

Farmers – Herders' Conflict and Socio-Economic Development of Benue State, Nigeria

Alu Martins Gema

Department of Political Science,
Benue State University, Makurdi.

Abstract

This work examines the phenomenon of farmers – herders' conflict and the extent to which it has affected socio-economic development of Benue state. It uses a survey research design where the primary data was sourced with the use of questionnaire method, while the secondary data on the other hand have been deduced from text books, newspapers, journal articles, and the internet sources. In attempt to achieve the fundamental objective, the effect of the conflict on the basic indicators of socio-economic development such as access to quality education and gainful employment opportunities in the state were all investigated. The study used the Marxist perspective of conflict theory as its theoretical framework to capture the reality of the phenomenon under discussion. The research universe was the entirety of Benue State population but the sample for the study was drawn from only three purposely selected local governments including – Guma, Logo and Agatu. Findings of the study reveal that, the menace of farmers-herders' conflict has affected socio-economic development in Benue State where access to quality education as well as gainful employment has been grossly affected. The study recommends among others the intensification of efforts by both the federal and state governments towards providing enough security for lives and properties in the conflict prone areas.

Keywords: Herders-Farmers Relations, Herders-Farmers Conflict, Benue State Conflict, Benue Socio-economic Development.

Introduction

Considering the centrality of socio-economic development to the positive transformation in the quality of lives of the individuals and that of the general society, the sector needs a radical transformation. Though this is not an easy task with our current shrinking economy but there is every need for a continuous aim at

socio-economic advancement which is a means of contributing to the growth and performance of our local economy. An enabling environment has to be provided for an improved socio-economic development at all levels. Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that this cannot be achieved under a hostile environment.

The fact remains that - socio-economic development cannot flourish in an environment that is incessantly plagued by hostilities arising from one form of conflict or the other.

In Benue State particularly, it has become a commonplace to talk of violent conflicts resulting from different forms of clash of interests, controversies and disagreements over scarce resources. Ugly headlines pointing out the attacks and the number of recorded casualties have flouted the media for quite a significant number of years. Attacks on the local communities have increased significantly over the years. In agreement with the above, Akerjiir (2018) noticed that the conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen in the country has existed and has been on the increase for many years as most of the recent increasing number of conflicts in the country is linked to the farmers – herders' conflict.

It is pertinent to note that with this dramatic escalation of conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen in the state, more attacks, kidnappings and killings are being carried out indiscriminately. The most worrying aspect of this conflict is the brutality and impunity with which the bushwhackers operate without any little regard for the law and the sanctity of life coupled with the inability of the Nigerian police and even the military to provide adequate security to defend the victims. These attacks on the local communities have truly taken a very dangerous dimension as women and children are not spared during attacks. Correspondingly, the Global Terrorism Index (2015) ranked these bushwhackers as the world's fourth deadliest terror group which can be compared to the likes of Boko Haram, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Al-Shabaab.

Another worrisome aspect of this conflict is that, it has already created a situation where farmers for fear of attacks could no longer go to their farms to harvest their farm produce (Kasarachi, 2016). The attacks have also led to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security of the entire country as Ajibefun (2018) noted. The study reveals that, the hostility recorded from these conflicts has distracted most communities, displacing people from their farmlands where they lost their major source of livelihood. It is also noted that the extra judicial killings recorded from this conflict have forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety. And the recent wave of violence (Kasarachi, 2016) noted has disrupted the socio-economic activities, political stability and threatened the national unity of the country at large. Correspondingly, (Idowu, 2017) submits that, the violence between farmers and herdsmen has displaced more than 100,000 people in Benue State living them under the mercy of relatives or in camps created for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

This condition has made Apenda (2016, 193) to lament that "the pattern and dimension which the conflicts have assumed has become a source of concern to most scholars in recent times". According to the study, in the past when these crises were yet to assume this recent dimension, the weapons used were limited to traditional weapons such as machetes, bows and arrows. But the introduction of sophisticated weapons have created a situation where these violent conflicts can be successfully termed as perilous as allegations have even been made that chemical weapons were used by the suspected herders' attackers on the local people in some communities in the state (Apenda, 2016).

