

Impact of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen on food production in the agro-ecological Zone-B of Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The conflict between farmers and herdsmen has defiled many solutions. It has lingered for a long time with negative impact on lives and livelihood. Current information on the effect of the conflict on food production is needed for policy formulation and advocacy.

Objective: This study sought to determine the impact of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen on food production in Benue State, Nigeria.

Methodology: The researcher achieved the objective of this study with the use of descriptive survey research design. The survey involved a sample of 385 farmers who are directly affected by the conflict. A combination of descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyse the data while tables were utilized to present the results.

Results: The researcher found a significant relationship between the conflict and food production in Benue State. In particular, the result of the study showed that there was a 56% reduction in food production as a result of the conflict. Also, the researcher found 62% negative impact on the income of farmers and their standard of living as a result of the conflict.

Conclusion: The conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Benue State has a significant negative impact on food security in the area.

Unique contribution: This study has shown association between farmers/herdsmen conflict and food production in the area. This information will be useful for policies on food production and food security.

Key recommendation: There is need for government to come up with agricultural intervention policies and programmes that address the food challenge of victims of herdsmen/farmers conflict in Benue State.

Keywords: conflict; farmers, food production; herdsmen, Benue State; Nigeria

Introduction

The Nigerian state has experienced a surge in the number of conflicts and the frequency at which they occur during the last two decades. The most frequent reported conflict during this period is the herdsmen and farmers conflict, largely visible in the agro-ecological zone. The herdsmen and farmers conflict is, unarguably a resource-based conflict. Gever (2018) opines that the conflict between farmers and herdsmen is one of the most disturbing clashes that has defiled many solutions. Conflict is understood as the outcome of the encounter between two or more polarized groups whose intention is to thwart the realization of the other's intentions. In this wise, the opponent group employs all her energy and other material resources to prevent the rivalry group from actualizing her goals. Put differently, conflict is a situation where opposing groups scramble and possess society's valuable and scarce resources of status, power and wealth. It occurs whenever incongruent activities take place with one party intruding, unleashing mayhem, hindering, or in some other way making another groups' actions ineffective (Adisa, 2012). In other words, conflict breaks out if there is a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals.

Nearly 40 per cent of nations that emerged from violence relapse in a period of 10 years and 90 per cent of nations that experienced civil wars in the 21st century had experience it in the last three decades (Umoh, 2018). In Africa, the conflict situation has continued to constitute a serious threat to food security, propelling the United Nations' Councils to engage in both peacekeeping and peace building to deliver combined results, as

visible in nations such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Central African Republic (CAR). However, the UN's conflict resolution strategies have been greatly undermined. Apart from weakening the power of the UN and similar organisations like the African Union (AU) and other platforms at the regional level, this over-dependence on conflict management, without paying attention to prevention, ultimately negates the potency of multilateral approaches for peace and security (Gustavo, 2017). Thus, this situation might affect food production and security in the Agro-ecological Zone B of Benue State. This situation is envisaged because in spite of the numerous efforts made to curb the conflict, it has continued to linger and farmers have fled their ancestral homes and feared to go back and resume farming activities.

In Nigeria, conflict is largely resource-based and has persisted over the decades (Jerome & Are, 2016). Nigerian state is predominantly an agrarian society providing employment for 30 percent of its population (Jerome & Are, 2016). According to Musa & Shabu (2014), the Nigeria's agricultural sector employs a large number of people and has great agricultural prospect with over 84 million hectares of fertile land, of which only 40 percent is put to agricultural use. Pastoral farming is the most predominant system of livestock farming in Nigeria and livestock owners are basically nomads travelling across the country in search of grazing fields and ready market. Given the large green vegetation present in the agro-ecological zone, the herdsmen prefer to migrate to the region at different seasons of the year for grazing purpose. More often, they encroach on farmlands and destroy crops during their migratory and grazing periods. This is always the major factor that breeds conflict between herdsmen and farmers as each group is ever ready to protect her interest. This conflict may have negative consequences on the indigenes who are mostly small-scale farmers.

