Frustration Aggression Theory to ascertain and justify the reasons for the conflict. A simple proportional percentage was used to distribute the total questionnaires for each of the local governments where 399 respondents were targeted to participate in the research but data were collected from 386 respondents. Findings from the research reveals that the land is a pivotal point in the conflict as the farmers use the land for cultivation, the herders equally use it for grazing. It was also discovered that the leaders rejected the concept of separating the farming area from the grazing area, an idea which could have reduced direct collision between farmers and herders. The paper thus recommended that the government should be more proactive in the enactment of appropriate policies, dialogue and infrastructural development for resolving herders and farmer's conflict in Benue State.

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INTRODUCTION

The management of armed conflict and the implementation of effective security strategies in Benue State have become critical issues in Nigeria's quest for peace and stability. The recurring clashes between farmers and herders, as well as communal violence, have raised concerns about human security and sustainable conflict resolution (El-Baradei, 2006). Scholars such as Dollard (1939) and Zillmann (1979) argue that aggression often stems from frustration due to unmet needs, a theory that can be applied

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to the socio-economic tensions fueling conflicts in Benue State. The failure of traditional security measures has necessitated a reassessment of strategies to address the root causes of violence, including competition over land and resources (Odoh & Chigozie, 2012).

Theoretical perspectives on conflict management, such as Doyle's (1983) liberal peace theory, suggest that institutional reforms and inclusive governance are essential for mitigating violence. However, in Benue State, structural deficiencies, weak law enforcement, and political grievances have exacerbated conflicts (Gbanite, 2001). The Feierabends' (1966) cross-national study on aggressive behavior within polities further highlights how systemic inequalities and poor governance contribute to instability. This underscores the need for a multidimensional approach that integrates security operations with socio-economic development and dialogue initiatives (Search for Common Ground, 2017).

The role of external actors, including international organizations and non-governmental agencies, has been pivotal in conflict resolution efforts. The International Crisis Group (2018) emphasizes the importance of localized peacebuilding strategies tailored to the unique dynamics of Benue State. Additionally, studies on pastoralist-farmer conflicts, such as those by Shetima and Tsar (2008), reveal that disputes over grazing rights and land use are deeply rooted in historical and environmental factors. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011) advocates for policies that balance the livelihoods of both farmers and herders, suggesting that sustainable rangeland management could reduce tensions.

Given the complexity of armed conflicts in Benue State, a hybrid security strategy combining military intervention, community engagement, and policy reforms is imperative. Johnson and Goetz (2007) argue that embedding security within broader organizational and societal frameworks enhances long-term stability. Similarly, Merz et al. (2013) propose composite risk assessment models to anticipate and mitigate conflict triggers. As Benue State grapples with persistent violence, adopting an integrated approach that addresses both immediate security threats and underlying socio-economic grievances remains crucial for sustainable peace (Naidoo, 2001)

An essential ingredient for productivity and growth has been largely attributed to an adequate chain of infrastructure. This recognition however has shifted in recent times as the role of infrastructure has received minimal attention. According to academic intelligentsia's; from the academic point of view, Aschauer, (1989); had sought to quantify the contribution of infrastructure towards income and growth. Infrastructural development both economic and social, is one of the major determinants of economic growth particularly in developing countries. Continuous investment on innovative infrastructures creates production facilities which in turn stimulates economic growth, reduces transaction costs as well as trade costs towards improving competitiveness and providing employment opportunities to the poor. Let us consider this analogy by Goebel, S. (2007)

In medieval time, when war breaks out between two estranged communities, and the army goes to the war front, the battle protocol is such that the captain of each army will go out in the company of two or few other lieutenants to the battle line. The captains will call out to each other for compromise of peace

bringing words from their Kings. Such dialogue is to exchange words for a sword or vice versa. In most cases, however, the sword usually prevails at that level. In other cases, the words prevail when the kings had sent elders for mediation to each other prior to the calling out of armies. In such a medium, the elders usually achieve success as words prevail. When words prevail, the people survive and peace reign. When sword prevails, the people are destroyed but peace reign too. However, the former ensures the survival of people, while the latter leads to their destruction.

In the analogy above, peace reign either by words or swords, but the fulcrum for the survival of people is the act of mediation which was used as a tool for both conflict management strategy and a security management strategy.