Consequently, these crises have tempered with the existing social and economic structure in the affected communities. That is why Abanyam (2019) noted that, these attacks have a drastic negative effect on socio-economic development to a massive extent as it has already posed a serious danger to the country's economy.

Market facilities and farms are been destroyed, people are been displaced from their localities and worst still people are been killed living their loved ones in hopeless conditions. All these and many more have severe consequences on the socio-economic development of the state as they have the capacity to halt socio-economic activities in the affected areas.

Given the above background the leadership in Benue State since the beginning of this violent conflict has made several efforts intended to adequately address this conflict situation but it seems the efforts made so far by the government have not yielded enough required positive result. Some of these efforts include: convening peace meetings to restore peace and tranquillity between the indigenous crop farmers and the pastoralist; the enactment of Anti-open Grazing and Ranchers Establishment Law; establishment and employment of livestock guards to monitor the movement of livestock within the state; the establishment of State Volunteer Guard; the introduction of amnesty program for those in position of prohibited weapons in the state - the program that intended to take away all arms and ammunitions from those that were unlawfully using them indiscriminately to rob members of the public and sometimes for cattle rustling.

All the above efforts together with a host of other strategies put in place by the government to handle this problem have not tangibly solved the problem as it continue to affect the socio-economic development of the state. It is against this backdrop that after considering the centrality of socio-economic development to both individual's wellbeing and societal development as well as the threat posed to it by the persistent farmers-herders' conflicts in Benue State, it is assumed that finding a lasting solution to this menace can be a fillip to the positive transformation in the quality of lives of the inhabitants of this State, which is also tantamount to both individual and societal development.

This scholarly work therefore generally examines the phenomenon of farmers - herders' conflict and the extent to which

it has affected the socio-economic advancement of the study area, coming up with findings that are useful to adequately bring an improvement to the continued deplorable condition of socio-economic activities in the area under study. The study considers access to quality education and gainful employment as among the indices of measuring socio-economic development. The study therefore specifically examines:

- i. The effect of farmers - herders' conflict on access to quality education in Benue State.
- ii. The effect of farmers – herders’ conflict on access to gainful employment in Benue State.

Bases on the above stated objective, the following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the effect of farmers – herders' conflict on access to quality education in Benue State?
- ii. What is the effect of farmers – herders' conflict on access to employment in Benue State?

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Karl Marx’s Conflict Theory. This theory was propounded by Karl Marx in his famous book, the communist manifesto in 1848. As was originally developed by Marx, the theory assumes that "society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources" (Adam, 2022, para. 1). This theoretical framework purports that because of society’s never-ending competition for limited resources, conflict becomes inevitable as the society will always be in a state of conflict. This implies that those in possession of these finite resources will always protect and hoard them, while those that have not will use every possible means to obtain them. The implication of this is that there is a constant struggle between the haves and the have nots (CFI Team, 2023).

The theorist here is of the idea that the basic feature of all societies is the struggle between different groups for access to

limited resources. This theory assumes that in every society there are structural power divisions as well as resource inequalities that make groups to have conflicting interests (Wells, 1979). According to Marx, the device for social transformation is the clash of opposing interests of groups. Marx believes that the transformation of society from primitive communalism to feudalism and to capitalism was the product of economic interests within the superstructure. Hence, issues of conflict in the society can best be analysed by detecting it within the relations of production. This theoretical framework identifies unequal distribution of the finite resources available to members of the social system as the source of conflict. It maintains that part of the social system struggles to protect their interest ensuring that their interest in the distribution of the available resources is well taken care of. The theory emphasises that, interests are the major ingredients for social life (Wayra, 2019).

The theorist is of the opinion that the history of mankind is that of productive activities. Since from the simple hunting and gathering society, societies moved to more complex industrial societies. The relationship of man to man and man to nature has been that of production for survival. It is in this desire to produce and reproduce his means of livelihood that man comes into conflict of economic interest.

This theoretical framework captures the reality of the phenomenon under discussion here and is therefore relevant to this study. This is because the theory emphasizes that human survival is dependent on man's production. Conflict is likely to occur during the production process. This is common especially among the crop farmers and herdsmen where each compete for land. There is a serious struggle between crop farmers and herdsmen in Benue State over land and water which are relatively scarce. The crop farmers struggle for land and water to enable them cultivate their farm crops while herdsmen on the other hand struggle for land to provide pasture and drinking water to feed their animals. In this

kind of competitive struggle, conflict among the two agricultural land user groups becomes grossly inevitable. This is therefore a suitable theoretical framework to serve as mirror through which the phenomenon of farmers - herders' conflict and its devastating effect on social-economic development of the study area can be successfully examined.