The World Bank (2018) reported that the ever-increasing conflict between herdsmen and farmers across the North-central region of Nigeria is denying the country at least \$14 billion in estimated revenues annually. Over the past two decades, the conflict has taken the lives of thousands of rural dwellers within the region. This usually occurs due to competition and contest over the use of scarce resources such as farmland, and water sources (Ogundipe & Oluwole, 2016).

Consequently, herdsmen/farmers conflict is a conflict over grazing and farming land as well as over water points and settlements. The natural and geographical features of the North Central Region of Nigeria are themselves enough reasons to understand that rural conflicts in communities located in this region of the country are eminent (Umoh, 2018). In the course of harnessing the natural resources, interests are likely to clash with each other, especially in a heterogeneous entity like Nigeria. A large number of communities in the agro-ecological zone of Nigeria are agrarian. They depend on farming as a means of earning their livelihoods. And the herdsmen have their animals to protect because it is their source of wealth and survival. This implies that both parties exist under the condition of protecting their various interests and wealth against each other's interruption.

The desire of both parties to protect their various interests often results in bloody confrontations between the two parties. Such development affects the security and peace in the central region of the country; it also threatens the unity of the Nigerian nation itself, owing to the fact that this conflict sometimes seem to assume religious dimension as it is the recent assumption that, the herders/farmers conflict is an attempt to conquer and Islamize the country. Conflicts with religious inclination are very quick in destabilizing the unity of the nation because of the complex nature of the country in relation to religious practices and orientations. This dimension which herdsmen/farmers conflict is assuming in this region of the country has escalated beyond religion to a point that politics have started taking over from where the religious aspect of the conflict ended (Ameh, 2018).

The conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has continued to escalate as evidenced by recent killings in some communities and local government areas across the region especially as experienced in some communities of Agatu, Logo and Guma Local Government Areas of Benue state in 2018 (Umoh, 2018). The incessant conflict between herdsmen who are largely nomads and farmers who are the locals in Nigeria is indeed a serious threat to peace and security. In Benue State for instance, the conflict has given rise to social and economic consequences such as loss of lives and property, displacements and hunger in the state. This has equally created a psychological burden among the locals who are largely farmers which invariably has a negative impact on farming activities. Although, Benue State government has made efforts by providing camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and also enacted a law prohibiting open grazing, the herdsmen are still attacking and the affected farmers are yet to return to their ancestral lands to commence their farming activities. This situation creates worry, especially, now that the country is thrown into food crisis occasioned by the novel Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19).

The people in Agro-ecological Zone-B who are predominantly agrarian contribute immensely to the total food produced in Benue state. For the fact that this area was most hit by the conflict and the internally displaced persons are still in camps provided by the government, there is an indication that these farmers may not participate effectively in this year's cropping season, This may negatively affect food production in the study area as well as income generation.

Although, a lot of researches (Adamu, 2016; Adelokun *et al.*, 2015; Ofem, *et al.*, 2014; Ofuoku & Isife 2009; Geve, 2018; Geve & Coleman, 2017) have been conducted in other states of the Federation including Benue on herdsmen/farmers conflict, little or nothing has been done on assessment of Herdsmen/Farmers conflict and food growing in the Agro-ecological Zone-B of Benue State, Nigeria. Farming, activities in this area seem to have been on the decline.

Review of literature

a. Conflict

There are several definitions and dimensions of the concept "conflict". Lewis Coser (1957) views conflict as "struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals". Conflict is therefore a hostile interaction among humans. Conflict does not just connote competition. This is because there may be competition between two or more people for a scarce resource without parties being fully aware of their competitors' existence, or without trying to prevent each other from actualising their set goals (Ameh, 2018:9). In other words, competition metamorphoses into conflict when the parties try to further their own by refusing to shift grounds, negating the efforts and position of the opposing group. Thus, conflict is bound to arise as a result of negative perception of others through ingrained prejudice.