Dialogue has proven to be very effective in conflict resolution (Singer, 2018). However, there are other security management strategy platforms that are usually adopted for building a lasting peace between communities and state. There are several resolute techniques proposed for solving or managing conflicts. These ranges from third party intervention through the use of standing committees or ad-hoc groups within the country or region. Also, the use of dignified leaders, Head of States within the region who are mentors and are perceived wise with depths of understanding (Osei-Koffi, et. al. 2010). In emphasizing the importance of African solutions from within Africa, Kasomo (2010) reveals that religion can also be used to arrest or mitigate conflicts in Africa. This seminar aims at examining security management strategies employed by the government in resolving herders and farmers conflict in Benue State. The persistent armed conflicts and security challenges in Benue State necessitate a comprehensive study to evaluate existing strategies and propose sustainable solutions. This research aims to analyze the root causes of violence, assess the effectiveness of current conflict management approaches, and recommend integrated security measures that address socio-economic grievances, governance gaps, and resource competition. By bridging theoretical insights with empirical evidence, the study seeks to contribute to peacebuilding efforts and inform policy interventions that enhance human security and stability in the region.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of security management strategies on herders- farmer conflicts in Benue State, North Central Nigeria. Specific objectives are:

- i. To examine the factors responsible for the conflict between farmer-herder conflict.
- ii. To examine efficacy of the existing security management strategies (ESMS) being employed by the government to address the farmer-herder conflict in Benue.
- iii. To examine the possibility of discontinuing further occurrence of the conflict using security management strategies.

Research Questions

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In appraising and evaluating the security management strategies and herders-farmers' conflict in Benue State, the thesis is poised to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the factors responsible for the farmer-herder conflict?
- ii. What are the existing security management strategies (ESMS) being employed by the government to address the farmer-herder conflict in Benue?
- iii. How can security management strategies help in preventing further occurrence of the farmer-herder's conflict?

Review of Related Literature

Farmers and Herders Conflict

The conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State, stems from competition over land and water resources, exacerbated by environmental degradation, population growth, and climate change. Farmers, who rely on arable land for crop cultivation, often clash with herders migrating southwards in search of pasture for their livestock, especially during dry seasons. These confrontations are further aggravated by weak land-use policies, ethnic tensions, and economic marginalization, leading to cycles of violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods (Odoh & Chigozie, 2012; Shetima & Tsar, 2008). The absence of clearly defined grazing routes and the encroachment of cattle on farmlands have intensified hostilities, with both groups accusing each other of destruction and violence, thereby deepening mistrust and communal divisions.

Efforts to mitigate the conflict have included government interventions such as grazing reserves, anti-open grazing laws, and mediation initiatives, but their implementation has been inconsistent and often politicized. While some states have enacted legislation to restrict open grazing, enforcement remains weak, and herders perceive such policies as discriminatory (Okoli et al., 2014; Ogo-Oluwa, 2017). Additionally, the militarization of responses has sometimes escalated tensions rather than fostering reconciliation. Sustainable solutions require a multi-stakeholder approach involving community dialogue, climate-resilient agricultural practices, and equitable land management policies that balance the needs of both farmers and herders (FAO, 2011; Search for Common Ground, 2017). Without addressing the root causes, the conflict will continue to threaten Nigeria's food security and socio-political stability.

Farmers and pastoralists in many localities and different countries make their livelihood within the same geographical, political, and socio-cultural conditions which may be characterized by resource scarcity or political inequality (Braukämper, 2000). Pastoralists usually graze over areas outside farmlands, and these have been accepted to be the norm from time immemorial. Their movements are opportunistic and follow pasture and water resources in a pattern that varies seasonally or yearly according to the availability of resources (FAO, 2011). The patterns of movement may be controlled by seasonal climate variations. However, an increase in population, drying of waterholes, shifting in rainfall pattern leading to drought as a result of the unpredictable climate which affects both sectors of agriculture.

At the same time, household agricultural crop production systems are becoming more and more integrated into the global economy, thereby increasing the demand and pressure needs for arable land values. These, coupled with the ineptitude of arable land

governance and the increased widespread of economic hardship thereby creating an avenue for resource conflicts. Both customary and statutory land management systems are often not responding adequately to the tenure insecurity these changes bring (Djire, 2014).

