

## **Resource Scarcity and Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria: Implications on Food Security in Benue State, 2013-2019**

**YUSUFU, Ahmed Audu, AUDU, Jacob and AKUVA, Isaac Iorhen**

### **Abstract**

The paper interrogates the incessant farmer-herder conflicts and its implications on food security in Benue State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to obtain a sample size of 360 respondents (180 herders and 180 farmers) and a structured questionnaire was used to collect data using a 5-point Likert Scale (LS). The study followed the pattern of descriptive analysis. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using simple percentages, mean and frequency counts. Hypotheses stated for the study were tested using Chi Square statistical method at 5% level of significance. The study found that a significant relationship exist between resource conflict and food security in terms of availability of food, accessibility of food, and sustainability of food supply in Benue state. The study recommends the need for a strong political will from governments at all levels in resolving resource conflicts among herders and farmers in a heterogeneous, multi-lingua, and multi-religious country like Nigeria for food security to be guaranteed.

**Keywords:** Conflict, farmers, food security, herders and resource scarcity

### **Introduction**

Land in Nigeria like most countries in Africa is primary asset for survival and a major source of income and livelihood for the rural population. Land is not only a source for livelihoods and valuable economic asset but also carries spiritual values with it (Mwamfupe, 2015). The access to landed resources is therefore not merely a matter of productive use of the ecological environment; it involves power and symbolic relations (Meur, Hochet & Shem, 2006). Land is a social necessity (even animals also fight to protect their land and territory); it is therefore understandable if human beings have attachment to their land and display tendency to defend it (Viashima, Ilim & Ogoh, 2014). This explains why landed resources have continued to have both historical and spiritual significance. Viashima, et al(2014) citing Okpaga (2006), further explains the relationship between man and land as he contends that:

Land to man is what water is to fish .... It provides means of existence for man; it also represents a form of social security, and community or ethnic identity; it is therefore inevitable that conflicts must arise as people compete (2014, p.112).

Land connotes different things to the various user groups. For instance, builders, fishermen, miners, hunters, manufacturers, industrialists and farmers among others have different specifications in their requirements for land for their production or service delivery. Of all these user groups agricultural production, perhaps exhibits the highest form of sophistication in its use of land and other ecological resources. Land, which the Economists regard as a free gift of nature, has now become somewhat scarce resource as result of both artificial and natural access and usage barriers (Rashid, 2012; Garba, 2016). These different specifications, multipurpose uses, and the limited available landed resources have consequently necessitated the eruption of different shades of competition for its utilization. While non-agricultural user groups compete with agricultural user groups for available land on the one hand, there also exist various levels of intra-user group competition on the other hand. In fact, increasing human and animal populations have continued to exert great pressures on available land and other ecological resources with varying environmental and socio-economic implications (Richard, 1976; Fiki & Lee, 2004; Garba, 2016). Agriculture has remained a dominant contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Nigerian economy and a major employer of labour in the country. Benue State, the “food basket” of the nation and the rest of Middle-Belt region provide over 60% of the food supply in Nigeria (Fajonyomi, et al, 2018).

Agriculturally, Benue State is significant for food production in the country because of its rich soil that supports the cultivation of various crops; and water cum green pastures that supports livestock grazing in commercial quantity. Thus, both crop farmers and herdsmen are attracted to the rich agricultural and economic potentials in Benue State resulting in stiff competition for access to and use of these ecological resources. Clashes usually occur when agricultural activities by the crop farmers hinder the movement of herds to water sources or

pastures (Shettima & Usman, 2008). Farmers-herdsmen conflict has therefore remained the most preponderant resources-use conflict in Benue state in particular and the country at large (Rashid, 2012). This conflict threatens the prospects for food security in the state and therefore calls for empirical study.

In recent years, resource-use conflicts among herdsmen and farmers have increased tremendously in North-Central Nigeria, especially in the “food basket state”- Benue State. Factors such as population pressure, environmental constraints, proliferation of small and light weapons and the absence of neutrality in the intervention by the Nigerian state in these conflicts have been blamed for the persistence and escalation of resource conflicts in the country (Genyi, 2019). Benue state alone witnessed over 70 attacks by the herdsmen between 2015 and 2017 with over 1,300 people killed and tens of thousands displaced, most notably the massacre of over 300 persons in Agatu Local Government Area in early 2015 (Bagudu, 2017). In fact, between 2013 and 2016, fourteen of the twenty three Local Government Areas in the state had come under severe herdsmen's attacks for more than once (Genyi, 2019). Aside the loss of lives and destruction of property, incessant resource conflicts have forced farmers to abandon their fertile farmlands, rendering several farming communities deserted and have consequently reduced crop farmers to tenants in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps. This constitutes a threat to food security in Nigeria. Enyi (2014) disclosed that the effects of these events are the looming hunger, famine and general food insecurity in Benue state; the state status as a “food basket of the nation” has been severely threatened by this resource conflict.