In the case of Ogundipe & Oluwole (2014), they see conflict as a situation that arises as a result of goal incompatibility. Goal incompatibility connotes a situation of antagonistic impulse or pursuits. In this wise, the herdsmen and the farmers have been pursuing incompatible goals (grazing and cultivation respectively) since the past two decades. This period has been characterized by the complete breakdown of relations and agreement within the two groups in the agro-ecological zone. A conflict situation may manifest as violent or non-violent, dominant or recessive, controllable or uncontrollable under various set of circumstances. Among the forms of social conflict, indisputably 'war' remains the most important single form in terms of its potential consequences for the individual and nations. According to Ujah (2016: 16) other forms of social conflict include: civil war, revolution, coup, guerilla, insurgency, political assassination, sabotage, terrorism, seizure of hostage,

prison riots, threats, displays of force, flare-ups, divorce, family fight, wrangling over custody of children among others.

Generally, conflict is interchangeably used with other concepts. This is where it becomes vital to enlist the synonyms of conflict. These include disagreement, disparity, discord, struggle, contest, strife, antagonism, controversy, clash, rivalry, contest, contention, brawl, fisticuff, fight, battle, feud, combat and war (Adisa, 2012). It can be said that conflict is a struggle and claim towards valuable resources of the society including power, status and wealth. It manifests when contending parties intensify their efforts to reach desired goals when there is failure to keep to the rules of engagement hitherto set by both parties. The expectations of the members cause a modification in response to their social and economic ecology. If the set rules are too rigid to be amended in order to suit the demands and expectations arising, such rigidity produces intense feeling of anger which is used by the dissatisfied group to alter the already existing peaceful social arrangement (Musa & Shabu, 2014). In conflict situations, the interplay of actions and counteractions invariably exerts influence on the behaviour of others, usually with the intention to injure or annihilate. It is convenient to say that conflicting parties' target is to prevent each other from actualizing desired goals, in part, given to assumptions of different interests. This is the context in which this paper is discussed.

b. Food production

Underlying the herdsmen/farmers conflict is the concept of food production which refers to the process - whereby food is gathered, grown, harvested, stored, processed, packaged, transported, marketed and consumed. In other words, it can be operationalized to mean all the activities involved in cultivation, processing distribution and consumption of food items. It is one of the basic functional prerequisites for human existence. Food production is basically done through agricultural process where raw food is obtained and further processed by industries for value addition, as well as important country-food chains that are done on a non-commercial base, including fishing, hunting, gardening and gathering activities. The quantity and nature of food produced in any clime relies largely on the climatic and environmental conditions of that defined location. Other changing factors such as population, socio-economic stability and the people's level of technological development equally determine the availability of food produced (Oriti, 2012). This implies that the competition between herdsmen and farmers in the agro-ecological zone B of Benue state has the potency to reduce the quantity and quality of food produced within the zone.

Olaniyi (2012) is of the view that food production involves all the activities in cultivating and growing food crops such as cereals, legumes, roots and tubers, vegetables, cowpeas among others, from the point of land selection to the consumption point. In this context, food production is very encompassing and involves the food producer (farmer) to commit his material, financial, energy and time resources to the realisation of his target. Ekwueme and Gever (2017), note that food is an important need of man and its production is essential for human survival. The conflict situation is a great impediment to food production.

Theoretical framework and study hypothesis

The Conflict theory is largely used by social scientists in order to analyse conflicting human behaviour. It was championed by Karl Max and it is anchored on the premise that there are different groups in the society which pursue diverse interests with each striving hard to overpower another and gain advantages and certain privileges. Scholars who belong to conflict school of thought lay emphasis on differences that exists about acquisition and wielding of powers. This consists of conflict between and generally the conflict within historically dominant ideologies in the society. Marx argued thus: "for man to produce his basic societal

needs of food, cloth, and shelter, man must enter into a production relationship.” Thus, he calls this “relationship of production” which must be combined with factors of production for effective productivity. The factors of production and the social relationship of production form the economic base called the infrastructure (Haralambos & Holborn 2013: 866-871). The basic unit of concern of conflict is relationship in the production process.

