

Enhancing Food Security in Rural Communities: A Comprehensive Examination of Farmers-Herdsman Conflicts in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Farmers-herdsman conflicts are rooted in competition over land and water resources which have intensified due to climate change, population growth, and shifting agricultural practices. This study investigates the impact of farmers-herdsman conflicts on food security in rural communities in Oyo State, Nigeria. It aims to provide a thorough understanding of these conflicts' causes and dynamics, focusing its implications for food security in the affected communities. A mixed-methods approach was employed and data were analysed in simple descriptive percentage. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaire, interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted with the key stakeholders, including farmers, herdsman, local community leaders, and government officials in selected conflict-prone areas to capture community perceptions and experiences. Qualitative data were obtained from the secondary sources such as government reports, academic publications and newspaper reports. The findings revealed increased food prices, decreased in crop yields, livestock losses, loss of income and livelihood, disruption of food supply chain and declined in nutritional quality. The findings revealed further that there was declined in agricultural investment, displacement of farmers, disruption of livestock production, decreased agricultural productivity and increased dependence on food importation. The study recommends, Strategies for fostering sustainable agricultural practices, enhancing resource management, and promoting peaceful coexistence between farmers and herdsman will thereby contributing to improved food security across communities in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Agricultural Sustainability, Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts, Food Security, Rural Communities, and Rural Livelihoods.

Introduction

Accessibility to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for productive and healthy life is significant to human existence and survival. The rural and urban dwellers, physically, socially and economically should have access to food sufficiently to cater for them in any part of the world. In Nigeria, food security has become a household problem due to numerous factors such as rapid population growth, climate change, poor agricultural practices, and escalating conflicts between farmers and herdsmen. Nigeria's dependence on agriculture for both economic development and food supply is becoming a mirage due to the orchestrated conflicts between farmers and herdsmen over competition for land and water resources which is crucial to the sustenance of farming and livestock rearing (Boliko, 2019). Rural communities in Nigeria, play a crucial role in national food production. However, persistent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists pose serious threats to food security and economic development. In Nigeria, Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia, Rivers, Benue, Plateau, Kwara and Oyo States had tasted farmers-herdsmen conflicts which had led to the massive displacement, destruction of lives and properties, the wanton killings of about 8000 people. This situation created insecure farming environment leading to farmers especially, youths' disinterest in farming activities (Busari, 2019 and Nnoruga, 2012). The insecurity affected negatively the internally generated revenue as stated by Salihu (2019). Understanding the dynamics of this conflict and finding sustainable solutions is crucial for enhancing food security in rural communities.

Aliyu and Abdulahi, (2018) and Usman (2019), affirmed that the conflict between farmers and herders in Oyo State, Nigeria is a long-standing issue. They are both related economically but ethnically different. However, the deteriorated relationship in the recent times, are multifaceted ranging to environmental changes, climate-induced migration, and competition for dwindling resources (Olaniyi, 2015 & Ubeletjit, 2016). Consequently, the farmers-herdsmen conflict has far-reaching consequences on food security, particularly in rural communities. The conflict directly affects food production and availability, reducing the quantity of food produced in the region. Many farmers flee their homes, leaving behind crops and livestock, which exacerbate hunger and poverty. Loss of livelihood by the farmers and the herders suffer economic losses due to the conflict. Farmers lose their crops, while herders lose their cattle, which are their primary source of livelihood. This loss of income increases vulnerability and exacerbates food insecurity in rural areas (Busari, 2019). Violent clashes between farmers and herders often lead to the displacement of entire communities. Displaced population is confronted with food shortages and increased reliance on humanitarian aid, further straining the food supply in affected areas. The migration of pastoralists into new regions also creates food shortages as they settle in areas not equipped to support large herds.