A number of works have been conducted on the prevalence of resource conflicts in Nigeria (Ortserga, 2014, Musa et al, 2014; Tenuche & Ifatimehin, 2009; Garba, 2016); while numerous studies have been conducted on the socio-economic, financial, cultural, and political implications of resource conflicts on development in Nigeria (Terzungwe, 2016; Aliyu, Ikinma & Akinwande, 2018; Kato, 2017; Akuva & Audu, 2018). Also, there exist some works on food security in Nigeria, such as Folorunsho, Gama & Ademiluyi (2018); Ahungwa, Umeh & Muktar (2013), and Ahmed, Eugene & Abah (2015) among others. These works are commendable, but have largely been done without giving adequate emphasis on the implications of resource conflicts among herdsmen and farmers on food security in terms of availability of food, the sustainability of food supply and accessibility to food in Benue state of North-Central Nigeria. It is against this background that this study attempts to cover this lacuna in the existing body of literature.

## **Contextual and Theoretical Discourse**

### **Resource Conflict**

Conflicts are common and unavoidable in all human society. Conflicts occur because society is made up of people with differing interests and values (Terzungwe, 2016). Conflicts occur in most societies when parties or groups in a

state of independence perceives divergent views or believe that their aspirations or goals cannot be achieved simultaneously. Conflicts are available in a monolithic social order but more pronounced in a plural society where conflicting interests, perceptions, and attitudes to matters by the groups tend to promote and generate conflicts and misunderstanding (Anyo, 2014). Conflict connotes clash or disagreement between two or more groups who have incompatible and sometimes competing differences. It is a situation in where two or more parties pursue similar goals but believe that such goals are achievable by just one of them and as such employ every resource within their disposal to hinder the other party from the attainment of such goal (Aliyu, et, al, 2018). In other words, conflicts could be seen as any personal divergence of interest between individuals, or groups, which occasionally become confrontational and culminate in physical violence (Keghku, Alom & Fanafa, 2019).

Resource conflict among herders and farmers began about the 20th century as a result of two major developments: the introduction of modern veterinary services leading to increase in herd size, and increased farming due to increasing population pressures (Blench, 2003). Ecological factors like the drying up of the Lake Chad and desert encroachment are the key factors in this conflict (Blench, 2010). Resource conflict in this context is the conflict by groups over access to and use of landed resources such as fertile land, green pasture, forest resources and water points. Competition over these ecological resources is usually at the heart of conflicts among herders and farmers especially in Benue state.

### **Food Security**

Food is the most important among the three basic needs of human beings world over. This was probably what Stamoulisk and Zessa (2003) had in mind when they said one of the most important objectives of man at all times has been the question of how to obtain food to feed the entire family, communities, nations, and indeed, the whole world. According to FAO (2003), Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and which meets their dietary needs and nutritious food which preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern. Food insecurity exists when people do not have adequate physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The World Bank (2010) identified three cardinal elements of food security:

- a. Food Availability (adequate supply of food items): Sufficient food is available for the household members.
- b. Food Accessibility (adequate purchasing power): This also means reducing poverty, which implies that members of the households have the capacity to purchase food.

- c. Food Utilization (safe food for human consumption): This entails ensuring a good nutritional outcome. Good nutrition must be accompanied with other care, safe water and better sanitation. Food Security incorporates a measure of resilience to future disruption on unavailability of critical food supply due to various risk factors including drought, shipping disruptions, fuel shortages, economic instability and wars (Okoli & Addo, 2018).

### **Empirical Review**

In a study titled: “Socio-economic assessment of resource use conflict between crop farmers and cattle herders in Misau Local Government Area of Bauchi State”, Garba (2016) sought to determine the socio-economic effects of herdsmen and farmers' conflict on both farmers and herders in the study area. With the use of multi-stage and snowball sampling methods complimented with in-depth interview, the findings of the study showed that crop damage, blockage of watering points and lawlessness were the major sources of conflict. Further findings of the study revealed that loss of expected yield, loss of cattle, displacement of people, and loss of human lives are the major effects of conflict. The study thus concluded that farmers and herders conflict results to loss of the sources of livelihood to both agricultural land user groups, and contributes to the spread and persistence of violence such as ethnic clashes and armed robbery.