Other proponents who hold the conflict view include Ralph Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, Lois Althusser, Cohen Perlen and Karl Meheim. The conflict theory sees society as a system that is made up of competing individuals and groups whose functions and organisations are a projection of the contest for scarce resources. They argue that the continuous polarized contest for scarce resources explains that some individuals and groups have more access to valuable and scarce resources of power, wealth and prestige and use those resources to frustrate those outside of their circles who do not have access to those scarce resources in the society; and as a result, society is always in conflict over scarce resources and that this conflict eventually paves way for societal change; social change occurs as a result of conflict between competing interest groups, not agreement or acceptance. (Haralambos & Holborn 2013: 866-871).

Conflict theory is relevant in providing explanation to the underlying forces behind resource-based conflict between the nomads and farmers in the society in the sense that competition over scarce resources of land is the basis for the conflict between the two groups. It is common knowledge that since the wake of the 21st century, there has been a surge in population and more lands which hitherto were meant for cultivation are now taken over by urbanisation and settlement purposes. In addition, resources are not evenly distributed in the society and this calls for interdependence among different groups scattered across different climates. In the situation where different groups have a clash of interest in the course of pursuing their personal or group goals, there is bound to be a manifestation of conflict. Therefore, to conflict scholars, the herdsmen/farmers conflict is a function of competition over economic resources of land in the society. In a society where a majority of the members are poor and cannot afford the basic needs of life, it becomes easier for people to be recruited into conflict at a slightest provocation. In other words, hungry militia can easily be cajoled for a token to engage in killings and wanton destruction of lives and property. Thus, the competition for land resource is what originated herdsmen/farmers crisis in agro-ecological zone-B of Benue State. Based on the conflict theory, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H1: Destruction of farmland and reduction in farming activities will significantly predict of food scarcity in Benue State

H2: Conflict between farmers and herdsmen lead to a reduction in farmers’ income and poor standard of living.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in Benue State agro-ecological zone “B”. The study area comprises of Makurdi, Guma, Tarka, Gboko, Gwer-West, Gwer East and Buruku with a population of 2,647,380 (Bureau of Local Government, 2018) people. It is predominantly inhabited by the Tiv people. Although, the study area covers the state capital where other ethnic groups like the Idoma, Igede and others are found. It shares boundaries with zone A and Nasarawa state in the North, Zone C in the South and Kogi state in the West. It is an agrarian area with fertile land suitable for different types of crops. Notably among the different types of crops cultivated in the area include yam, cassava, rice, soyabeans, cowpea, corn, guinea-corn, millet among others, which constitute the livelihood of the people. The study area also covers a great portion of the Benue valley, an area suitable for rice production, sugarcane and other vegetables. The River Benue also grows vegetation suitable for animal grazing throughout

the year which attracts the herdsmen into the area. Agriculture forms the main stay of the study area, engaging more than 70% of the inhabitants. The agricultural system is highly subsistent where farmers rely on manual labour and crude farming implements to conduct farming activities.

Methodology of the Study

Survey method was used as the research design for this study. The choice of survey was because it is capable of allowing a researcher to explain or describe a phenomenon. The sample size was up of 384 farmers from the study area who are affected by the conflict. The sample was arrived at using the Cochran formula. The researcher made use of simple random, cluster, quota and purposive sampling techniques to select victims of the conflict in the agro-ecological zone-B of Benue State. This sample was implemented in stages. At the first stage, the researcher made use of simple random sampling technique to sample three local government areas. These are Makurdi, Guma and Gwer-west local government areas. At the second stage of the sample, the researcher regarded the three local government areas as clusters. At the third stage of the sample, the researcher allocated 128 samples to each of the three local government areas. At the fourth stage of the sampling, the researcher made use of purposive sampling technique to sample farmers from the selected areas who are affected by the conflict.

The instrument for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire. The choice of the questionnaire is because it is capable of generating data in large volume. The questionnaire items were intended to elicit information on both the dependent and the independent variables.

Three experts from Department of Sociology, Benue State University validated the questionnaire instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined with the use of test-re-test approach involving 30 persons who were not part of the actual study. The outcome of the reliability testing yielded .78, an indication that the instrument was reliable. Typically, any reliability of above .70 is excellent.