Data Generation

Various approaches, techniques and procedures for the collection, analysis and interpretation of data for this research are examined under this section. For instance, the study adopted a survey research design considering the fact that the population to be studied was relatively large.

The general population also known as Research Universe of this study is the entirety of Benue State population. However, a particular population that is derived from this state encompasses only three local governments, each of which was purposively selected from each of the three geopolitical zones of the state. Guma, Logo and Agatu local Government Areas were therefore selected for study. Based on the 2022 National Bureau of Statistic Projection Figures, the population of the three selected local government areas was projected at 692000 people (280300, 244800 and 166900 respectively). With the above population, using the Taro Yamane's formula for calculating sample size, a sample of 400 respondents was obtained.

Both the purposive (judgmental) and snowball non probability sampling techniques were triangulated to effectively select the requisite sample for the study. Data for the study was generated from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data for the study was generated through the use of questionnaire method. And for effective analysis of the data generated for this study, the researcher used descriptive statistical tools such as frequency tables and simple percentages for evaluation and analysis of the collected data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data becomes useful only when it is analysed. This section therefore presents the data collected and analyses them for a better interpretation of the results. It deals with the analysis and interpretation of data (responses) obtained from the respondents on various questions aimed at answering the stated research questions. This has been done based on 400 valid questionnaires retrieved from respondents in the study area.

Note: Five (5) Point Likert Scale was used for respondents to specify their level of agreement and disagreement to the statements as:

Strongly Agree = **SA**,

Agree = **A**,

Undecided = **UD**,

Disagree = **D**,

Strongly Disagree = **SD**

Effect of Farmers - Herders' Conflict on Access to Quality Education

Table 1: Farmers - herders' Conflict Affects Children's Access to Quality Education in Benue State

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	168	42
Agree	110	27.5
Undecided	44	11
Disagree	51	12.75
Strongly Disagree	27	6.75
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 1 above shows that 168 respondents (42%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 110 respondents (27.5%) agreed, 44 respondents (11%) are

undecided while 51 respondents (12.75%) and 27 respondents (6.75%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that farmers - herders' conflict affects children's access to quality education in Benue State. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that farmers - herders' conflict affects children's access to quality education in Benue State.

Table 2: School Infrastructure/Facilities are Constantly Being Destroyed during the Violent Conflict

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	185	46.25
Agree	112	28
Undecided	55	13.75
Disagree	38	9.5
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 2 above shows that 185 respondents (46.25%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 112 respondents (28%) agreed, 55 respondents (13.75%) are undecided while 38 respondents (9.5%) and 10 respondents (2.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that school infrastructure/facilities are constantly being destroyed during the violent conflict. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that school infrastructure/facilities are constantly being destroyed during the violent conflict in Benue State.

Table 3: The Violent Conflict Leads to Displacement of Teachers Whose Absenteeism Denies Students Access to Quality Education

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree		
Agree		
Undecided		
Disagree		
Strongly Disagree		
Total		

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 3 above shows that 128 respondents (32%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 148 respondents (37%) agreed, 34 respondents (8.5%) are undecided while 59 respondents (14.75%) and 31 respondents (7.75%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that the violent conflict leads to displacement of teachers whose absenteeism denies students access to quality education. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that the violent conflict in Benue State leads to displacement of teachers whose absenteeism denies students access to quality education.

Table 4: Some Schools have been closed down During the Violent Hostilities

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	214	53.5
Agree	160	40
Undecided	13	3.25
Disagree	10	2.5
Strongly Disagree	3	0.75
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 4 above shows that 214 respondents (53.5%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 160 respondents (40%) agreed, 13 respondents (3.25%) are undecided while 10 respondents (2.5) and 3 respondents (0.75%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that some schools have been closed down during the violent hostilities in Benue State. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that the violent conflict in Benue State leads to closure of some schools during the violent hostilities.

