ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS OF INCESSANT HERDSMEN-ARABLE CROP FARMERS' CONFLICTS ON CROP PRODUCTION IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The study assessed effects of incessant herders-arable crop famers' conflict on crop production in Benue State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was used for selecting 179 respondents for the study. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and data collected were analysed using percentages. The findings revealed that 70.9% of the respondents were males, 23.46% were age between 36 and 40 years, 82.7% were married and 48.1% obtained secondary education. The finding further revealed that 66.7% of the respondents were farmers and about 53.1% of the respondents had farm size of at 4-10 hectares. Also, 59.7% had household size of between 1 and 10 members, 15.64% of the respondents had annual income between N401,000 - N500,000 and 39 % had farming experience of 10 years. Causes of farmer-herdsmen conflict included killing of farmers (96.1%), desertification (93.9%) and destruction of community water points (89.9%) among others. Items destroyed during the farmers-herdsmen conflicts included storage facilities (92.7%), pipe borne water and it's facilities (85.5%), residential houses and fish ponds (78.2%), stored farm produce and crop farm (77.1%). The study concludes that Farmers-herdsmen conflicts have significance negative effect on crop production in Benue State. Establishment of ranches by those rearing livestock, government should deploy security personnel to the affected areas to prevent killing of farmers by the armed herders and there should be adequate public enlightenment on the negative effects of conflicts in Nigeria in general and Benue State in Particular.

***Keywords**: Assessment, Effect, herdsmen, arable-crop-farmers, conflicts*

Introduction

Agriculture remains the mainstay of many economies especially the developing countries like Nigeria. The two major types of agriculture are practised in Nigeria are crop production and livestock rearing. The two types of agricultural practices depend on one another, crops provide feeds to animals and animals supply animal excreta as manure for crop production in symbiotic relationship. On the other hand, animals can destroy both crop and environment (land, water, air) if they are not ranched. This is usually, the origin of conflict between farmers and cattle herders (Cee de and Harvey, 2018).

Conflict has been one of the stumbling blocks and a major threat to world peace today. Conflict is perceived as a serious disagreement or argument about something important that leads to outbreak of law and order (Collins *et al.,* 2016). Conflict is a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, values and goals (Dietz and Albert, 2016). According to Oyetade (2017), access to water and grazing land has become more competitive and has led to farmers and herders' incessant conflicts. This is a worrisome trend because both have coexisted interdependently for centuries, sharing the same fields for farming and grazing with a manageable level of tolerance and accommodation. Historically, conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria existed for long before now, however, recently scarcity of environmental resources as a result increase in population, as well as climatic change, has led more fierce conflict between crop farmers and herders. It is important to note that these conflicts have direct effects on the food security of those involved as well as the country at large. Conflicts disrupt and threaten the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic

groups and sustainability of agricultural production in Nigeria (Moritz, 2016).

In Benue State, the frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the predominantly farming areas of the State have resulted in the destruction of lives, properties and farmlands. According to Apenda (2016), nine out of the 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue State, namely; Guma, Gwer-West, Agatu, Logo, Kwande, Ukum, Tarka and the Northern part of Makurdi are mostly affected by the rampaging activities of herdsmen. International Crisis Group (2018) observed that Benue State seems to be the hardest hit in recent times.

Since May 2015, many farmers have been displaced and are living in internally displaced camps with little or no hope of returning to their ancestral homes. Farmers are killed on daily basis; the killings have made farmers to abandon their farms and families among others to take refuge in the township as internally displaced persons. There is a danger of food insecurity if the farmers cannot return to their home to continue with farming to provide food to feed their families and for other Nigerians. Nigeria is witnessing series of violent communal clashes arising from the activities of the herders who move about on a daily basis with their cattle in search of water and green pastures (Suleiman, 2015). Consequently, many farmers and herders have lost their lives, while others have experienced declining production in their crops and herds (Suleiman, 2015).

