

**Socio-Economic Impacts of Conflicts between Farmers and Cattle Herdsmen in Rural Households of Benue State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

The survey was conducted to determine socio-economic impacts of conflicts between farmers and cattle herdsmen in rural households of Benue State, Nigeria. Questionnaire/interview schedule was used to collect data from a sample of 118 respondents used for the study. Frequency, percentage and factor analysis were used for analyzing data collected for the study. Findings of this study indicate that major effects of conflict between farmers and cattle herdsmen on agricultural production were named socio-economic, loss of lives and property-related and shortage of food-related factors. Furthermore, the respondents revealed that the coping strategies used in avoiding conflict between farmers and cattle herdsmen were avoiding crops destruction by cattle

(88.1%), strict supervision of grazing by adult herdsman (78.8%), establishment of ranches (78.0%) and avoiding cattle rustling (78.0%). It is recommended that government at all levels (federal, state and local) should liaise with community leaders to ensure adequate security of lives and property in rural communities in order to sustain the livelihoods of the rural dwellers.

**Keywords:** Sustenance, livelihood, conflict, farmers, cattle herdsman, rural households, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Persistent and on-going conflict between herdsman and farmers in rural communities in Nigeria which has resulted in severe violence is a serious threat to human security and development in the country. The conflict has a strong potential to spread to other neighboring countries in West Africa (Olusola, 2018). Nigeria is under a severe security threat which has assumed political, economic and environmental dimensions. Each of these dimensions has critically affected the stability of the country and is traced to many factors in which the farmers and cattle herdsman conflicts is a major contributory factor (Ajibefun, 2018).

However, these persistent violent conflicts had predominantly occurred in the North Central states of Nigeria which include Taraba, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Adamawa. These areas possess fertile soils and vegetation that are rich for crop production and grazing of livestock like cattle (Adebayo and Olaniyi, 2008). Evidence show that the clashes between the two groups have spread to other parts of the country comprising states in the North and Southern regions such as Zamfara, Rivers, Ekiti, Enugu, Ogun, and Bayelsa among others. The effects of climate change and desertification in the North alongside the activities of insurgents in the North Eastern region has made cattle grazing difficult, and has driven herdsman to migrate to other

parts of the country which gave rise to the high prevalence of violent clashes between the farmers and the herders (Adebayo and Olaniyi, 2008).

In recent times, the killings recorded by cattle herdsman and farmers clashes have rampaged most rural communities in Benue State depriving them of their farmlands and ancestral homes as well as leading to loss of their major source of livelihood. Most worrisome in the present development is the raping, killing and kidnapping of innocent people where women and children are the most vulnerable and worst hit (Olusola, 2018). These extra judiciary killings have forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety. Worthy of note are the social issues of the raping of women, robbery and kidnapping with ultimate intent for ransom. Besides the destroyed properties, socio-economic life in those states is usually grounded to a halt as people could not freely go about their farming and socio-economic activities for fear of being killed.

This menace is posing a serious threat to life and livelihood as herdsman attribute the roots of the crisis to religious differences resulting in the killing of their cows while the farmers see the herdsman as a threat to their crops and farm produce since the herdsman allow their cattle to graze on the crops (Abbas, 2009). According to Kasarachi (2016), violence in Nigeria resulting from farmers and cattle herdsman conflicts have disrupted socio-economic, religious, educational and political activities in the country which has threatened the national unity. Okereke (2012) asserts that the persistent violence have become so alarming that there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is at a crossroad and gradually drifting to a conflict society.

Bello (2013) noted that the conflicts in most parts of Nigeria especially farmers and cattle herdsman clash has affected many rural communities, farmers are driven out of their villages, ultimately becoming refugees in neighboring towns or states. Those that remain

in the villages are afraid to go to farms in remote locations due to fear of attack by herdsmen. This has a far reaching implication on agricultural production which invariably affects socio-economic activities and livelihoods of the people living in the affected areas.

Conflicts cattle herdsmen and farmers had led to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable crop 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 (Kasarachi, 2016).

This study advocates that the international community and civil society organizations should pay attention to ongoing herdsmen and farmers conflict which has the potential to spread throughout West Africa. The current approach by the Nigerian government has not adequately addressed the situation. This conflict has led to serious food insecurity and displacement of people from their ancestral homes thereby turning them to refugees. Adequate measures are needed in providing security for people in rural communities across the states in Nigeria. This can be achieved by constituting a special security task force at the local government and grassroots levels to prevent further clashes between cattle herdsmen and farmers. There is also a need to set up punitive mechanisms to penalize criminal actors who kill in communities which will serve as a form of justice and a potential deterrent to others. Based on the forgoing, there arise the following research questions that are pertinent to this study. What are the effects of conflict between farmers and cattle herdsmen on agricultural production? What are the coping strategies used by the respondents in avoiding conflicts?

Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. determine the effects of the conflict between farmers and cattle herdsmen on agricultural production in the study area; and

- ii. identify coping strategies used by the respondents in avoiding conflicts.

### **Methodology**

The survey was conducted in Benue state, Nigeria. The state lies between longitude 6°-8°E and latitude 8°-10°N and has a land mass of 6.575 million hectares (Benue State Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (BNARDA), 1999). Benue state has a total population of 4,219,244 (National Population Census (NPC), 2006) which is made up of 413,159 farm families.

The state is bounded by Nasarawa State in the north, Taraba State in the east, Cross-River State in the South, Enugu State in the south-west, Ebonyi State in the south central, Kogi State in the west and in the south east by Cameroon Republic. The state is administratively divided into three zones namely; Zone A (Eastern Zone), Zone B (Northern Zone) and Zone C (Central Zone) and has twenty three (23) local government areas. The predominant occupation of inhabitants of Benue State is farming with over 80% engaged in the occupation and highly noted for substantial cultivation of arable crops like yam, cassava, rice, soybean, maize and other staples. Livestock especially small ruminants are reared extensively in this area.

The population for the study comprised farmers in Benue State, Nigeria. Zone B was selected for this study out of the three zones using simple random sampling technique. Secondly, two local government areas namely; Guma and Gwer West were selected out of eight local government areas in the Zone because of the frequent occurrence of farmers and cattle herdsman conflict in the area. Two communities were selected randomly from each of the local government areas which gave a total of four communities. In each of the communities selected, thirty heads of households were selected which gave a sample size of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents.

Interview schedule/questionnaire was used for collecting data for the study. Interview schedule was used for illiterate farmers while questionnaire was used for literate farmers. Two copies of questionnaire were not returned, leaving a total of one hundred and eighteen (118) copies of questionnaire used for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage as well as inferential statistic like factor analysis were used for analyzing data collected for the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Factor Analysis of Effects of Conflict between Farmers and Cattle Herdsmen**

Results of the analysis on the effects of conflict between farmers and cattle herdsmen on agricultural production by respondents in the study area are presented in Table 1. Three factors were extracted based on the responses of the respondents; namely; factor 1 (economic and financial factor), factor 2 (loss of lives and property-related factor) and factor 3 (shortage of food-related factor).

Factor 1 includes inadequate intermarriage ceremony (0.847), loss of social relationship (0.784), inadequate markets for sale of livestock (0.777), high cost of hides and skin (0.707), inadequate cultural exchange between farmers and cattle herdsmen (0.700), high cost of beef (0.679), inadequate cow dung as manure (0.565), unavailability of fresh milk (0.555), psychological trauma (0.519) and proliferation of small arms (0.516). These factors are considered as economic-economic factors.

Loss of lives and property-related factors (factor 2) include increase in number of internally displaced persons (0.784), outbreak of hunger and diseases (0.719), children drop out of school (0.645), decrease in farm output (0.631), breakdown of law and order in the community (0.600), destruction of properties (0.518), destruction of farms (0.471) and high population of orphans (0.432).

Factor 3 includes unsafe environment for farming activities (0.766), insufficient food supply to farming communities (0.611), loss of lives and injuries to people (0.592), force relocation of farms (0.579), loss of stored products (0.530), farmers' displacement (0.496) and loss of farm income (0.429). These factors are considered as shortage of food-related factors. This implies that the aforementioned factors affect farm families and their livelihoods.

The finding is in line with a study done by Adetula (2016) and Ndubuisi (2018) who observed negative consequences of farmers/herders conflict to include economic, political, religious, social and educational crises. This is to say that there cannot be much progress in the face of conflict.

Dimelu *et al* (2017) observed that conflict significantly affects both physical and financial livelihood assets of farmers. Destruction of crop in farms could cause poor harvest, insufficient food supply, loss of productive resource culminating to poor income, outbreak of hunger, nutrition related diseases and poverty. This could influence farmers to resort to unsustainable agricultural production options, spend more time on the farm so as to make up for supply deficit; and others might increase dependent on friends and relations for survival leading to vicious cycle of poverty among households. They further explained that when crops are destroyed and the farming environments become unsafe that farmers abandon crops in the farms which lead to loss of biodiversity and poor access to human and financial assets. Similarly, Abba and Usman (2008) also reported that farmers abandon the cultivation of some crops to avert conflict with herdsmen and above all, conflict leads to breakdown of social system evidenced as ethnic and religious divide, insecurity of life, hunger and poverty. Invariably, this affects the social and political assets of farmers because members of communities can hardly come together with common voice on issues that require public intervention.

