

# ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT BETWEEN CROP-FARMERS AND PASTORALISTS ON PUPILS' ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The study assessed the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment and attendance in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 11,987 teachers from 2,114 primary schools in Benue State. A total of 1,119 (10%) respondents from 211 (10%) primary schools was selected using multi-stage procedure (purposive, proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques). A four point structured 5-item rating scale questionnaire titled Conflicts between Crop-farmers and Pastoralists on Pupils' Enrolment and Attendance Questionnaire (CCPPEAQ) was constructed and used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have significant impact on school enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria and that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have significant impact on school attendance in primary schools. It was concluded that the unending conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists in this part of the country have not only distorted peace and order in some rural parts of Benue State that led to dislodging the affected communities, but have also discouraged parents from enrolling their children into schools. It is also affecting the psychological well-being of the children to the extent that they are no longer willing to attend schools in the affected area. This carnage, if not arrested on time, has the tenacity of breaching the security of the state that will make people to embrace youth militancy. It was recommended among other things that school management should carryout sensitization campaign to encourage parents to enrol/ release their children/ wards to schools; and that school management should collaborate with the host communities to provide adequate security in schools to enable pupils attend their school and classes without any interruptions.*

**Key Words:** Conflicts, Crop-Farmers, Pastoralists, Enrolment, Attendance.

## Introduction

In the 21st century, signs are already actively indicating that climate change is occurring in Africa and Nigeria in particular. These signs are noticeable in the areas of temperature variations, the drying up of soils and water bodies, increased pests and diseases, shifts in suitable areas for growing crops and livestock, increased desertification in the Sahara region, change in rainfall pattern which leads to either draught or erosions and flooding of homes and farmlands. These changes have caused draught that forces pastoralists to move southwards in search of pasture that have increased confrontations between crop-farmers and herders, leading to violent conflict, deaths, forced displacement and migration, erosion of inter-communal relationships as well as the destruction of agricultural and livestock outputs (Yakubu, Musa, Bamidele, Ali, Bappah, Munir & Manuwa, 2021; Suleiman, 2015).

Conflict is one predominant form of social interaction that exists in human society. Koeb and Eilson (2016) assert that conflict is a disjointed process that results in the disruption or destruction of all bonds of unity that might have previously existed between two disputants. Thus, conflicts come whenever two or more groups seek to possess the same item, occupied by the same space or an exclusive position plays an incompatible role, maintain incompatible goals or undertake mutually incompatible means of achieving certain purpose. In addition, Yawe and Pinga (2017) posit that conflict manifests when someone has a chance to achieve his or her purpose at the expense of someone else. The parties involved in a conflict could be individuals, groups or countries that pursue incompatible interests or goals. Sometimes, conflict is seen as a competition over power or resources (natural resources) between two parties of which one party may attempt to eliminate, injure or damage the other (just like the crop farmers and pastoralists case in Benue State and other parts of Nigeria).

Historically, conflict between crop-farmers pastoralists have existed for centuries in Nigeria and other parts of the world but seem to have reached an unprecedented peak in the early part of 21st century. This could be as a result of increase in population as well as climatic change (Moritz, 2016). According to Aliyu (2014) these conflicts are mainly attributable to resource control and divergent value systems in the country. In Benue State of Nigeria, conflicts between crop farmers and pastoralists arise from disagreements over the use of land around farmland and/or grazing areas, stock routes and access to water points for animals and households. Uba (2017) posits that the movement of pastoralists from one area of the country to another is usually caused by the increasing demand for fresh grazing grounds especially during dry season or draught period, when the pastoralists move southwards because of the availability of pasture. In most cases, the pastoralists encountered problems with the local people because cultivators' crops are/were destroyed by their cattle.

In his contribution, Pual (2015) also highlights other factors that underlie these disputes to include porous borders, proliferation of small and light weapons in the rural areas, destruction of crops by cattle, cattle rustling, increased competition for land (driven by desertification, climate change and population growth), lack of clarity around the demarcation of pasture and stock routes and breakdown of traditional relationships and formal agreements between pastoralists and farmers. The researchers' experience in the study area shows that conflict between crop farmers and pastoralists is usually associated with violation of human rights, the displacement of people from their homes and disposition

of their properties. This also violates their rights to ownership of property and lives because people are killed in the process and the rights of vulnerable groups such as women and children are trampled upon.