Table 5: Some Children Together With Their Parents Have Been Displaced From Areas Where They Attend Schools

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	120	30
Agree	114	28.5
Undecided	68	17
Disagree	60	15
Strongly Disagree	38	9.5
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 5 above shows that 120 respondents (30%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 114 respondents (28.5%) agreed, 68 respondents (17%) are undecided while 60 respondents (15%) and 38 respondents (9.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that some children together with their parents have been displaced from areas where they attend schools. This portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that some children together with their parents in Benue State have been displaced.

Effect of Farmers - Herders' Conflict on the Level Employment in Benue State

Table 6: Farmers - herders' Violent Conflict Affects the Level of Employment Opportunities in Benue State

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	190	47.5
Agree	130	32.5
Undecided	30	7.5
Disagree	35	8.75
Strongly Disagree	15	3.75
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 6 shows that 190 (47.5%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 130 respondents (32.5%) agreed, 30 respondents (7.5%) are undecided while 35 respondents (8.75%) and 15 respondents (3.75%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that farmers - herders' violent conflict affects the level of employment opportunities in Benue State. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that violent conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen has affected the level of employment opportunities in Benue State.

Table 7: Some Crop Farmers Have Been Rendered Jobless Because They Could No longer Access Their Farmlands

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	180	45
Agree	136	34
Undecided	44	11
Disagree	26	6.5
Strongly Disagree	14	3.5
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 7 shows that 180 (45%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 136 respondents (34%) agreed, 44 respondents (11%) are undecided while 26 respondents (6.5%) and 14 respondents (3.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that some crop farmers have been rendered jobless because they could not get access to their farmlands. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that some crop farmers in Benue State have been rendered jobless because they could not access their farmlands.

Table 8: Some Traders Lost Their Goods in Market during Attacks Therefore Could Not Have Access to Capital to Continue With Their Trade Again

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	140	35
Agree	126	31.5
Undecided	68	17
Disagree	36	9
Strongly Disagree	30	7.5
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 8 shows that 140 (35%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 126 respondents (31.5%) agreed, 68 respondents (17%) are undecided while 36 respondents (9%) and 30 respondents (7.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that some traders lost their goods in market during attacks. This portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that some traders lost their goods in market during attacks therefore could not have access to capital to continue with their trade again.

Table 9: Some Motorcyclists Lost Their Motorcycles during Attacks and Are Now Jobless

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	178	44.5
Agree	113	28.25
Undecided	66	16.5
Disagree	20	5
Strongly Disagree	23	5.75
Total	400	100

Field Survey, 2022

The data presented in Table 9 shows that 178 (44.5%) out of the total number of respondents strongly agreed, 113 respondents (28.25%) agreed, 66 respondents (16.5%) are undecided while 20 respondents (5%) and 23 respondents (5.75%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that some motorcyclists have lost their motorcycles during attacks and are now jobless. Since the percentage of those strongly agreed and those agreed added together is the highest, it portrays the affirmation by respondents in the study area that some motorcyclists lost their motorcycles during attacks and are now jobless.

Discussion of the Major Findings

Based on the information obtained from the data gathered, presented, analysed and interpreted above for the purpose of this study, fundamentally it has been discovered that socio-economic development has continue to suffer serious setback in Benue State as long as the menace of farmers - herders' conflict persists.

Specifically, the findings of the study reveal that: Farmers - herders' conflict affects children's access to qualify education in Benue State where: School infrastructure/facilities are constantly being destroyed during the violent conflict. The violent conflict leads to displacement of teachers whose absenteeism denies students access to quality education. Some schools have been closed down during the violent hostilities. Some qualified teachers are

unwilling to accept posting to conflict-prone areas which is denying students from those areas access to quality education. Some children together with their parents have been displaced from areas where they attend schools.

It has also been revealed under the study that: Farmers - herders' violent conflict affects the level of employment opportunities in Benue State: Some crop farmers have been rendered jobless because they could not access their farmlands. Some traders lost their goods in market during attacks therefore could not have access to capital to continue with their trade again. Some motorcyclists lost their motorcycles during attacks and are now jobless.