Therefore, it is in the interest of the government to address the genuine needs of the cattle herders for availability of grazing land, resolve the recurring conflicts in the agricultural sector that provides employment to reasonable portion of the country's population. The study recommended among others that farmers should adopt intensive cultivation by using improved seeds and farm inputs in view of the rapid population pressure and declining farmlands. Also, the cattle herders should embark on fodder production such as growing of Guatemele and Bracharia to feed the cattle in times of scarcity during the dry season. On the whole, the study recommended that the traditional rulers, religious leaders and the leaders of cattle herders should be more proactive and give more efforts in preaching the implications of conflict on the people in particular and the community in general.

Ofuoku and Isife (2009) conducted a study in Delta State to investigate the farmers-nomadic herders' conflict that is common in many parts of Nigeria. Such conflict has caused a lot of loses to Nigeria, the State, Local communities and Families. The socio-economic effects of the conflicts include reduction in crop yield and income of farmers and herders, displacement of farmers, loss of products in storage. The study thus suggested that local development plans should be established to reduce such conflicts. Aliyu (2015) conducted a study entitled: “Causes and Resolution of Conflict between Cattle Herders and Crop Farmers in Katsina State” with the objectives of investigating the causes of Farmer-Herders Conflict and the performance of management institutions towards the resolution of the conflict in the state. Results from the findings of this study shows that crop damage by cattle, encroachment of cattle routes,

inadequate grazing reserves, lack of access to water points, cattle rustling, land tenure system and changes in climatic conditions indiscriminate bush burning, pollution of water points were the major factors responsible for the cause of conflict in the study area. Further findings of the study reveal that the traditional ruler's institution and Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) were the most effective institutions for handling farmers-herders conflict in the study area. Based on these findings therefore, the study suggests that, formal education for both the herders and farmers should be encouraged through sensitization using individual and mass communication with the aid of extension agents and radio programmes respectively. Also, governments at all levels should ensure indigenous resource user groups are involved in formulating policies relating to natural resources management and utilization. It was also recommended that the existing Land Use Act (Policy) should be amended so as to afford the herders a more balanced recognition in terms of land ownership, utilization and control.

Using Yobe state as a reference point, Alhassan (2013) examined herdsman and farmers conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria, its causes, repercussions and resolutions. The study describes the traditional relationship between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in the incessant resource conflicts witnessed in Yobe State and how it affects livelihood security of those involved and resource sustainability for the local communities. The causes of Herdsmen-Farmers conflict, according to the study include destruction of crops by cattle, burning of rangeland Fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment, increasing rate of cattle theft, and the destruction of property such as reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructures by the herdsman themselves. The findings of the study reveals that the repercussions of conflict between herdsman and farmers in Yobe State, Nigeria include: Loss of income/resources crop yield; destruction of property such as home/farms, bodily injury or death as family members; emotional exhaustion; and the creation of social, economic, and political tensions as a result of numerous escalation of violent conflict. The study concludes that it is in the interest of the state to end the rhetoric on the demarcation of grazing land, and take concrete steps to address the genuine needs of herdsman for availability of grazing land, resolve the recurring conflicts in the agricultural sector which currently provides employment to over 80% of the country's population. The study thus recommends among others that, there is need for viable Non-Government Organizations on Farmers-Herders Conflict Management, especially in the areas of awareness, education, prevention, and amelioration. Furthermore, NGOs should support livestock-centered livelihoods including cattle herding, not only in conflict mitigation but also in the support of grassroots innovations and in influencing favourable national policies. Also, traditional and local leaders should be well involved in finding solutions to herdsman-farmers conflict.

Musa, Shabu and Igbawua (2014) conducted a study to assess resource use conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsman in Guma Local Government

Area of Benue state, Nigeria. The study revealed that, both farmers and herdsmen agreed that herdsmen were not acceptable by their host communities. The destruction of crops/farmlands, contamination of water, and harassment of herdsmen by host communities were the major causes of conflicts between farmers and Fulani herdsmen. Displacement of both farmers and herdsmen, loss of lives and properties, and decrease in output were the major effects of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in the study area. The study concluded that, the conflict is a setback to the development of agricultural sector, and therefore recommended the creation of grazing reserves so that herders can shift from traditional method of animal husbandry to modern methods.