Sequel to the foregoing, it is important to note that the crop farmers-pastoralist conflict assumed a devastating dimension in Benue and other states of Nigeria. It has affected local government areas like Agatu, Guma, Logo, Gwer-West, Gwer-East, Ukum, Buruku, Katsina-Ala, Kwande and Makurdi all in Benue State. In these local government areas, the attackers usually invade the settlements, kill, sack the people, destroy their properties and farm lands and by extension, they breach the security of the state. In some communities, they occupy the areas after chasing away the original dwellers. Aside from killing and destruction of properties, their activities also seem to affect pupils' education, most especially primary school pupils' enrolment and school attendance (Tyokyaa & Pinga, 2018).

The researchers observe that there seems to be a steady decline in school enrolment for some time now, most especially in the rural areas across Benue state. Enrolment which refers to the number of pupils that register in a particular school or class may decline or drop during conflict (Obi, 2011). Rick (2015) observes that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists often forces parents to relocate with their children to places that are safe from the conflict area which influences their enrolment into school as these new places may not have educational facilities.

Some primary schools in the affected areas seem to be recording low enrolment because of the emotional and psychological problems created in the people as a result of the conflicts (Joseph, 2017). Tyokyaa and Pinga (2018) note that even parents who have returned from Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDPCs) prefer to stay at home with their children than send them back to school to continue their education. According to Tyokyaa and Pinga, most parents prefer to stay at home with their children/ wards because they do not know when next the attackers were coming to attack. Apart from the fear of the unknown and the financial crisis, the people who return from IDP camps may have little or no money at all to send their children/wards back to school. On the whole, school enrolment reduced by half even when normalcy returned to some areas because many people leave the rural areas and even the state in search of peace and safer schools for their children/wards. Thus, Benue State which had a high school enrolment rate is now lagging behind in this area as most school age children are found in Internally Displaced Persons' Camps.

Another aspect of primary school administration that could be affected by conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists is school attendance. Kazeem and Ige (2010) note that the persistent nature of security challenges in Nigeria today has made many families to relocate with their children to safer places. Such students skip classes as the safe place they may have found refuge may not have schools to accommodate their children. In some cases, people who are displaced by these crises may seek refuge in schools that are not affected by the crises, thereby sending the pupils of such schools home without any proper arrangement.

Conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have been identified as one of the factors that lead to destructions of many economic activities, including educational development in most communities in Benue State of Nigeria. The outcome of these conflicts is not just limited to destruction of lives and properties but also the closure of schools in the area. According to Odinkalu (2014), the closing down of schools have far reaching consequences, including ending the education of many students and the opportunity to get to higher education. The implication of this is that when schools are closed in most

communities, that becomes the end of educational attainment or opportunity for some pupils. This is because the parents of some children may not have the resources or opportunity of moving to urban or safer places where there are schooling facilities for their children to continue with their education.

The crisis situation has forced many children of school age to abandon school in an already ill-educated and disadvantaged region. Eric (2012) reports that it is not just the pupils at the targeted schools that end up being affected, teachers and others are also affected. According to the Nigerian Education Data Survey (NEDS, 2010) in Saleh (2011), constant attacks make it even harder for teachers and other stakeholders to persuade parents to allow their children to stay in school. With the increased intensity of crises between herdsman and farmers in Benue State, there was consistent mass movement of individuals from the most frequently attacked communities in early 2018. This sudden movement directly affected school attendance among children. Yakubu (2012) reports that thousands of students and teachers across North Central Nigeria have been forced to abandon their schools due to increasingly brazen attacks by radical Fulani marauders. Okpaga, Chijioke and Innocent (2012) observe that Nigeria as a nation must make concerted efforts to raise the educational attainment of all its youths who are the leaders of tomorrow especially those that are deprived of regular school attendance because of insecurity and conflicts. The hope for the country seems to be grim if children cannot go to school. This review is similar to what is obtainable in Benue State of Nigeria as most students find it difficult to attend school as result of the psychological trauma occasioned by conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists. This in no small measure has made the future of Nigeria children to be uncertain.

As a result of the increasing trend of the conflicts in the state, it poses a key challenge and call for an in-depth assessment of its impact on pupils' enrolment and school attendance. The researchers observed that there is no sufficient document on the impact of crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment and school attendance in the study area. Given this background, this study assessed the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists' conflicts on pupils' enrolment and school attendance in primary schools in Benue State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been public outcry and expression of worry over the menace of conflicts that have risen between crop-farmers and pastoralists in Benue communities. These conflicts seem to undermine the security of the state and Nigeria at large as well as effective management of primary education. The activities of these groups have not only led to the dislodging of the numerous rural communities but seem to have affected the enrolment school aged children into primary schools. Most often, these conflicts lead to the burning down of school buildings and documents thereby sending pupils and teachers away.