Land acquisition by capitalist farmers exacerbates the upsurge of conflict as pastoralist can no longer find where to pass let to talk of where to stay (Abbass, 2012). Changing access rights as traditional communal property are being replaced by private ownership (Adisa, 2012). It is common to see that Burtalis (cattle pathways) close to cities do not exist anymore as houses and filling (petrol/gas) stations have taken over their places. Cattle now compete with motorist on the available path which are tarred roads. There are many other predominant causes. Blockage of waterholes by farmers and fishermen, crop damage by pastoralist livestock and reprisal attacks on pastoralist by sedentary farmers when ethnic or religious disputes occur somewhere else (Umar, 2002; Abbass, 2012; Audu, 2014). Also, allocation of grazing lands as government layouts without compensating the pastoralist, breaks down the law and order thereby biased sides being taken by local rulers or Judges (Rasak, 2011; Fabusoro & Oyegbami, 2009). Others are gradual decline of social cohesion, ethnocentric and religious intolerance of leaders who are themselves sedentary farmers and conflict of cultures (Abbass, 2012; Bello, 2013).

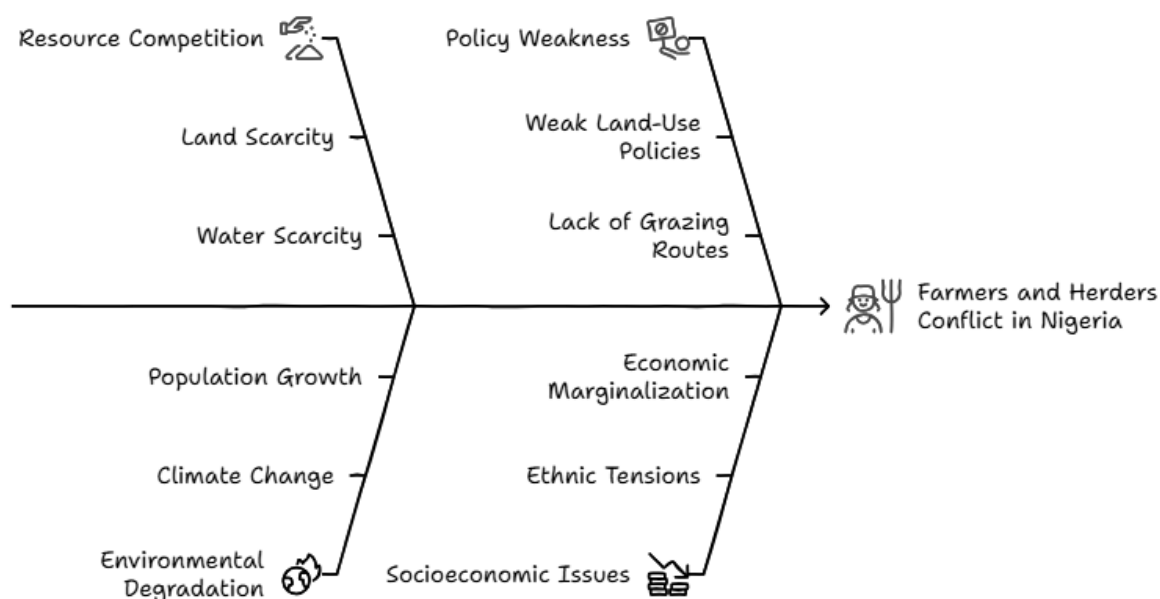


Figure 1. Analyzing Farmers and Herders Conflict in Nigeria

Dialogue and Infrastructural Development

Dialogue can be understood as a form of communication that intends change or learning, the latter being defined by Piaget as changes in cognitive (or affective) patterns, as either assimilation or accommodation (Piaget, 1971). The transmission model, where a message expressed by one person can be immediately received and fully understood and implemented in the competitive structure and other (instructive approach) is not believe

to lead to any form of deep understand in this sense. Pedagogical communication is not reducible to the formally defined relations of communication (sender-receiver), much less to the explicit content of the message sent. Learning takes place when the learner actually participates in the learning activity and constructs new knowledge on the basis of what he already knows (constructivist approach). This is even more relevant when the learner is an adult employee with well-established believes and practices. Dialogue and involvement are first crucial to learning and to change.