Nigeria is an agrarian State with an estimated majority of the population living in rural areas, surviving on peasant farming for sustenance. Besides, Nigeria has a significant population of nomadic and herders spread across the country. Some of these nomads are indigenous cattle herders who move from one area of the country to another in search of pastoral and grazing land for their animals (Amnesty International, 2018). Farmers-herders conflict took a new dimension with the resurgence of democracy because of the politicisation of the conflict by some politicians to score cheap political goals (Nwosu, 2017). There are numerous factors that are attributed to the emergence of farmers-herders conflict including ineffective agricultural policies, low level of infrastructure, politics, socio-economic conditions in the country, climatic change, mis-utilisation of resources and media sentiments (Kwaja and Adelehin, 2017). Other factors include the nature of Nigerian borders which are porous, overconcentration of infrastructure in urban centres, ineffective security response and lack of political will to address the issue (Ajibo *et al.,* 2018). Farmers-herders conflicts have many implications on national security and national development. Fundamental among the effects are escalation of the fragile security situation in the country, creation of food insecurity which by extension is affecting food supply across the nation, destruction of thousands of lives and properties worth millions of naira, creates mutual suspicion and disunity among the public. It also affects the performance of agricultural sector and livestock production leading to declining revenue generation for the government and an impediment to diversification of the economy (Kenneth and Ananti, 2018).

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective was to assess effect of incessant herdsmen-arable crop farmers' conflicts on crop production in Benue State, Nigeria and the specific objective were to:

i. describe the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents;
ii. identify causes of incessant crop farmers-herders conflicts in the study area; and
iii. identify properties destroyed during crop farmers-herders conflicts.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria. The State lies between longitudes 6035′ E and 8010′ E of the Greenwich Meridian and latitudes 6030′ N and 8010′ N of the equator at an elevation of 97m above sea level in southern guinea Savannah agro ecological zone. The State has 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) 423 council wards and three senatorial zones (North- east, North-west and Southern zones) with administrative headquarters at Makurdi. The State covers landmass of 32,518 Km^2 with an estimated population of 6,286,170 people (World Bank, 2022). The State drives its name from River Benue, one of the longest rivers in the country. Benue State is one of the

36 States in Nigeria, it lies in the north- central region of Nigeria and share boundaries with five other States; Nassarawa to the north, Taraba to the east, Cross-River to the south, Enugu to the south-east and Kogi to the west. The State also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon in the south-east [Benue State Agricultural Rural Development Authority (BNARDA, 2010)].

The State experiences tropical climate with two distinct seasons, the rainy season which lasts from April to October with annual mean rainfall of 1500mm and the dry season which begins in November and ends in April, temperature fluctuates between 23°C and 38°C in the year. The State is made up of several ethnic groups including Tiv, Idoma, Igede. Others are Jukun, Etulo, Abakpa, Akweya, Hausa, Igbo and Igala among others. Most of the people are farmers, while the inhabitants of the riverside areas engage in fishing as their primary or secondary occupation. The State is estimated to have 75% of her population engaged in subsistence farming that is purely rain fed and is made up of 413,159 farm families. These farm families are mainly rural, farming is the major occupation of people in the State (BNARDA, 2010).

The population of this study comprised all the farmers in Benue State, Nigeria. A sample size of 179 respondents was selected using stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Firstly, the population for the study was stratified into three agricultural zones based on the already existing structure, (Eastern, Northern and Central zones). The second stage involved purposive selection of one LGA from each agricultural zone. The third stage involved purposive selection of three rural communities from each of the LGAs based on the level of herders' attacks on the rural communities and the fourth stage involves the use of simple random sampling technique to select farmers (respondents) from the rural communities. A sampling frame was developed for each of the communities and using a proportional allocation of 0.8% (0.008) across board, a sample size of 179 respondents was selected for the study. Data were collected using structured questionnaire; data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 reveals that 37.99% of the respondents were within 31-40 years, 28.49% were aged ≤30 years old. The finding reveals that a smaller proportion (37.99%) of the respondents was young. The implication is that the respondents were in their active years capable of performing farming operations effectively since farming requires a lot of energy. The finding contradicts that of Solomon and Chinwe (2015) that most farmers within the study area were between 51 and 60 years old.

Table 1 also, shows that, majority (70.9%) of the respondents were males and 29.1% were females. This shows that farming in the study area was dominated by males. In African tradition, farming is more favourably disposed to male at the detriment of female as farming resources are allocated to male than female and this practice has created an imbalance in farming activities and ownership of farm resources for many decades.