In addition, this may influence the attendance of primary school pupils negatively as thousands of pupils who may have moved with their families to places of safety may have had their schooling programme disturbed or distorted. When they return, they may have lost the memory of what was taught as they may not have had access to education at the safe place at all. The problem of the study in question form is: what is the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment and attendance in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The study assessed the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment and attendance in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. establish the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on school attendance in primary schools.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What impact do conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have on school attendance in primary schools?

## **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school attendance in primary schools.

## **Research Method**

The study adopted the survey design. The study was conducted in Benue State of Nigeria. The population comprised 11,987 teachers from 2,114 primary schools in Benue State during the 2018/2019 academic session (Benue State Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, 2018). A sample of 1,119 (10%) respondents from 211 (10%) primary schools was selected using multi-stage procedure (proportionate stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques). This sample size is considered adequate since it is in line with Achor and Ejigbo's (2006) assertion that for a larger population, a sample of 10% of the population is adequate.

A researcher-structured questionnaire titled "Conflicts between Crop-farmers and Pastoralists on Pupils' Enrolment and Attendance Questionnaire (CCPPEAQ)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B. Section A contained information on the personal data of the respondents, while Section B contained information that bordered on the assessment of the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment and attendance in primary schools in Benue State. The responses of teachers were collated and analyzed for results. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question. The decision was based on the real limit of numbers. Hence a mean response score of 3.50-4.00 was considered Strongly Agree (SA), 2.50-3.49 Agree (A), 1.50-2.49 Disagree (D), while 0.50-1.49 was considered as Very Strongly Disagree (SD). Chi-square test was used to test the hypotheses at  $p < 0.05$  level of significance.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

The results were analysed and interpreted in line with the research questions and hypotheses as follow:

**Research Question One:** What is the impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of impact of conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists on pupils' enrolment in primary schools

S/No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	Dec.
1	In my area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have made parents/guardians to move their wards/ children from the rural primary schools to urban centers which are more secured.	1,115	266	398	294	157	2.69	0.99	Agree
2	In my area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have led to the death of many pupils thereby reducing pupils' enrolment in the primary schools.	1,115	223	515	272	105	2.77	0.88	Agree
3	In my area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have killed parents/guardians of primary school pupils thereby leaving no one to enroll such children/ wards in school.	1,115	463	430	108	114	3.11	0.95	Agree
4	In my area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have disabled many school age children/wards thereby making it difficult for their parents/guardians to enroll them in school.	1,115	300	484	146	185	2.81	1.01	Agree
5	In my area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts scare many parents /guardians from enrolling their children/ wards in the primary schools for the fear of been killed by the Fulani herders.	1,115	308	255	334	218	2.59	1.09	Agree
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>1,115</b>					<b>2.79</b>		<b>Agree</b>

Table 1 shows that the mean score and standard deviation for items 1-5 are 2.69 (0.99), 2.77 (.88), 3.11 (.95), 2.81 (1.01) and 2.59 (1.09) respectively and cluster mean of 2.79 was considered to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. From these results, the respondents indicated that in their area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have made parents/guardians to move their wards/ children from rural primary schools to urban centres. They also agreed that in their area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have led to the death of many pupils thereby reducing pupils' enrolment in primary schools. Respondents also state that in their area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have killed parents/ guardians of primary school pupils thereby leaving no one to enrol such children in school. The respondents also said that in their area, farmers-pastoralists conflicts have disabled many school age children/ wards thereby making it difficult for their parents/ guardians to enrol them in school. The responses also showed that farmers-pastoralists conflicts scare many parents/ guardians from enrolling their children/ wards in the primary schools for the fear of been kidnapped or killed by herders. This implied that farmers-pastoralists conflicts influenced school enrolment in public primary schools in Benue State.

**Research Question Two:** What impact do conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have on school attendance in primary schools?

**Table 2:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Impact of Conflicts between Crop-farmers and Pastoralists on School Attendance in Primary Schools

S/No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	De c.
6	Kidnapping of pupils occasioned by herdsmen-farmers crises may have made pupils to stay away from school.	1,115	258	507	184	166	2.77	0.97	Agree
7	Rumors of attack by herdsmen have made many pupils to skip classes.	1,115	303	409	281	122	2.80	0.96	Agree
8	Incessant attacks by the herdsmen may have affected pupils' attendance to school.	1,115	335	527	100	153	2.94	0.97	Agree
9	Burning of school facilities by suspected herdsmen have made pupils to relocate thereby absenting themselves from school.	1,115	452	393	133	137	3.04	1.01	Agree
10	Raping of women by suspected herdsmen have made pupils to stay away from their schools.	1,115	425	409	152	129	3.01	0.99	Agree
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>1,115</b>					<b>2.91</b>		<b>Agree</b>