Infrastructural development is essential in the sustainability of human development. In improving accessibility to social services safe water, electricity, sanitation and social infrastructural facilities for residence has been acknowledged as one of the principal ways of promoting sound human settlement. More so, migration is one of the most crucial phenomena which shapes not only the structure of an area's population but the spatial pattern and dynamics of an area. Likewise in rural settlement, infrastructure has the power to determine the quality of life for residents of an area. Furthermore, dialogue is considered a formal structure of discourse. Theories in this connection are conversation analysis (Sacks, Schlegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Brown & Levinson, 1987) and discourse analysis (Roulet et, al., 1986; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1990). On the other hand, dialogue can be analyzed on functional terms. The theoretical approaches used in this connection are the pedagogical theory, learning theory and psychology. In combining theories this way, we fuse what we believe best serves our purpose: to isolate parameters for distinguishing organizational dialogue from other dialogues and communication forms. We argue that dialogue is both a formal structure and a discursive practice. Dialogue is not only a tool for managing interaction with a specific goal, but also a concrete communicative practice that relies on language. We look at a number of important contributions from different disciplines and areas in order to extract some fundamental notions that are relevant in the analysis for dialogue as a tool in organizational change. The linguistic approaches to dialogue described in the first section view dialogue as a formal structure, whereas the psychological and learning oriented approaches presented in the second section take the perspective of dialogue as a discursive practice where the goal is learning and ultimately change The Geneva School (Roulet, et. al, 1986), Drawing on works by Bakhtine, Austin, Searle and Grice and Goffman, among others, understands dialogues a hierarchical or logical construction.



Figure 2. Cycle of Dialogue and Learning

According to this school, dialogue consists of units at different levels (for example, a superior versus a subordinate exchange), which are tied together in different ways. In practice, it can be difficult to delimit the units. However, one possibility is to consider a meeting between two or more persons in a certain place and in a certain space of time as a unit (Kerbiat-Orecchioni, 1990). Furthermore, a unit can be defined by its topic as topic shifts can mark the transition to a new unit. The starting point of the model is a conception of dialogue as negotiation. This means that a dialogue is not closed before the partners reached an agreement, including agreeing that it is not possible to reach an agreement.

The following composite security management strategies (Composite SMS) for the herders-farmers conflict in Benue State were identified from the works of Guo, K. H., Yuan, Y., Archer, N. P., and Connelly, C. E. (2011); Johnson, M. E., and Goetz, E. (2007); Merz, M., Hiete, M., Comes, T., and Schultmann, F. (2013): 1., Mediation and Reconciliation (MR). 2. Policing, Sanctions, and Prosecution., and, Government Policy and laws.



Figure 3.Synergy in Conflict Management Strategies

Mediation and Reconciliation (MR)

According to Bukari, (2018), mediation and reconciliation has proven to be a very effective tool in resolving herders-farmers conflict. In 2015, search for common ground provided the platform for the development of a Stakeholders' Forum tasked with the responsibility of mediating and resolving community grievances concerning land issues. The Ardo Sodangi, paramount ruler of the Fulani tribes for all Keana Local Government Area (LGA), Nasarawa State, serves as the Chairman of the Forum and decreed that all Fulani grievances should first be brought to him for discussion with the representatives of the farmers. The same was requested of the farming community to their representatives. Whenever issues arise, the members of the forum usually come together to resolve the problems peacefully. Since the training, Ardo Sodangi and Public Relations Officer for the farmers, Mallam Isa Oji, reported that there have been no instances of violence between herding and farming communities in Keana, (a community located at the Benue border) and the surrounding communities.

Mediation is a process of using an impartial intervener to help in resolving a dispute between two parties by facilitating a negotiation so as to solve or end a problem or difficulty by reaching a party agreed decisions. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is the process of making two people or groups of people friendly again after they have argued seriously or fought and kept apart from each other or a situation in which this happens. The interesting thing about mediation and reconciliation or resolution is that they happen in succession in conflict management. Mediation should lead to an amicable resolution and reconciliation of the warring parties. Mediation in herders-farmers conflict can be carried out through the use of traditional rulers, village elders and chiefs, religious leaders or constituted committee.