Table 1 on marital status shows that 82.7% were married and 14.5% were single. The findings indicated that majority (82.7%) of the respondents were married. Marriage confers responsibility on people, making them more careful than when they were not married. The finding is similar to that of Eze *at al*. (2021) that most of the farmers in the study area were married.

Table 1 further shows that 48.0% had secondary education and 26.5% acquired Tertiary education. This implies that the respondents were educated and have known the consequences of conflict in our society. Education is a weapon that creates awareness and makes human beings knowledgeable concerning different things. Educated persons make better decisions that are long lasting because they have been exposed to various experiences during the course of their education, including the issue of conflicts. The finding is in agreement with Kughur *et al.* (2022) that farmers are educated and have clear sense of decision making.

Besides, Table 1 reveals that majority (66.7%) of the respondents were crop farmers and 15.6% were civil servants. This implies that most of the respondents were crop farmers and have accumulated information about farmers/herders conflict over the years. For more than a decade now,

farmers have not been able to carryout farming activities in many areas in Benue State as result of herder-farmers conflicts. During the conflicts, farmers are mostly affected as they have permanent abode in their locations, however, herders only visits these places to perpetuate the crimes and run away. The finding is in tandem with Kughur *et al.* (2022) that majority of the people in Benue State were farmers and have experienced farmers-herders conflicts.

It was also found that majority (53.1%) of the respondents had farm sizes of 4-10 hectares and 26.3% had farm size of ≤3 hectares. This implies that majority of the respondents had farm sizes ranging from 4 - 8 hectares. This means the respondents were peasant farmers, farming at subsistence level to earn a living. The finding disagrees with Kughur *et al.* (2019) that farmers in the same area cultivate small proportion of land ranging from 2 - 3.5 hectares.

Table 1 shows that majority (59.7%) of the respondents had household sizes of 6 - 10 persons and 31.9% had household sizes of 11 – 15 persons. This implies that most of the households have large numbers of dependants. This may increase the cost of living as huge sum of money may be use to cater for the dependant on one hand and the large number of dependants may provide ready manpower for family farm reducing the cost of hired labour. This finding is in contrast to Kughur *et al*. (2022) that household size of farmers in the study area was between 5 - 8 persons.

Result on annual income showed that 39.11% of the respondents had income between ₦401,000 - ₦700,000 and 30.17% of the respondents had income ranging from ₦101,000 - ₦400,00. This implies that a small portion of the respondents had income of ₦401,000 and ₦700,000. Income of a farmer influence his level of production, the higher the income of a farmers, the better his financial position to expand the farming enterprise. This implies that the respondents were peasant farmers, who lack the resources to expand their farm enterprise but farm to feed themselves, family and sell the surplus.

Table 1 further shows that 39.11 % of the respondents had experience of at least 10 years and 31.84% had experience of between 11 - 20 years. Experience is an important tool in farming and other areas in life. Farmers with many years of farming experience may have several encounters with the herders and may have developed their personal strategies of dealing with farmers/herders crisis in their locality. The finding is in contrast to Kughur *et al*. (2019) that farmers had few years of farming experience ranging from 6 - 10 years.

Finally, Table 1 shows that majority (53.07%) of the respondents had experienced farmers-herders conflict 4 times and 33.52% had experience of at least 2 times. This implies that majority of the respondents have encountered farmers-herders conflict several times. Having experience of conflicts is not palatable at all. In conflicts affected areas, people are killed, properties destroyed, those who may survive may have experience famine and some other devastating consequences.

Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=179)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age (Years)			38.27
31– 40	68	37.99	
≤ 30	51	28.49	
41– 50	36	20.11	
51– 60	14	7.82	
> 60	10	5.59	
Sex			
Male	127	70.9	
Female	52	29.1	
Marital status			
Married	148	82.7	

Single	26	14.5	
Separated	3	1.7	
Divorced	2	1.1	
Educational qualification			6.69
Secondary level	86	48.0	
Non-formal education	43	21.0	
Tertiary education	42	26.5	
Primary education	8	4.50	
Major occupation			
Crop farming	123	66.70	
Civil service	28	15.60	
Artisan	13	7.30	
Fish farming	6	3.40	
Petty trading	8	4.50	
Retiree	1	0.60	
Farm size (hectares)			6.18
4– 10	95	53.10	
≤3	47	26.30	
11-15	36	20.20	
≥16	1	0.60	
Household size (Numbers)			
6– 10	106	59.70	
11– 15	57	31.90	
≤5	15	8.40	
16and above	1	0.60	
Annual income			606,988.83
401,000– 700,000	70	39.11	
101,000– 400,000	54	30.17	
701,000– 1,000,000	39	21.78	
≤101,000	8	4.47	
≥1,000,000	8	4.47	
Farming Experience (years)			
≤10	70	39.11	
11– 20	57	31.84	
21– 30	20	11.17	
31– 40	25	13.97	
41and above	7	3.91	
Farmers/herdsmen conflict experience (number of time)			
4	95	53.07	
2	60	33.52	
1	24	13.41	