Statement of the Problem

The persistent conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Oyo State, Nigeria, has become one of the most critical threats to food security in rural areas in the State. Agriculture remains the backbone of the economy in these regions, with smallholder farmers producing the majority of the food consumed in the state. However, violent clashes between crop farmers and nomadic herders

over access to land and water resources have severely disrupted agricultural activities. These conflicts result in the destruction of crops, loss of livestock, displacement of farming communities, and increased poverty. The disruption of food production and livelihoods caused by these conflicts has led to declining food availability, heightened food prices, and reduced market access. Rural households, already vulnerable to food insecurity due to economic challenges and environmental factors such as climate change, are now further disadvantaged by violent disruptions. The increasing frequency and intensity of these clashes have put immense pressure on the agricultural sector in Oyo State, threatening its capacity to ensure food security for the region. These unresolved conflicts undermine the state's ability to achieve sustainable agricultural development and to ensure food security for its rural population. Though numerous studies have examined the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria, such as Adelakun, et al., (2015) focused on the socio-economic effects of farmer pastoralist conflict on agricultural extension service delivery in Oyo State, Nigeria. Eniola, et.al (2016) focused on transhumance pastoralists on farming activities in Oke Ogun area and Oyedokun and Lawal, (2017) focused on the management and resolution of the crop farmer and Fulani herdsmen conflict in Oyo state using community leaders without their studies being focused on Oke Ogun area and its direct impact on food production, livelihoods and market access at the local level. There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of this conflict on food security in Oyo State, particularly in rural communities. By addressing these gaps, the study will contribute to the development of context-specific solutions to the farmers-herdsmen conflict, ultimately enhancing food security in rural communities in Oyo State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims at investigating the impacts of farmers-herdsmen conflicts on food security in the rural communities in Oyo State, Nigeria.

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. identify the causes of farmers-herdsmen conflicts in rural areas;
- ii. investigate the effects of farmers-herdsmen food security in rural areas and;
- iii. explore mitigating mechanism to promote food security in rural areas

Literature Review

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria has garnered significant academic attention due to its profound impact on livelihoods and food security, particularly in rural communities. In Nigeria, where agriculture accounts for a significant portion of the economy and provides employment for rural populations, conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have disrupted agricultural productivity and exacerbated food insecurity (Adisa, 2012). Scholars attribute the intensification of the farmers-herdsmen conflict to several factors, including climate change, resource competition, and socio-political dynamics (Blench, 2004; Fasona & Omojola, 2005). Climate change, through desertification and droughts in northern Nigeria, has pushed nomadic herders southward into regions like Oyo State, leading to competition over arable land and water (Bello, 2013). This resource competition often leads to violent clashes, with devastating consequences for agricultural activities and food production (Usman and Eyo, 2022). Studies show that when farmlands are destroyed or abandoned due to conflict, food production declines, and

rural households experience increased poverty and hunger (International Crisis Group, 2018). The socio-economic impact of the conflict is well-documented. As farmers and herders clash over land, rural communities suffer from displacement, loss of livelihood, and destruction of critical resources like crops and livestock (McGregor, 2014). Several studies emphasize the role of poor governance, including weak conflict resolution mechanisms and unclear land tenure systems, in exacerbating the crisis (Olayoku, 2014). Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, once effective in maintaining peaceful relations, have weakened, allowing disputes to escalate into violence, further destabilizing food systems (Blench, 2004). Despite efforts to mitigate the conflict, including policies promoting ranching and grazing reserves, sustainable solutions remain elusive. Current literature largely focuses on the causes and consequences of the conflict but falls short of exploring local-level, context-specific interventions to improve food security in affected communities (Okeke, 2014). Furthermore, much of the existing research tends to focus on national-level policies without considering the unique environmental and social dynamics of regions like Oyo State. This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive examination of how the farmers-herdsmen conflict directly impacts food security in Oyo State's rural communities and exploring sustainable, locally adapted solutions to mitigate the conflict and enhance agricultural productivity.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on conflict theory providing a scientific framework for dissecting the causal factors, dynamics and its impacts on food security in rural communities especially in Oyo State, Nigeria. Karl Marx developed the Conflict Theory and expanded by sociologists such as Max Weber and C. Wright Mills. Karl Marx posits that society is in a constant state of conflict due to competition for limited resources. The theory suggests that individuals and groups within society will compete over scarce resources like land, water, and wealth, and that this competition often leads to conflict, particularly when there are power imbalances and inequalities. Contextually, the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Oyo State is characterised with the above description. A resource such as land and water which is critical to the farming and livestock activities is the issue in conflict. The intolerance attitude of farmers and herders in the usage of water and land resources contributed to the conflict escalation which directly impact food security in the state. The theory further identified survival strategy between the farmers-herdsmen conflict led to unhealthy competition over increasingly scarce resources and climate change induced a problem which is forcing the migration of Fulani herders to Southwest zone of Nigeria. Conflict Theory emphasizes that such competition for resources in an unequal social structure leads to conflict, which in this case manifests in violent clashes over land use and access to natural resources. The theory identifies the significance of power imbalances and inequality in fuelling conflict. These power dynamics exacerbate the conflict, as herders feel marginalized and farmers perceived the herders as threats to their livelihoods. Again, the conflict theory stated that social conflicts have broader implications for economic structures. In the case of the farmers-herdsmen conflict, the competition for land disrupts agricultural activities, leading to the destruction of crops, loss of livestock, and displacement of communities. These socio-economic disruptions have a direct impact on food security, as rural communities depend on farming for both sustenance and income. The destruction of agricultural output and the displacement of farming communities contribute to hunger, poverty, and reduced market access, all of which are central concerns in this study. The conflict theory is highly relevant to the study of causes and consequences of the farmers-herdsmen conflict but also offers insights into potential solutions such as addressing underlying inequalities