Policing, Sanctions and Prosecution

Policing is a means of improving respect for human rights and bringing actions and conducts in line with internationally recognized human rights standards. They are also

fundamental in deciding whether to initiate an engagement with the police to achieve such aims appropriately (Osse, 2006). According to Crawford and Newburn (2002); policing is the maintenance of social order which refers to the processes by which the shared rules of conduct are established, upheld and enforced. Strong actions are taken in order to make people obey a law or rule, or a punishment given when they do not obey. Thus, Sanction is a penalty or punishment for disobedience or unwholesome act. A prosecution is an act of prosecuting someone or the act of officially accusing someone of committing an illegal act, especially by bringing a case against that person in a court of law.

The utilization of policing the herders-farmers conflict would entail area surveillance of the borders and deployment of station ground forces at strategic positions along the border of Nigeria and her neighboring countries to control the movement along the border. Policing and Control can also be carried through the creation and empowerment of local forces for security such as civilian JTF, neighborhood watch etc. Another major act of policing and control is the mopping up of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). According to Chigozie, (2010); the fight against an excessive and destabilizing accumulation of SALW within ECOWAS sub-region is still a mirage in Nigeria. This is because an estimated three million SALW are in circulation in Nigeria. The study further revealed that since 2006 that the ECOWAS Convention on SALW came into being, Nigeria organized just one illegal arms collection programme. These amnesty programmes were organized by the Yar'Adua administration to pardon militants in the Niger Delta and have them submit their arms. The enforcement of the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on SALW would further reduce the incentive and brutality of HFC.

The adoption of sanctions and prosecution in the management of Herders-Farmers Conflict will involve sanction for unlawful grazing and farming. It also involves the use of local courts and police for the prosecution of offenders. The subject of sanction and prosecution is one of the major issues that people have been calling for on the subject of Herder-Farmers Conflict. Most people consider that the Government and the security agencies have not shown seriousness in sanctioning and prosecuting people who have been found culpable in the conflict or bring to book the people that are behind these heinous acts.

Government Interventions

Over the years the Nigerian central government has adopted a policy of establishing a network of grazing reserves and routes for pastoralists. The country has 415 grazing reserves but only one-third of them are utilised, others are being built upon or being used for farming. In April 2014, the Minister for Agriculture; Akinwunmi stated that the country had only 141 reserve officially lawed and less than 20 of those were suitable for use by the pastoralists. In 2009, the government embarked on a project which needed a sum of 247m USD to map out grazing reserve across Kastina, Bauchi and Abuja.

Nevertheless, the government's efforts and plans have not been met with favour from either the Fulani herdsmen or the farmers. Whilst the herdsmen view any encroachment on their grazing lands and migration route by farmers as a form of severe provocation, the farmers on the other hand view such restrictions as a form of provocation.

Government Policy and Laws are central to the resolution of Herders Farmers Conflict. At the Federal Level, the Federal Government has come up with such policies and laws like the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in 1989 through Decree 41. It is presently known as Nomadic Education Act, Cap No. 20 Laws of the Federation. The main goal of the program was to economically and socially integrate nomadic pastoralists into the national life, through the provision of functionally relevant and mobile basic education and livelihoods skills provision. It was also designed to help the pastoralists modernize their techniques of rearing cattle to maximize their economic potential, including dairy processing and marketing, animal vaccinations, and modern herding techniques. Another is the Northern Region Grazing Reserves Law of 1965 created corridors for the passage of migrating livestock and 415 grazing reserves throughout the country. The reserves were envisioned to section off large swathes of land to be exclusively used by herders to graze their livestock.

More so, Government. In 2015, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) formulated what was referred to as a “Comprehensive Livestock Development Plan.” The plan was to address the lingering conflict between farmers and herders across the country and develop grazing reserves as well as cattle routes, through a review of the existing program. Despite the fact that the Central Bank of Nigeria released the sum of N100 billion (nearly USD \$300 million) to the 36 states for this purpose, no state has been able to construct a ranch, reserve, or address the issue of the stock route due to a poor commitment to the issue. (Gboyega, et, al. 2011).

At the State level, some states government in Nigeria such as Ekiti, Taraba and Benue State have enacted Anti-Grazing Bill. Ogo-Oluwa, (2017) revealed in his study that the Ekiti State Government passed into Law Anti Grazing Bill 2016 to resolve various conflicts between Fulani herdsman and Farmers in Ekiti State. He also revealed that the Government set up Ekiti Anti-Grazing Enforcement Marshal who implements the Law. The State government partner with the 16 Local Governments in the allocation of land to herdsman for cattle’s grazing. It was established that the Government also collaborates with the herdsman association in Ekiti to maintain the peaceful implementation of the law. He then concluded that the Anti-grazing policy has succeeded in resolving the conflict between Fulani herdsman and Farmers in Ekiti State.