The data collected were analysed using quantitative techniques. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20 was used for the analysis. Therefore, simple percentages, mean standard deviation and Chi-square were used to analyse the result for the study.

Results

Among the 384 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents, 367 copies representing 96% were filled and returned. The sample was 61% males and 39% females. The mean age of the respondents was 30 years. The results of the psychographic data were presented in the following tables:

Table 1: Regression analysis of destruction of farmland and reduction in farming activities as predictors of food scarcity in Benue State

	Constant	β value	R square	F. value	P. value
Destruction of farmland	4.922	.672	.560	12.411	.001
Reduction in farming activities		.799			.001

The researcher computed the table above to ascertain if destruction of farmland and reduction in farming activities predict food scarcity in Benue State. The result of the study showed that both variables significantly predict food scarcity in Benue State. The analysis showed R. Square value of .560. This means that our model explains 56.0% variance in in food production as a result of the conflict. Therefore, the first assumption of the study was

supported and it was concluded with 95% confidence that the conflict between farmers and herdsmen led to more than 50% reduction in food production. In addition, it was determined between both variables which contribute most in predicting food scarcity. Result showed that reduction in farming activities ($\beta=.799$) contributed most. The impact of the conflict on earnings of farmers was also examined and the result is presented in table two below:

Table 2: Regression analysis of reduced farmers' incomes and poor standard of living in farming activities as predictors of food scarcity in Benue State

	Constant	β value	R square	F. value	P. value
Reduction in income	4.020	.572	.620	11.911	.001
Poor standard of living		.699			.001

The researcher computed the table above to ascertain if the conflict between farmers and herdsmen lead to a reduction in farmers income and result to their poor standard of living. The result showed that both variables are significantly linked to the conflict. The analysis showed R. Square value of .620. This means that our model explains 62.0% variance in standard of living and income of farmers as a result of the conflict. Therefore, our second assumption was equally supported and we concluded with 95% confidence that the conflict between farmers and herdsmen lead to more than 62% negative impact on the income of farmers and their standard of living. Further analysis showed that poor standard of living ($\beta=.699$) had a higher beta value, meaning that the conflict impact most on the standard of living of farmers in Benue State than on their income.

Discussion/Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine the impact of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen on food production in the agro- ecological zone-B of Benue State. The study tested two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed that there is a 56% reduction in food production as a result of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the zone. The result also showed that there is a 62% reduction in the income and standard of living among farmers in Benue State as a result of the conflict. This study has extended previous studies (Adamu, 2016; Adalakun *et al.*, 2015; Ofem, *et al.*, 2014; Ofuoku & Isife 2009; Gever, 2018) that have examined issues related to the conflict. Most of these studies did not pay attention to the impact of the conflict on food production. Even Gever (2018) who is arguably one of the pioneers of research on the conflict did not examine the impact of the conflict on food production. For example Adalakun *et al.*, (2015) linked the conflict to agriculture but their study focused more on agricultural extension services. Therefore, in the current study, attention was focused on food production as well as the quality of life of victims of the conflict.

The result of the current study has implications on food production policies as well as the theory of conflict. Regarding food production, this study has shown that efforts aimed at making food available in Benue State should also take into account the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. Ekwueme and Gever (2017) notes that food is an essential need of man as such, government and policy makers must always ensure that food scarcity is avoided. The result of the current study has implications on conflict theory by showing an association between conflict and food security. This information will be beneficial in shaping future debates on conflict studies.

Based on the result of the current study, it is concluded that the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the agro-ecological zone-B of Benue State has a serious negative implication on food security in the area. Additionally, the conflict impacts negatively on the income and standard of living of those affected. The researcher makes three recommendations. First, government at all levels should redouble their efforts in making sure that the conflict between farmers and is resolved because of its negative impact on food security. There is need for government to come up with agricultural intervention policies and programmes that address the food challenge of victims of herdsmen/farmers conflict in the agro-ecological zone-B of Benue State. Finally, further studies should be conducted in other parts of Nigeria that are affected by the conflict for better understanding.

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