Causes of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts

Table 2 reveals causes of conflicts to include that killing of farmers (96.1%), desertification (93.9%), destruction of community water points (89.9%), destruction of farmlands by cattle 77.1%

and destruction of crops by cattle (73.2%) among others. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents stated that killing of farmers was one of the major causes of farmers-herdsmen conflicts. Series of farmers-herdsmen conflicts have resulted to killing of farmers because they are armless. Desertification is among one of the major causes of farmers-herdsmen conflict as herders have continued to migrate from the North to Southwards making the population of the herders highly concentrated around Benue State leading to clashes between farmers and herdsmen and even among herders.

This finding agrees with Masere and Worth (2022) that major causes of farmers-herdsmen conflicts included killing of farmers, destruction of water points and crops among others.

Table 2: Causes of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts (n=179)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Killing of farmers	172	96.1
Desertification	168	93.9
Destruction of community water points (well)	161	89.9
Destruction of farmlands by cattle	138	77.1
Destruction of crops by cattle	131	73.2
Reprisal attacks	116	64.8
Destruction of irrigation equipment	107	59.8
Climate change	99	55.3
Encroachment of farm land by herdsmen	92	51.4
Harassment by herders	77	43.3
Indiscriminate defecation by cattle	69	38.5
Drought	51	34.6
Overgrazing of cattle	48	34.1
***Multiple responses**	*	

Properties Destroyed during Farmers-herdsmen Conflicts

Table 3 reveals that storage facilities (92.7%), pipe borne water facilities (85.5%) and residential houses (78.2%) among other items were destroyed during farmers-herdsmen conflict. Majority of the respondents, storage facilities were destroyed. Storage facilities such as warehouses play important role to farmers. Storage facilities serve as a main place where farmers keep their farm produce and other items after harvest. There is no doubt that if farm produce are destroyed, storage facilities will similarly be destroyed leaving the farmers with no place to keep their farm produce after harvest. If storages facilities are destroyed, farm produce are similarly destroyed and this can lead to famine in the affected areas. The finding resonate Daudu (2020) that residential houses were destroyed in Zango-Kataf, Kaura and Sanga Local Government Areas of Kaduna State as a result of farmers-herdsmen conflict. Similarly, the finding is in tandem with Bello (2013) that storage facilities, water sources, residential houses and crop farms among others items were destroyed in the course of farmers-herdsmen conflict in many parts of Nigeria.

Table 3: Properties Destroyed during Farmers-herdsmen Conflict (n=179)

Items destroyed	Frequency	Percentage
Storage facilities	166	92.7
Pipe borne water and facilities	153	85.5
Residential houses	140	78.2
Fish ponds	140	78.2
Stored farm produce	138	77.1
Crop farming	138	77.1
Irrigation facilities	136	76.0
Town halls	127	70.9
Hospitals	111	62.0
Bridges and curvet	111	62.0
Farm animals	110	61.5
Schools	95	53.1
Market places	91	50.8
Worship centres	91	50.3
***Multiple responses**	*	

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The persistence of farmers-herders conflicts over the years does not portend any good future for our country, Nigeria. These conflicts are caused by climate change, killings of human beings and destruction of facilities among others. Conflicts situations are not palatable as it leads to destruction of cordial relationships and material things. Arable farmers-herdsmen conflicts have significant negative effect on crop production in Benue State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Recommendations

i. All efforts should gear towards resolution of conflicts to create an enabling environment for farming and development strives.
ii. Establishment of ranches by those rearing livestock.,
ii. Government should deploy security personnel to the affected areas immediately to prevent escalation of the conflicts and there should be adequate public enlightenment on negative effects of conflicts on the masses.

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