Similarly, Search (2017) reported that in response to the rising tensions and cycles of attacks, the Benue State Government passed legislation that banned open grazing on May 22, 2017. The law prohibited the open grazing of livestock, or the practice of allowing cattle to roam freely in search of pasture and water, beginning from November 1, 2017, and called instead for the establishment of ranches within the state. The Open Grazing Prohibition and Establishment of Ranches Law, 2017 was met with both support and opposition. Those that support the legislation have gone so far as to label it the best antidote for herder-farmer conflict in the state. Whereas, those that oppose it claim that the law is discriminatory against herders, does not provide or support the production of alternative livelihoods, and effectively evicts herders from the state. Despite the conflicting responses, the Open Grazing Prohibition Law went into effect on November 1, 2017. The Taraba State Governor also signed the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill 2017 into law on July 24, 2017, to begin implementation on January 24, 2018.

Theoretical Framework

Frustration and Aggression Theory

The study adopted the Frustration and Aggression theory which is linked to the publication of Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939); Zillmann, (1979), in which they presented what is now popularly called the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis (F-A) Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939). According to this, the central thesis of Frustration and aggression theory is that aggression is always a function of frustration and the occurrences of aggressive behavior always presuppose the existence of frustration. They further defined aggression as any behavior which is intended to injure, cause harm, pain to the individual to whom it is directed. According to Zillmann, (1979), the major tenets of the theory are;

- a) Frustration instigates behavior that may or may not be hostile or aggressive; and
- b) Any hostile or aggressive behavior that occurs is caused by frustration.

The theoretical significance of this theory is its ability to concisely explain the reasons for violent conflict between the farmers and herdsmen. Environmental conflict from the perspective of this theory is a product of the frustration of herdsmen as a result of severe ecological changes and Boko Haram incessant attacks in their home states with the resultant effects such as the death of many cattle which are their most treasured possession, cattle rustling and migration to the south. All of which makes the herdsmen put on aggressive behaviors which are derived from the previous frustrations they had encountered as a result of grazing in the face of adverse weather condition, scarcity of environmental resources and security threats from Boko Haram attacks. Therefore, the destruction of farm crops, properties, houses and massive death toll that perpetually fill up the front-page of the national dailies are the products of aggression that evolves from frustration and sense of deep loss on the side of the herdsmen. Frustration Aggression Theory is adopted as part of this research because it explains the reason for conflict. When individual expectations are not met, it can easily lead to frustration and hostile behaviors which progresses into aggression hence result to conflict which is the situation between farmers and herders in Benue State.

The Frustration Aggression theory, though an effective tool in proper analysis of conflict between farmers-herders in Logo, Guma and Agatu local governments in Benue state, is not without limitations. The assertions that frustration always leads to aggression is a major setback of the theory as outlined below:

- i. Not all frustration leads to aggression as human beings have diverse behavioral exhibitions, a temperament control different from person to person. When found in threatening situation, reaction can be as a result of self-protection rather than frustration “fight or flight”.
- ii. Aggression can be a learned response via environmental, social, and reactions does not necessarily be a result of frustration.
- iii. Individual and situational difference are not taken into consideration.
- iv. Innate character of an individual aggressive nature in which becomes more pronounced at slightest provocation in completely ignored

- v. The theory on the mind gender bias as it fails to explain why men tends to be more aggressive than women, even when each sex suffers same frustration: but men are more incline to aggression.
- vi. The theory is cyclical in nature that is, drive to goal, obstacle to a goal, leads to frustration, aggression-success/punishment, punishment usually leads to more frustration.

METHOD

This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design, which involved collecting data at a single point in time from a carefully selected sample to draw inferences about the broader population. This approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the efficient examination of the farmer-herder conflict dynamics, security strategies, and their implications across multiple local government areas in Benue State. The design was particularly suitable given the large population under study, as it facilitated cost-effective data collection while maintaining methodological rigor.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from conflict-affected communities. First, local governments with the highest incidence of farmer-herder clashes were purposively selected. Next, Taro Yamane’s (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size, ensuring statistical reliability with a 5% margin of error. The calculated sample size was 399 respondents, though 386 completed responses were ultimately analyzed due to logistical constraints. Questionnaires were proportionally distributed across the selected LGAs to capture diverse perspectives.