**Table 1: Factor Analysis of Effects of Conflict between Farmers and Cattle Herdsmen on Agricultural Production**

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Inadequate cow dung as manure	0.565*	-0.095	-0.062
Inadequate cultural exchange between farmers and herdsmen	0.700*	-0.008	-0.062
Inadequate intermarriage ceremony	0.847*	-0.020	-0.054
Inadequate markets for sale of livestock	0.777*	0.143	-0.074
High cost of beef	0.679*	0.090	0.023
Unavailability of fresh milk	0.555*	0.299	-0.051
High cost of hides and skin	0.707*	0.256	0.186
Inadequate development of foot path	0.294	0.294	0.006
Breakdown of law and order in the community	-0.0007	0.600*	0.408
Decrease in farm output	-0.032	0.631*	0.133
Outbreak of hunger and diseases	0.067	0.719*	0.165
Abandonment of crops in the field	0.088	0.434*	0.133
Destruction of farms	-0.003	0.471*	0.251
Psychological trauma	0.519*	0.317	0.178
Farmers' displacement	0.043	0.100	0.496*
Insufficient food supply to farmers communities	0.031	0.228	0.611*
Loss of lives and injuries to people	-0.238	0.324	0.592*
Loss of farm income	-0.005	0.101	0.429*
Migration of farmers to urban areas	-0.047	0.033	0.314
Unsafe environment for farming activities	-0.211	-0.118	0.766*
Force relocation of farms	-0.100	-0.091	0.579*
Loss of stored products	0.391	-0.297	0.530*
Loss of social relationship	0.784*	-0.100	-0.088
Proliferation of small arms	0.516*	0.151	-0.122
Destruction of properties	0.124	0.518*	0.345
Children drop out of school	0.101	0.645*	-0.189
Increase in number of internally displaced persons	-0.070	0.740*	-0.133
High population of orphans	0.200	0.432	0.027
Malnutrition among farming households	0.234	0.253	-0.023
High dependency ratio	0.145	0.223	-0.076

**Extraction method:****Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization**

Factor 1: Socio-economic factors

Factor 2: Loss of lives and property-related factors

Factor 3: Shortage of food-related factors

**Coping Strategies Used in Avoiding Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict**

Results in Table 2 show the respondents' opinion on the coping strategies used in avoiding conflict which include prevention of crop destruction by cattle (88.1%), strict supervision of grazing by adult herdsmen (78.8%), establishment of ranches (78%), avoiding cattle rustling (78%), prevention of sexual harassment by both parties (76.3%), prevention of contamination of water sources by cattle (74.6%), use of concentrate feeds by herdsmen (73.7%), avoiding burning of range lands by herdsmen (66.1%), hay production and sales by host community (62.7%), provision of grazing reserves (60.2%), cutting and sale of grasses to herdsmen (56.8%), reporting to authorities in case of destruction (55.1%) and fencing of farms (37.3%). However, fencing of farmland was the least of consideration by the respondents. The findings are in agreement with Okoli and Atelhe (2014) who stated that ranching and law enforcement would help in curbing the ugly situation. Perhaps the reason for the prolonged conflict is lack of law enforcement as indicated by Ndubuisi (2018).

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents according to Coping Strategies Used in Avoiding Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict (n=118)**

Strategies*	Frequency	Percentage
Fencing of farms	44	37.3
Reporting to authorities in case of destruction	65	55.1
Provision of grazing reserves	71	60.2
Establishment of ranches	92	78.0
Avoiding cattle rustling	92	78.0
Avoiding crop destruction by cattle	104	88.1
Avoiding contaminating water sources by cattle	88	74.6
Hay production and sales by host community	74	62.7
Cutting and sale of grasses to herdsmen	67	56.8
Use of concentrate feeds by herdsmen	87	73.7
Avoiding sexual harassment by both parties	90	76.3
Strict supervision of grazing by adult herdsmen and not	93	78.8
Avoiding burning of range lands by herdsmen	78	66.1

\*Multiple responses

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that the respondents were confronted with a lot of socio-economic problems emanating from farmers and cattle herdsmen conflict. These problems include inadequate intermarriage ceremony, increase in number of internally displaced persons, loss of social relationship, inadequate markets for sale of livestock, outbreak of hunger and diseases, children drop out of school, decrease in farm output, destruction of lives, properties and farms, loss of stored products, loss of farm income, etc. However, the respondents adopted coping strategies such as prevention of crop destruction by cattle, strict supervision of grazing by adult herdsmen, establishment of ranches, avoiding cattle rustling, prevention of sexual harassment by both parties, prevention of contamination

of water sources by cattle, use of concentrate feeds by herdsmen, avoiding burning of range lands by herdsmen, among others in avoiding conflicts.

It is recommended that government at all levels (federal, state and local) should liaise with community leaders to ensure adequate security of lives and property in rural communities in order to sustain the livelihoods of the rural dwellers. Farmers and cattle herdsmen should adhere strictly to lay down rules to avoid crisis and maintain peace between the two groups as well as increasing productivity of farm output.

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