and power imbalances. By applying Conflict Theory, the study focuses on the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate the conflict, offering a deeper understanding of how to enhance food security in rural communities while mitigating the ongoing tensions between farmers and herders. Equitable resource management, sustainable agricultural practices, and inclusive governance will enhance food security and foster long-term peace in the region.

Methodology

A mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative research designs was adopted for this study. The quantitative research design involved the use of questionnaire technique while qualitative techniques involved interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) served as the primary sources of data while secondary data was retrieved from government white paper, textbooks and other relevant documents. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed to determine the population of the study. The first stage involved purposive selection of the two-third of the local government in Oyo State and the five local governments purposively selected. The specificity was based on the productivity of the land for farming and livestock rearing. Five (5) Local Government Areas selected purposively include Saki-West (383900), Iwajowa (1144500), Ibarapa North (409000), Iseyin (359100), and Oorelope (146100) (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2006). The sample for this study was five hundred and fifty (550) respondents purposively drawn from five (5) local government areas in the study area. Therefore, the percentage of population of each LG shows that Ibarapa North L.G = 11.9%. App= 12%, Oorelope L.G = 12.4 % App= 12, Iwajowa L. G= 12.3 %App =12, Saki West L. G= 32.6 %App= 33 and Iseyin L.G = 31.4 % APP= 31. The questionnaire was distributed accordingly, Ibarapa North L.G: 66, Orelope L.G:66, Iwajowa L.G: 66, Saki West L.G: 182 and Iseyin L.G: 170 questionnaires. The snowball sampling method was adopted to select herdsmen based on their dispersed nature and twenty (20) respondents were purposively selected. The twenty (20) respondents were drawn in this distribution: Three (3) community heads, two (2) security chiefs, three (3) leaders of Fulani two (3) leaders of traders, 5 farmers and four (4) traditional leaders. The questionnaire was subject to face and content validity by conflict experts who adjudged the instrument to be valid for use after which it was administered to 30 farmers and herdsmen outside the study area. The research instruments were subjected to test of internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's Alpha statistics. The Cronbach's Alpha obtained indicates a strong reliability value of 0.979 which shows that the instrument used were reliable and valid since Cronbach's Alpha value is more than 0.7. The 550 copies of questionnaire were purposively administered in each of the selected community within the section of the population while a total of 503 copies were returned

Data Analysis

Social-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Study Area

The table below shows the distribution of the respondents who participated in the study. The table shows (63%) males and (36.9%) females' participants. It shows the age range, (4.5%) between 50-above years old, (28.4 %) were 42-49 years old, (48.7%) were between 34 - 41 years, 26-33 years were (16.3%) and (1.9%) between the age of 18 – 41 years old participated in the study. Table 1 shows the marital status of the respondents, (20%) single, (17.8%) divorcees, (12.1%) widows, and (13.6%) not willing to state their marital status and (36.6%) respondents were married. Table 1 reveals the occupational distribution of the respondents; (42.7%) were into farming, (32.8%)

trading and (24.4%) were into herding. In the table, (27.2%) stayed in the study area for 11 – 20 years, (11.8%) have stayed for 1- 10 years and (28.4 %) stayed for 31 and above years.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Study Area