In a study titled: “livelihood and conflict dimension among crop farmers and Fulani Herdsmen in Yakurr region of cross River State, Nigeria, Ofem and Bassey (2014) examined the negative approach of Nomads to crop farmers in the region. The study blamed overgrazing of farmlands, contamination of streams, and the harassment of female farmers, which results to rape, as being the fundamental causes of conflict in the region. The study reveal that, apart from the killings by nomads and reprisal attacks of the host communities, reduction in income and output of crop farmers and internal displacement of herdsmen and farmers in the host communities, are the major socio-economic effects of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers. In view of these findings, the study recommends that, nomadic education and the mechanism tagged “Local Development Plans –LDPs” be adopted by extension agencies to minimize conflict in rural areas where grazing of cattle is inevitable.

Fajonyomi, Fatile, Bello, Opusunju and Adejuwon (2018) carried out a study in North-Central zone of Nigeria to ascertain the nexus between farmers-herdsmen conflicts and food security. In other words, the study examined the effects of farmers-herdsmen conflicts on food production in the North-Central geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study reveals that there is a significant relationship between the availability of food and insecurity; stability of food supply and displacement of people as well as the accessibility of food and disability and death in the study area. The study recommends among others that the Nigerian Government should make policies that will stop herdsmen by monitoring and checkmating their activities to ensure availability of food, the stability of food supply, and the accessibility of food in different parts of Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study under review is viewed from the perspective of the Resource Access Theory (RAT) propounded in the 1970s by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Sananak. According to this theory, conflict is an ever recurring decimal in the history of humanity (Fajonyomi, 2018). Conflicts are seen as a resultant effect or consequence of competition for scarce resources in human society. The access to natural resources in an environment is most often than not contested, and in most cases characterized by all manner of conflicts. The need for people to legitimize their rights and access to natural resources has remained central in competition and contestation for natural resources (Fajonyomi, et al, 2018).

According to this theory, the dimension of most conflicts in any human society is defined or determined by ownership either directly or indirectly. However, in the history of mankind, land has remained an overwhelming source of conflict among both agricultural and non-agricultural user groups as well individuals at varying degrees. Given that more than 65% of Nigerians depend on agriculture for survival, people go to great lengths to carve out lands and protect them for farming purpose (Viashima, et al, 2014). A study of major sources of conflicts in the society, conducted by Gyuse (2006) revealed that land matters account for the highest percentage (42.9%) of conflicts in Nigeria, followed by Politics (32%) and Chieftaincy matters (25.1%).

Applied to the purpose of this study, the theory sees access to land and other ecological resources such as grazing fields and water sources as the main trigger of resource-use violent conflicts among crop farmers and cattle herders in Nigeria. These conflicts have taken a very dangerous dimension with catastrophic consequences in Nigeria in recent years, due to *intensification* and *extensification* of production activities necessitated by increasing human population (Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). The strength of this theory lies in the fact that it has been able to establish that a significant relationship exists between scarce ecological resources and violent conflicts in the society. The relevance of this theory notwithstanding, it has been criticized for over-emphasizing group conflict while de-emphasizing conflict among individuals in the group. Also, the theory has been criticized for failing to adequately explain why certain feeling of deprivation or denied access to resources are transformed into collective action, whereas in some similar situations, no collective effort is made to reshape the society (Fajonyomi, et al, 2018). These shortcomings or limitations notwithstanding, this theory is still very useful in explaining and understanding resource-use conflicts among herdsmen and farmers, and the implications these conflicts have on food security in Nigeria.

### **Research Methodology**

The study was conducted in Benue state, Nigeria between September, 2019 and November, 2019. Benue State was created on February 3, 1976 by the military administration of General Murtala Mohammed. The State is located in the North-Central region (Middle Belt) and has a total population of 4,253,641 in the 2006 Census. The state is dubbed the “food basket of the nation”, with majority of its population engaged in farming as a source of livelihood. Benue State is structured into 23 Local government Areas (LGAs) with its headquarters in Makurdi. As an ex post facto research, cross sectional survey research design was employed in this study with aid of structured questionnaires administered to farmers and herdsmen in the affected farming communities across three Local Government Areas in the state. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Purposive (judgmental) sampling technique was used to select 3 out of the 23 LGAs and affected farming communities based on the frequency of occurrence of resource conflicts in these areas. These LGAs include: Agatu, Guma, and Gwer West. Purposive sampling technique was used because it provided the



researchers partial intuitive understanding and selection of core violent prone areas for the study. Random sampling technique was used to select 60 farmers from each of the 3 LGAs making it a total of 180 farmers while snow ball sampling technique was used to select 60 herders from each of the 3 LGAs given the nature of their settlement, called “Ruga” in Fulani dialect, making it a total of 180 herders. In all, a total of 360 respondents formed the sample size for this study. The study followed the pattern of descriptive analysis. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using simple percentages, mean and frequency counts. The research hypotheses were tested using Chi Square statistical method at 5% level of significance. The mode of analytical presentation was thematic in nature. In this respect, relevant issues were systematically considered under selected themes and sub-themes designed to address declared objectives of the study.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 2: Characteristics of the Questionnaires administered**