Given the study’s focus on conflict-affected farmers and herders, purposive sampling was utilized to target respondents with direct experience of the clashes, ensuring data relevance. Both primary data (questionnaires, key informant interviews) and secondary data (government reports, conflict records) were triangulated to enhance validity.

Data analysis employed descriptive and inferential statistics, with findings presented in tables and charts for clarity. This methodology provided a structured yet flexible framework to assess the effectiveness of security strategies while identifying sustainable conflict resolution pathways

Table 1. Population and Sample Selection

S/N	Local Government Area	Population	Sample Size
1	Logo	244,800	125
2	Guma	280,300	144
3	Aguta	166,900	130
	Total	692,000	399

Source: National Population Census Projection, (2016)

The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane's (1994) simplified sampling formula: $n = N/[1 + N(e)^2]$, where n represents the required sample size, N is the total population (728,000), and e is the proportion of sampling error (0.05 or 5%). Applying this formula yielded a sample size of 399 respondents, though ultimately 386

responses were successfully collected. The questionnaires were distributed across local governments using simple proportional percentage allocation. Given the study's specific focus on farmer-herder conflict impacts, purposive sampling was employed to target respondents directly or indirectly affected by the conflicts - primarily farming households, as while nearly all community households have members engaged in farming, not all residents are active farmers themselves. This approach ensured the collected data reflected perspectives from those most impacted by the agricultural dimensions of the conflicts.

Method of Data Collection

Administration of questionnaires to selected respondents were used, as a primary medium of collecting data. As such, both primary and secondary data were collected and used in achieving the purpose of this study. Moreover, primary data is the type of information that will be obtained directly from first-hand sources by means of surveys and observation. It is a data that has not been previously published and was derived from a new or original research study and collected at the source while secondary data are those previously collected and utilized by persons other than the ones who collected the data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings revealed that the farmer-herder conflict in Benue State is primarily driven by competition over dwindling land and water resources, climate-induced migration, weak governance structures, and socio-economic marginalization. Ethnic and cultural differences further exacerbate tensions, as farmers perceive herders as encroachers, while herders view anti-grazing laws as discriminatory (Odoh & Chigozie, 2012; Shetima & Tsar, 2008). Additionally, the proliferation of arms and the failure of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have intensified violence, making the conflict increasingly deadly and complex. Regarding the efficacy of existing security management strategies (ESMS), the research found that while military deployments and anti-open grazing laws have been implemented, their effectiveness remains limited due to poor enforcement, political interference, and lack of community trust (Ogo-Oluwa, 2017; Okoli et al., 2014). Heavy-handed security approaches have sometimes worsened hostilities rather than fostering peace, highlighting the need for more nuanced strategies.

On the possibility of preventing future conflicts through improved security management strategies, the study suggests that a hybrid approach combining intelligence-led policing, community-based early warning systems, and inclusive dialogue could significantly reduce violence. Sustainable solutions must also address root causes by promoting ranching, climate-smart agriculture, and equitable land reforms (FAO, 2011; Search for Common Ground, 2017). The findings indicate that while complete eradication of the conflict may be challenging, its recurrence can be minimized through proactive governance, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive security frameworks tailored to local dynamics. Without systemic reforms, however, temporary interventions will remain insufficient in achieving lasting peace.

Results show that the main cause of conflict between farmers and herders in Benue state is land which is used by farmers for cultivation and grazing for herders. This concern was not solved neither by leaders nor elders. Results show that leaders rejected the concept of separating farming from grazing area the idea which could have reduced direct collision between farmers and herders. The study indicates that farmers see herders as very bad people and see them to be responsible for every bad thing such as crop destruction, land degradation and farm encroachment. This tendency of farmers to look at herders in a negative way increases hatred between these two groups which correspondently increases the rate of conflict among these communities. The finding is in support of the study of Okoli and Atelhe (2014) and Adisa, (2012), who concluded in their various studies that farmer-pastoralist conflicts have been associated with the conflict of land resource use exacerbated by dwindling resources. They linked this crisis to the theory of eco-violence, where environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources leads to conflict and violence. This may explain the dwindling grazing resources (land and pasture) and poor management of existing grazing reserves as culpable.