Sex	Frequency	Percentage	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Male	317	63	Farming	215	42.7
Female	186	36.9	Trading	165	32.8
Total	503	99.9	Herding	123	24.4
Age	Frequency	Percentage	Total	503	99.9
18-25	10	1.9	Length of Staying	Frequency	Percentage
26-33	82	16.3	1-----10	60	11.8
34-41	245	48.7	11-----20	137	27
42-49	143	28.4	21-----30	162	33.2
50 and above	23	4.5	31-----above	144	28.4
Total	503	99.8	Total	503	100.4
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage			
Single	98	19.4			
Married	185	36.6			
Divorcee	90	17.8			
Widow	61	12.1			
Not Willing	69	13.6			
TOTAL	503	99.5			

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Discussion of Findings

This table outlines the consequences of farmer-herdsmen conflicts on the supply chain and market cost of agro-pastoral products in the Oke Ogun area. Each consequence is paired with responses from participants, categorized into five levels: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D). The numbers next to each response indicate the frequency and percentage of respondents who chose each option. The analysis of the interpreted table shows that the majority (65.9%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that the conflict has contributed to rising product costs. A significant portion (83%) of respondents strongly agree or agree that the conflict has led to a shortfall in farm produce supply to the market while a notable percentage (46.3%) agrees or strongly agrees, a substantial portion (38.3%) disagrees or strongly disagrees, suggesting mixed views on the relationship between conflict and food insecurity. There is a higher level of disagreement (60.3%) regarding the impact of the conflict on meat quality, with only 30.4% in agreement. A majority (65.9%) agree that the conflict contributes to inflation in the area. Also, a high percentage (61.9%) of respondent agrees or strongly agrees that the conflict has led to an increase in chemical-related diseases. A combined 65% of respondents agree or strongly agree that there has been a reduction in cow-related products such as cheese, local milk, and skin. 63.7% agree or strongly agree that the conflict has increased the cost of farm produce. A majority

(55.2%) agree or strongly agree that the conflict has harmed economic activities in the region. A combined 65.2% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the conflict has destroyed livelihoods in the region. A majority (53.7%) agrees or strongly agrees that the conflict has reduced internally generated revenue in the area. The combined 54.4% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the conflict has led to the displacement of youths and investors from farming while 52.5% agree or strongly agree, 38.8% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating divided opinions on whether the conflict has increased humanitarian issues. A clear majority (76.7%) agrees or strongly agrees that the conflict has led to lower productivity and income for both farmers and herders. 64.4% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the conflict has hindered access to financial assistance. A majority (64.1%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that the conflict has led to farmers abandoning farming. High percentages (50.9%) disagree or strongly disagree that the conflict has discouraged investment in agro-allied areas. Significant majorities (85.9%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that the farmer-herdsmen conflict has contributed to a vicious circle of poverty in the region. Only a small percentage (11.8%) disagrees or strongly disagrees, indicating a strong consensus that the conflict exacerbates poverty. Large majorities (76.7%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that the conflict has led to outbreaks of hunger and disease. A smaller portion (17.4%) disagrees or strongly disagrees, highlighting the widespread belief that the conflict has caused significant public health and food security issues in the area.