	Agatu LGA	Guma LGA	Gwer West LGA	Total
<b>Number Administered</b>	120	120	120	360
<b>Number Returned</b>	108	112	110	330
<b>Number used for analysis</b>	108	112	110	330
<b>Percentage Returned</b>	90%	93%	91.7%	
<b>Percentage analyzed</b>	90%	93%	91.7%	

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

From the above table, out of 360 questionnaire forms administered to the respondents, 330 were properly filled and returned. The break down shows that 108 were returned in Agatu LGA; 112 were returned in Guma LGA while 110 were returned in Gwer West LGA. The percentage returned and analyzed were 90%, 93% and 91.7% for Agatu, Guma and Gwer West LGAs respectively.

**Test of Hypotheses**

Hypothesis One

H<sub>0</sub>: Resource conflict does not affect the availability of food in Benue state.

**Table 3: Observed Frequency Table (OFT)**

Options	Male	Female	Total
AGREE	45	35	80
DISAGREE	175	75	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>330</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

**Expected Frequency Table (EFT)**

MALE	FEMALE
AGREE	AGREE
$\frac{220 \times 80}{330}$ = 53.33	$\frac{110 \times 80}{330}$ 26.67
DISAGREE	DISAGREE
$\frac{220 \times 250}{330}$ = 166.67	$\frac{110 \times 250}{330}$ = 83.33
Thus,	
MALE	FEMALE
AGREE = 53.33	AGREE = 26.67
DIAGREE = 166.67	DISAGREE = 83.33

**Source: Field Survey, 2019.**

**Chi Square,**

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - ef)^2}{ef}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{(45 - 53.33)^2}{53.33} + \frac{(35 - 26.67)^2}{26.67} + \frac{(175 - 166.67)^2}{166.67} + \frac{(75 - 83.33)^2}{83.33}$$

$$= 1.30 + 2.60 + 0.42 + 0.83 = 5.15$$

Calculated  $X^2 = 5.15$

Critical Value = 3.84

**Interpretation**

$X^2$  calculated is greater than  $X^2$  tabulated (Critical Value). Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected. Thus, resource conflicts affect the availability of food in Benue state.

**Hypothesis Two**

$H_0$ : Resource conflict would not influence the sustainability of food supply in Benue state.

Table 4: Observed Frequency Table (OFT)

Options	Male	Female	Total
AGREE	43	42	85
DISAGREE	172	73	245
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>330</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Expected Frequency Table (EFT)

MALE		FEMALE	
AGREE		AGREE	
$\frac{215 \times 85}{330}$		$\frac{115 \times 85}{330}$	
= 53.38		= 29.62	
DISAGREE		DISAGREE	
$\frac{215 \times 245}{330}$		$\frac{115 \times 245}{330}$	
= 159.62		= 85.38	
Thus,			
MALE		FEMALE	
AGREE = 55.38		AGREE = 29.62	
DIAGREE = 159.62		DISAGREE = 85.38	

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

**Chi Square,**

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{(43 - 55.38)^2}{55.38} + \frac{(42 - 29.62)^2}{29.62} + \frac{(172 - 159.62)^2}{159.62} + \frac{(73 - 85.38)^2}{85.38}$$

$$X^2 = 2.77 + 5.17 + 0.96 + 1.80$$

$$X^2 = 10.7$$

$$\text{Calculated } X^2 = 10.7$$

$$\text{Critical Value} = 3.84$$

**Interpretation**

$x^2$  calculated is greater than  $x^2$  tabulated (Critical Value). Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected. Thus, resource conflict would influence the sustainability of food supply in Benue state.

**Hypothesis Three**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Resource conflict would not influence accessibility to food in Benue state.