**Source:** *Researcher's Field Survey Results (2020)*

Table 2 shows that the mean score and standard deviation for items 6-10 are 2.77 (.97), 2.80 (.96), 2.94 (.97), 3.04 (1.01) and 3.01 (.99) respectively and cluster mean of 2.91 was considered to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. Item by item analysis revealed that the respondents agreed that kidnapping of pupils occasioned by farmers-pastoralists conflicts made pupils to stay away from school. The responses further showed that rumors of attack by pastoralists have made many pupils to skip classes and incessant attacks by the pastoralists have affected pupils' attendance at school. The respondents also agreed that burning of school facilities by suspected pastoralists made pupils to relocate thereby absenting themselves from school. The respondents showed the degree of how raping of women by suspected pastoralists made pupils to stay away from their schools. The cluster mean of 2.91 was found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This therefore, means that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists impacted on school attendance in primary schools.

**Hypothesis One:** Conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Table 3:** *Chi-square test of Impact of Farmers-Pastoralists Conflicts on School Enrolment in Public Primary Schools*

Responses	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Resid.	df	Level of Sig.	$\chi^2$ -Cal.	P-value	Dec.
SA	266	278.8	-12.8					
A	398	278.8	119.3	3	0.05	105.61	.000	Significant
D	294	278.8	15.3					
SD	157	278.8	-121.8					
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,115</b>							

$P=.000 < 0.05$ ;  $df=3$ ; and  $\chi^2$ -calculated = 105.61<sup>a</sup>

Table 3 shows that  $P < .05$  with 3 degree of freedom. This showed that the null hypothesis which stated that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria was therefore, not accepted. The implication is conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have significant impact on school enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Two:** Conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school attendance in primary schools.

**Table 4:** Chi-square test of Impact of Conflicts between Crop-farmers and Pastoralists on School Attendance in Primary Schools

Responses	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Resid.	df	Level of Sig.	$\chi^2$ -Cal.	P-value	Decision
SA	303	278.8	24.3					
A	409	278.8	130.3	3	0.05	151.14	.000	Significant
D	281	278.8	2.3					
SD	122	278.8	-156.8					
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,115</b>							

$P=.000 < 0.05$ ;  $df=3$ ; and  $\chi^2$ -calculated = 151.135<sup>a</sup>

Table 4 shows that  $P < .05$  with 3 degree of freedom. This showed that the null hypothesis which stated that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school attendance in primary schools was therefore, not accepted. This result implies that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school attendance in primary schools.

### Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have significant impact on school enrolment in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. This finding corroborated Tyokyaa and Pinga (2018) who discovered that farmers-pastoralists conflicts significantly influenced students' enrolment in schools. This was because farmers-pastoralists' conflicts had forced families to relocate with their children, thereby making the population of the school to drop. The findings of the current study is similar to that of Tyokyaa and Pinga because, both studies are carried out in the same location (Benue State) and as at the time the studies were conducted, the reoccurring crises had sent most of the rural dwellers to Internally Displaced Peoples Camps (IDPs). The implication is that, the security situation experienced in Benue state as of 2018 is still similar to the one experienced in 2021.

The second finding revealed that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have no significant impact on school attendance in primary schools. This finding is also in consonance with the findings of Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013), who discovered that there was significant difference in school attendance among primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in areas prone to Boko-Haram attacks. This finding also supported Umaru and Terhemba's (2014) report which said that the level of primary school attendance in Damaturu Metropolis was found to be low as a result of Boko-Haram activities and as well the population of the female pupils was also found to be lower than that of the male. The findings of the current study is similar to the previous studies because, even in the rural communities of Benue State, pastoralists do attack and rape women thereby making these women to run away with their children to safe haven; thereby making school attendance to drop. Also the rumours of attack by pastoralists have also made many pupils to skip classes. Other pupils have relocated as a result of these rumours thereby reducing school attendance in the area.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists have significant impact on pupils' enrolment and school attendance in primary schools in Benue State. The unending conflicts between crop-farmers and pastoralists in this part of the country have not only distorted peace and order in some rural parts of Benue State that led to dislodging the affected communities, but have also discouraged parents from enrolling their children into schools. It is also affecting the psychological well-being of the children to the extent that they are no longer willing to attend schools in the affected area. This carnage, if not arrested on time, has the tenacity of breaching the security of the state that will make people to embrace youth militancy.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School management should carryout sensitization campaign to encourage parents to enrol/ release their children/ wards to schools.
2. School management should collaborate with the host communities to provide adequate security in schools to enable students attend their school and classes without any interruptions.
3. Government should beef up security to reduce the level of insecurity in the country and ensure safety of lives and properties to encourage people from IDP camps to go back to their communities and enrol the children into schools.

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