More so, the study shows that herders also perceive farmers as very bad people and see them to be responsible for cattle route encroachment, encroaching grazing area, excess irrigation water usage, water sources destruction and poor farming method which cause land degradation and serve as the main cause of grazing land encroachment. The perception of farmers towards herders and herders towards farmers shows that each of the two groups are asserting each other based on negative thoughts which results in the inability to resolve conflicts. Leaders in any society are responsible in peace maintenance within a particular community. The results show that farmers and herders do not trust their leaders as they are being blamed for being involved in corruption. These results indicate that strategies for managing the conflict between farmer and herders and the resolution obtained are not sustainable.

The study shows that no good result can be obtained by using power in solving conflict between farmers and herders. Furthermore, it shows that there was a reoccurrence of conflict despite the extra power used especially by police force. The study further shows that, sustainable resolution is obtained by creating awareness to the community members to know the importance of peace keeping in their society, and involves people and especially the conflicting groups to find out the causes and strategies suitable to end conflict.

Based on the results of this study, both farmers and herders share the same opinions about conflict meaning that both farmers and herders have the same experience on the effects of conflict. In the first place both farmers and herders agree that conflict leads to loss of life and destruction of properties and social relationship which make life to become difficult. The prior or existing relationship between farmers and herdsman conflicts include: Better understanding of what caused the conflict, focusing on the management strategy that best address the problem between both parties, allowing parties in conflicts to find a reasonable solution on their own and resolving conflicts by ensuring that both parties accept fair terms of settlement.

The main issues involved in farmers and herders' conflicts include: crop destruction, land degradation and farm encroachment, cattle route encroachment,

responsible for encroaching grazing area, excess irrigation water usage, water sources distraction and Poor farming method which cause land degradation and hence the main cause of grazing land encroachment.

The study finding also revealed the challenges of farmer-herder conflicts and national security to include: farmers and pastoralists for being corrupt, for using bad approach to end conflict, not being transparent, being in favour of pastoralist and selfishness.

In relation to the effect of farmer-herder conflict on national security, the findings show that the conflicts have led to loss of life and destruction of crops, animals, houses, properties and social relationship which makes life unnecessarily difficult. In relation to the strategies to mitigate the challenges militating against the efforts at addressing farmer-herder conflicts for enhanced national security, the findings of the study show that taking time to study what caused the conflicts, promote an atmosphere of understanding between farmers and herders and allows the conflicting parties to air their views, Discourages resentment and grudges between the groups.

CONCLUSION

The recurring farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State represent a complex security challenge with far-reaching implications for Nigeria's socioeconomic stability. This study reveals that while various security management strategies have been implemented, their effectiveness has been hampered by systemic weaknesses including poor coordination, inadequate resources, and lack of political will. The conflicts have not only disrupted agricultural activities and threatened food security but have also exacerbated ethnic tensions and displaced thousands of vulnerable populations. The findings suggest that current approaches remain largely reactive rather than preventive, failing to address the root causes of resource-based conflicts in an era of climate change and population pressure. Without comprehensive reforms that combine security measures with socioeconomic interventions, these conflicts risk escalating further, potentially spreading instability across Nigeria's Middle Belt region and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively address these challenges, the government should adopt a multi-pronged approach that combines immediate security measures with long-term structural solutions. First, there should be accelerated implementation of the National Livestock Transformation Plan with adequate funding for ranching infrastructure, water resources, and conflict resolution mechanisms in hotspot areas. Second, security architecture requires urgent overhaul through enhanced intelligence gathering, community policing models, and specialized rapid response units trained in conflict mediation. The educational system should incorporate peace and security studies across all levels to cultivate a culture of tolerance, while traditional and religious institutions should be empowered as partners in peacebuilding. Crucially, constitutional reforms are needed to address indigene-settler dichotomies by recognizing residency rights after a defined period. These measures should be complemented with economic empowerment

programs for both farming and herding communities to reduce competition over scarce resources. Only through such comprehensive, inclusive and sustained interventions can Nigeria hope to break the cycle of violence and build lasting peace in Benue State and other conflict-prone regions

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