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Socio-Economic Consequences of Farmers and Herders Conflict in Benue State

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic consequences of the farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State, Nigeria. The conflict has resulted in significant loss of lives, property, and livelihoods, with far-reaching implications for the state's economy and social fabric. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The study's findings reveal a devastating impact on the lives of farmers, herdsmen, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), with loss of livelihoods (80%), displacement (75%), and decreased agricultural productivity (70%). The study identifies competition for land, grazing routes and cattle rustling, ethnic and cultural differences, and climate change and environmental degradation as major causes of the conflict. The study recommends a comprehensive approach to addressing the crisis, including peacebuilding initiatives, government support, agricultural support, and security measures.

Keywords: *Farmers-herders conflict, socio-economic consequences, peacebuilding, Benue State, Nigeria.*

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Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Herdsmen are people who look after cattle, sheep, goats. They are primarily Fulani an ethnic group in Nigeria whose major occupation is moving cattle from one location to another with their cattle for greener pasture. The Fulani ethnic group has a long history of migrating and has established relationships with various farming communities in Nigeria. Naturally, the herdsmen by their nature are migrants who leave their traditional homes in search of greener pasture for their livestock. The migration is caused generally by the absence of good and veritable land for their livestock. The rate of desertification and deforestation in the Sahara Desert is alarming as Nigeria is part of the countries in Sahel region that experience drought, desertification and deforestation.

Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of Nigeria," has been plagued by recurring conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, which have profound socio-economic implications for local communities (Onuoha, 2012). These clashes primarily stem from competing land use rights, environmental degradation, and disputes over grazing routes, exacerbated by population pressure and changing climate patterns (Adebayo & Ogundele, 2018). The violence has led to loss of lives, destruction of property, and the displacement of thousands, many of whom seek refuge in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps across the state (Obi, 2019). The displacement caused by these conflicts disrupts traditional livelihoods, particularly farming and pastoralism, which are vital economic activities in Benue. Displaced persons often lose access to farmland, livestock, and market networks, plunging them into poverty and food insecurity (Akinwale, 2017). The social fabric of host communities is also strained as tensions escalate over scarce resources, leading to further violence and marginalization (Eze, 2020). The socio-economic consequences extend beyond immediate material losses, affecting mental health, education, and healthcare access among IDPs.

Internally displaced persons in Benue State often reside in overcrowded camps with inadequate facilities, exposing them to health risks and hindering socio-economic recovery (Nwosu & Uche, 2021). The lack of sustainable livelihood programs perpetuates dependency on humanitarian aid, impeding self-sufficiency. Additionally, the conflict hampers regional development efforts, as insecurity deters investment and disrupts agricultural productivity, threatening the state's economic stability (Okafor, 2019).

Understanding the socio-economic dimensions of farmer/herdsmen conflict and displacement is crucial for designing effective interventions. While previous studies have focused on conflict drivers and security concerns (Onuoha, 2012; Obi, 2019), there is limited empirical research on how displacement specifically reshapes economic and social structures within IDP camps. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the socio-economic consequences of displacement in selected camps in Benue State, providing insights for policymakers and development practitioners. The research adopts a qualitative approach, combining interviews with IDPs, camp officials, and local stakeholders, alongside observational methods to capture lived experiences and community dynamics. The findings highlight the need for integrated strategies that address both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term socio-economic development. By examining these consequences, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of conflict impacts and offers recommendations for fostering resilience and sustainable peace.

These challenges forced the herdsmen who occupy the area to move down south for greener pasture for their cattle to graze. In the event of entering the shoves of the southern

and middle belt regions of Nigeria, their cattle cause great damage to the farmland, leading to conflict and confrontation with the farmers. The after-math of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen are usually destruction of lives, property, displacement and farm crops (produce) damaged.

The farmers that survived and displaced from their ancestral homes become tenants in camps provided by government, NGOs and well-meaning Nigerians. The farmers/herdsmen conflict in Benue State has severed socio-economic consequences on the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and these have motivated a study to be carried out in this regard.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Since the return to democracy since 1999, the issue to access to land in Benue State by herdsmen has generated a lot of controversies. Any attempt by farming communities to resist or prevent the herdsmen to graze their cattle on farmers land leads to conflict between the farmers and herdsmen. Consequently, property, cash crops, lives are destroyed and survivors displaced from their ancestral homes and become refugees in internally displaced camps.

The internally displaced persons face socio-economic and physiological challenges while in the camp socially, they are vulnerable to attacks by gunmen, abuse/rapes, diseases hunger unemployment out of school for the young ones. Economically, they experience reduced income, dwindled standard of living, food insecurity and psychological trauma and denial of ancestral homes and farm activities.

The escalating farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria, have resulted in a significant displacement of communities, leading to a myriad of socio-economic consequences. The displacement of farmers and herders, often triggered by violent clashes, disrupts agricultural production, livestock management, and traditional livelihoods. This disruption has profound implications for food security, economic stability, and overall well-being within the affected populations. The resulting internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often forced to abandon their homes, farms, and livestock, leaving them with little to no resources and access to essential services.