**Table 5: Observed Frequency Table (OFT)**

Options	Male	Female	Total
AGREE	44	38	82
DISAGREE	177	71	248
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>330</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

**Expected Frequency Table (EFT)**

MALE		FEMALE	
AGREE		AGREE	
$\frac{221 \times 82}{330}$		$\frac{109 \times 82}{330}$	
= 54.92		= 27.08	
DISAGREE		DISAGREE	
$\frac{221 \times 248}{330}$		$\frac{109 \times 248}{330}$	
= 166.08		= 81.92	
Thus, MALE		FEMALE	
AGREE = 54.92		AGREE = 27.08	
DIAGREE = 166.08		DISAGREE = 81.92	

**Source: Field Survey, 2019.**

**Chi Square,**

$$X^2 = \frac{\sum (O - e)^2}{e}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{(44 - 54.92)^2}{54.92} + \frac{(38 - 27.08)^2}{27.08} + \frac{(71 - 81.92)^2}{81.92} + \frac{(177 - 166.08)^2}{166.08}$$

$$X^2 = 2.17 + 4.40 + 1.46 + 0.72$$

$$X^2 = 8.75$$

$$\text{Calculated } X^2 = 8.75$$

$$\text{Critical Value} = 3.84$$

From the above table, it can be deduced that resource conflicts have really dealt a great blow on Benue crop farmers, many of whom have either being killed, disabled or displaced as a result of these conflicts. Consequently, farming to the

survivors, is no longer encouraging as most of them have abandoned their farmlands and relocated to the cities for fear of being attacked by these killer-herders. No doubt these conflicts have negative implications on food production in Benue state. This was corroborated by the former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Chief Audu Ogbe, who expressed the fear that more Nigerians may go hungry except something is done to avert the looming crisis (Bagudu, 2017)

Similarly, Action Aid (2008) observed that resource conflicts among herdsmen and crop farmers not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved, they also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production. In the same vein, Akombo (2016) pointed out that the major consequence of these conflicts was acute shortage of foodstuffs with attendant sky rocketing prices of maize and rice which rose from N7,000 and N5,000 to N25,000 and N13,000 respectively. Similarly, the prices of beans, guinea corn, and groundnut rose from N10,000, N4,000 and N5,000 to N27,000, N21,000 and N7,500 respectively. The same scenario repeated itself between 2017 and 2019.

From the above analysis, this study has established that resource conflicts affects the availability of food, accessibility and sustainability of food supply in Benue state, and by implication Nigeria at large. What this implies is that incessant resource conflicts among herders and Benue farmers is a threat to the prospects for food security in Nigeria, given that Benue state is the food basket of the nation. The findings are in tandem with the findings of Fajonyomi, Fatile, Bello, Opusunju and Adejuwon (2018) who found that a positive association exists between insecurity and availability of food; displacement of people and stability of food supply; as well as disability and death and accessibility to food in North-Central Nigeria characterized by herders and farmers conflicts.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the perspective of the Resource Access Theory (RAT) as applied to this study, it is evident that resource conflicts among herders and Benue farmers is basically as a result of access to, use of, and control of ecological resources such as land and water resources for the purpose of crop farming and cattle grazing in order to make a living. This phenomenon of conflict among herders and farmers is what this paper describes as “resource conflict” which threatens the prospects for food security not only in the state but the country at large. The herders who are hitherto known for going about their daily transhumance business using sticks to scare away wild animals now go about with very sophisticated weapons of warfare such as AK-47s and assault rifles among others. This has resulted to high casualties in recent years, and has also created an atmosphere of insecurity in Benue state in particular and the country at large. Thus, there is need for something to be urgently done to address these conflicts, for food security to be guaranteed in the food basket of the nation.

On the basis of the findings of this study, following recommendations have been made:

- Laws prohibiting open grazing should be formulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. This will discourage the transhumance practice which has now become anachronistic, and thus encourage these herders to embrace modern ranching system as practiced in countries like India, Brazil, China, USA and Argentina among others.
- There should be thorough border security to regulate trans-border movement of herders
- Victims of resource conflicts should be adequately compensated by the Federal Government to avoid reprisal attacks.
- Conflict mongers and those suspected to have caused and escalated resource conflicts as well as their handlers should be made to face the full wrath of the laws of the land
- Desertification and drought in the far northern parts of Nigeria which are the direct impacts of climate change should be assuaged by the government, strong-willed individuals, communities and corporate bodies. This will reduce the migration of herders southwards to the North-Central Nigeria in general and Benue state in particular in search of fresh grazing fields and water sources.
- There is the need for continuous and persistent sensitization of both herders and farmers by the government, faith-based organizations, farmers' associations, herders' associations, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on the necessity for peaceful co-existence among them.

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