Conclusion

Based on the major findings of this study as derived from the two research questions, the following conclusion has been made:

Social economic development most especially in the area of improved access to quality education and gainful employment is very crucial for both individual and societal development. But this can only be achieved under a peaceful and violent free environment. The people of Benue State are already deeply suffering from the negative effect of farmers – herders' conflict in the areas mentioned above. All the revealed effects of the conflict have already kept the living condition of the affected people in a deplorable condition and until something is done to forestall these hostilities that the quality of lives of the people will be improved.

From the foregoing the fundamental research question for this study is believed to have been answered while the first specific question that sought to find out the effect of the conflict on children's access to quality education in Benue State has been answered with the results of the findings which identified constant destruction of schools' infrastructure/facilities among others as the major adverse effects of the conflict on children's access to quality education in the State.

The second question demanded to know the effect of the conflict on employment opportunities in the state. Here the result of the findings identified lack of access to their farm lands by some crop farmers among other findings as the major effects of the conflict on employment opportunities in the study area.

In order to improve on the deplorable condition of socio-economic development in Benue State, the follow recommendations have been made based on the major findings of this research: As a matter of urgency the federal Government in collaboration with state government should prioritise rehabilitation of the areas destroyed by this conflict and make strong budgetary allocation for that purpose. Here all the schools destroyed by this conflict will be reconstructed and furnished with adequate facilities/equipment to be able to deliver quality education.

The federal government should intensify efforts towards providing enough security for lives and properties in the conflict prone areas. These efforts should be supported by the state government where the volunteer guards (the state security outfit) will jointly operate with the federal security agencies to provide the needed security for the people.

Government and NGOs should make efforts towards attaching each of the IDPs camp located in Benue State with a basic school with the requisite facilities. This may go a long way in helping the displaced children to have access to quality education.

Inducement packages should be arranged and provided for the school teachers working in the conflict prone areas as this may encourage teachers that are refusing to work in those areas.

Efforts should be intensified towards disarming herdsmen who are constantly been accused by crop farmers for carrying AK 49 rifles which they normally use to perpetrate mayhem. Peaceful coexistence among the people should be encouraged. This may encourage crop farmers to go back to their farm lands to continue with their farming activities. Traders will also operate freely

without their goods being destroyed by herdsmen. Motorcyclists will also move freely without their motorcycles been snatched from them. This will go a long way in curbing this menace thereby helping people to improve on their income earnings and their general wellbeing.

References

- Abanyam, N. L. (2019). The effects of cattle herders and crop farmers conflicts on socio-economic development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Conflict Management*, ISSN: 2536-7234 (Print): 2536-7242 <http://www.casirmediapublishing.com>
- Adam, H. (2022). Conflict theory Definition, Founder, and Examples. Investopedia. Retrieved from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/conflict-theory.asp>.
- Ajibefun, M. B. (2018). Social and economic effects of the menace of fulani herdsmen crises in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*. E-ISSN 2240-0524 ISSN 2239-978X
- Akerjiir, A.S. (2018). *Increasing farmers – herder conflict in Nigeria: An assessment of the clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and indigenous farmers in Ukpabi-Nimbo community Enugu State*. A Dissertation Presented to the Wageningen University, Natherland. <https://edepot.wur.nl/>.....>
- Apenda, I.T. (2016). An assessment of the impact of farmers-herders' conflict on food security in Benue State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Development Strategies in Humanities, Management and Social Sciences* Vol. 6 No. 2 November, 2016.
- CFI Team (2023). *Ending Competition for Resources*. Retrieved from <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/economics/conflict-theory/>
- Global Terrorism Index (2015). *Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism*. Institute for Economics & Peace, pp. 1-107.
- Idowu, A.O. (2017). Urban violence dimension in Nigeria: farmers and herders onslaught. *AGATHOS International Review*, 8(14), 187-206.

- Kasarachi, N. P. (2016). Institutionalizing peace education for sustainable development in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State. *Niger Delta Journal of Education*, 8(1), 194-196.
- Waya, G.T. (2019). *Impact of Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict on secondary school students' academic performance and social interactions in Benue and Nassarawa State, Nigeria*. Thesis Submitted to the Postgraduate School Benue State University, Makurdi.
- Wells, A. (1979). *Conflict Theory and Functionalism: Introductory Sociology Textbooks, 1928 – 1976*. *Teaching Sociology*, 429 – 437.