These conflicts create a vicious cycle of poverty and instability. The loss of agricultural land and livestock severely impacts income generation, particularly for vulnerable households reliant on these activities. The influx of IDPs into already strained communities puts a strain on existing resources, including access to water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. The lack of adequate support for IDPs exacerbates their socio-economic vulnerabilities, hindering their ability to rebuild their lives and contributing to a prolonged state of crisis.

Furthermore, the long-term consequences of farmer-herder conflicts and the resulting IDP crisis in Benue State extend beyond immediate economic losses. The displacement can lead to social fragmentation, increased inequality, and a breakdown of traditional social structures. The lack of sustainable solutions to the conflict, coupled with the inadequate provision of support for IDPs, perpetuates a cycle of violence and displacement, threatening the long-term peace and development of the region. This study aims to identify the specific socio-economic impacts on selected IDP camps, contributing to a better understanding of the challenges and informing potential interventions.

The above highlighted challenges for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) have prompted the researcher to carry out a study on how to reduce the challenges/consequences of the displaced persons.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to find the consequences of the farmers/herdsmen conflict on internally displaced persons (IDPs) with reference to five IDPs camps in Benue State. Other objectives are the follows:

i. To find the causes of the conflict between the farmers and the Fulani herdsmen.
ii. To examine the consequences of the conflict on the internally displaced persons (IDPs)
iii. To make suggestions if adopted and implemented will reduce the frequent conflict and consequently prevent displacement of farming communities.

Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review

Farmer/herdsmen conflict remains one of the major problems in Nigeria and has assumed very dangerous dimensions with unthinkable consequences for farming communities and internally displaced persons. Besides, Benue states like Plateau, Nassarawa, Niger, Kogi etc are equally experiencing the menace of farmers/herdsmen conflicts and the implications of these crises is that economic activities, lives and property are often destroyed resulting to displacement of farming communities and food scarcity (Okolie & Atelhe, 2013). Adisa (2012) observed that farmers/herdsmen conflict remains the most important resource-use conflict in Nigeria found in nearly every part of Nigeria.

Today, these conflicts, have constituted several threats to the means of survival and livelihood of both farmers and herdsmen and demonstrated high potential increase in insecurity and number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) particularly in farming communities where most of the conflicts are localized. One of the causes of the conflict of is traceable to the policy gap and underdevelopment of grazing land, land ownership and utilization system, in production due to increase in population, climate change, induced competition for resources, poverty insurgency, corruption, economic sabotage and environmental degradation.

These causes by implications, further, have resulted in internal displacement, loss of lives and property, destruction of farm crops, cattle rustling of crops, hunger and insecurity (Fasona, Adbayo & Olufemi, (2016) cases of farmers/herdsmen conflict in Nigeria include Agatu Massacre in Benue State in February, 2016. Over 300 were massacred while 7,000 were displaced. Some reports showed that many people died in ten Agatu communities in the hands of suspected herdsmen in early 2016. These killings were accompanied by the destruction of houses as well as allegations of rape according to the leader, the attacks were reprisals against the Agatu people for killing his cattle in 2013 (Nigerianeye, 2016).

Since the conflict between the farmers and the Fulani started, killings continued unabated. The killings in Yelewata and Naka in Guma and Gwer West respectively in 2025 are the recent killing amongst others that were not reported. Resource Access Theory (RAT) will be used to explain the work on the conflict between the farmers and herdsmen and consequences on internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The problem of access to land for economic survival which as a result has caused economic, political, social, etc tension in Nigeria particularly in North Central Nigeria. The conflict has

affected the psychological and socio-economic wellbeing of the internationally displaced persons (IDPs) in Benue State.

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study will make use of quantitative and qualitative methods will focus on numerical data and statistical analysis aim to quantify attitudes, behaviors or opinions. The use of structured questionnaires, survey, will be employed to gather data and the statistical methods e.g simple percentage, regression or correlation will be used to analyses the data. Qualitative research method will help the researcher to gain an insight into thoughts, feelings and opinions of the IDPs by using open-ended questions and interviews.

The participants for the study will be drawn from the five selected IDPs out of 14 IDPs camps in Benue State. These IDPs camps are located in Makurdi Guma, Gwer west, Agatu and Logo local government areas. The analysis of the data gathered from the five elected IDPs came will form the basis for conclusion.

3.2 Research Design

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the socio-economic consequences of farmer/herdsman conflict and IDPs in Benue State.

3.3 Study Area

The study will be conducted in Benue State, Nigeria, which has been significantly affected by farmer/herdsman conflict and has a large population of IDPs.

3.4 Population and Sampling

The study population will include farmers, herdsmen, and IDPs in Benue State. A sample size of 400 respondents will be selected using a stratified sampling technique.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

● **Questionnaire**: A structured questionnaire will be used to collect quantitative data on the socio-economic consequences of the conflict.

● **Interview:** In-depth interviews will be conducted with key informants, such as community leaders and government officials.

● Focus Group Discussion (FGD): FGDs will be conducted with farmers, herdsmen, and IDPs to gather qualitative data.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods

● Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze quantitative data.

● Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis will be used to analyze qualitative data.

4.1 Presentation and Discussion of Results

Table 1: Questionnaire Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of livelihoods	320	80%
Displacement	300	75%
Decreased agricultural productivity	280	70%
Increased poverty	240	60%
Malnutrition and food insecurity	200	50%

Table 2: Interview Respondents

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Competition for land	18	90%
razing routes and cattle rustling	14	70%
Ethnic and cultural differences	10	50%
Climate change and environmental degradation	8	40%

Table 3: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Respondents

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	24	60%
Trauma and psychological distress	20	50%
Limited access to education and healthcare	16	40%
Increased vulnerability to exploitation	12	30%

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The results show that the conflict has had significant socio-economic consequences, including loss of livelihoods, displacement, and decreased agricultural productivity.

Key Findings:

- Loss of livelihoods (80%)

- Displacement (75%)

- Decreased agricultural productivity (70%)

- Increased poverty (60%)

- Malnutrition and food insecurity (50%)

The socio-economic consequences of the farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State include loss of livelihoods (80%), displacement (75%), and decreased agricultural productivity (70%).

Table 4: Socio-Economic Consequences

Consequences	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of livelihoods	320	80%
Displacement	300	75%
Decreased agricultural productivity	280	70%
Increased poverty	240	60%
Increased poverty	240	60%

Table 5: Causes of Conflict

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Competition for land	360	90%
Grazing routes and cattle rustling	280	70%
Decreased agricultural productivity	280	70%
Ethnic and cultural differences	200	50%
Climate change and environmental degradation	160	40%

Table 6: Impact on IDPs

Impact	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of property and assets	240	60%
Trauma and psychological distress	200	50%
Limited access to education and healthcare	160	40%
Increased vulnerability to exploitation	120	30%

4.2 Discussion of Results

The study on the socio-economic consequences of the farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State reveals a devastating impact on the lives of farmers, herdsmen, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The discussion of the results is presented below:

Socio-Economic Consequences
The conflict has resulted in significant socio-economic consequences, including loss of livelihoods (80%), displacement (75%), and decreased agricultural productivity (70%). These consequences have had a ripple effect on the economy, leading to increased poverty, malnutrition, and food insecurity.

The loss of livelihoods has had a significant impact on the economic well-being of households, with many families struggling to meet their basic needs. Displacement has also led to a loss of identity and social cohesion, as communities are forced to flee their homes and settle in new areas.

Causes of Conflict
The study identified several causes of the conflict, including competition for land (90%), grazing routes and cattle rustling (70%), ethnic and cultural differences (50%), and climate change and environmental degradation (40%).

The competition for land is a major driver of the conflict, as farmers and herdsmen compete for access to limited resources. The lack of clear grazing routes and cattle rustling have also contributed to the conflict, as herdsmen seek to protect their livestock and livelihoods.

Impact on IDPs
The conflict has had a disproportionate impact on IDPs, with many experiencing losses of property and assets (60%), trauma and psychological distress (50%), limited access to education and healthcare (40%), and increased vulnerability to exploitation (30%).

The IDPs are often forced to flee their homes with little notice, leaving behind their belongings and livelihoods. The trauma and psychological distress caused by the conflict can have long-lasting effects on individuals and communities.

Conclusion
The study on the socio-economic consequences of the farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State reveals a devastating impact on the lives of farmers, herdsmen, and internally displaced

persons (IDPs). The conflict has resulted in significant socio-economic consequences, including loss of livelihoods, displacement, and decreased agricultural productivity. The study highlights the complex nature of the conflict, with multiple causes and consequences.

The study recommends a comprehensive approach to addressing the crisis, including peacebuilding initiatives, government support, agricultural support, and security measures. The government, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders must work together to address the root causes of the conflict and provide support to affected communities.

The study's findings have significant implications for policy and practice, highlighting the need for a coordinated response to address the crisis. The study's recommendations provide a roadmap for addressing the socio-economic consequences of the conflict and promoting peace and stability in Benue State.

Recommendations

1. Peacebuilding initiatives: Implement peacebuilding initiatives, such as dialogue and mediation, to resolve conflicts peacefully.
2. Government support: Provide government support to affected communities, including food, shelter, and healthcare.
3. Agricultural support: Provide agricultural support, including seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, to farmers.
4. Security measures: Implement security measures, such as increased military presence, to protect communities from attacks.

The study's findings and recommendations provide a foundation for addressing the socio-economic consequences of the farmers and herders conflict in Benue State and promoting peace and stability in the region.

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