The responses to this statement are divided while 46.5% of respondents agree or strongly agree that traders hoard available goods, 40.3% disagree or strongly disagree, and 13% are undecided. This suggests a split opinion on whether traders hoard products during times of conflict, with almost equal percentages supporting or opposing the idea. Increase in the vicious circle of poverty, the conflict is widely perceived as worsening poverty, with 85.9% agreeing. There is strong agreement (76.7%) that the conflict has caused food insecurity and health crises. Hoarding by traders, opinions are mixed, with nearly equal percentages of respondents agreeing and disagreeing on whether traders are hoarding available products, indicating a disputed or less clear impact. In essence, the table shows a consensus on the negative impacts of the conflict, particularly regarding poverty and food insecurity, but some aspects, like the hoarding of goods by traders, are less clear-cut. The key informant respondent, a 39-year-old farmer, Mr Timothy Oluleke who cultivated varieties of food crops such as maize, millet, cassava, yam, soya-beans in large quantities recounted his experiences in the hands of herdsmen; I plant maize, yam, cassava, millet and other crops, the herdsmen destroyed two hectares of cassava, 5 hectares of maize which led to the shortage of food and lost amounted to 1.4 million naira in the interval of two years. The herdsmen had caused much havoc in the land which may lead to shortage of food and loss of livelihood among us (KII Filed Report, 2024).

On the contrary, the Fulani/ Bororo believed their livestock is the cultural heritage linked with their survival and they had strong believed that their economic activities and livelihood can be conducted without restriction anywhere in the country. This view emboldened them to state it openly and to dare government decision sometimes especially anti-open grazing laws. For instance, Gan-Allah Fulani Development Association believed that livestock is the cultural and economic resources of the Fulani that must survive whether other culture or tribes believe it or not (Fulani Da'owuro).

Nonetheless, the herdsmen's incursion changed the geographical insecurity indices in this region from communal clashes, chieftaincy and political crises in the Southwest. Adesomoju in the Premium

Times (Feb 21, 2021) affirmed that the Ibarapa and Oke Ogun axes of Oyo State were hot bed of violent activities perpetuated by armed herdsmen. They are often responsible for the persistence kidnapping for ransom, killings and raping of women in the area... these violent attacks led to loss of lives due to unimaginable torture of their victims by kidnappers and bandits in the past few years. He avowed that, these kidnappers engaged in these nefarious activities for ransom ranging to several millions of naira. In furtherance of this study, loss of lives, strained and gross enmity between the host community and herders, increase in crime and insecurity are common features in the area. Again, the following insecurity indices; proliferation of small arms/light weapons, migration of farmers from the area, low productivity and income for farmers and herders, food insecurity and public trauma cum psychological induced stress in Oke Ogun Area revealed the dangers citizens live with. In view of the following, the high level of insecurity continues to impact negatively the farmers' income, reduction in internally generated revenue, and diverting fund to improve livelihood to security. This farmer-herders conflict had negative impacts on the economic activities of the people; traders had been robbed to the tune of 20 million aside raping and violence against women in the area. Some of the raped women were traders and farmers though, it was not pronounced for fear of stigmatisation and mockery among people. The findings are incongruent with the position of scholars such as Ogebe, Abah & Ligom (2019) and Brimah & Shittu (2020) that conflict between arable crop farmers and cattle herdsmen is over the use of agricultural land is pervasive and portends grave consequences for rural development in Nigeria. The above studies affirmed the grievous threats to the means of survival and livelihoods of rural communities.

Perception of Respondents on the Impacts of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict on Food Security in Oyo State, Nigeria

Table 2

S/N	Consequences of Farmer – Herdsmen Conflict on Supply Chain and Market Cost of Agro-pastoral Products in Oke Ogun Area	Frequency and Percentage				
		SA	A	U	SD	D
1	Rising cost of products	203(40.3)	129 (25.6)	17 (3.2)	43 (8.5)	111(22.1)
2	Short falls in farm produce supply to the market	242(48.1)	176(34.9)	----		85(16.9)
3	Increase food insecurity	128(25.4)	140 (20.9)	42 98.1)	81 (16.1)	112(22.2)
4	It affect the quality of meat	86(17.0)	67(13.4)	46(9.0)	129(25.6)	175(34.7)
5	It leads to inflation	121(24.1)	211(41.8)	34(6.7)	43(8.5)	94(18.7)
6	It increases chemical related diseases in the community	202(40.1)	110(21.8)	43(8.5)	88(17.4)	60(12.1)
7	Reduction in cow related product such as cheese, local milk and skin	159(31.6)	168(33.4)	27(5.4)	104(20.6)	45(9.0)

8	Increase in cost of farm produce	149(29.6)	172(34.1)	34(6.7)	86(17.0)	62(12.3)
9	Damages to the economic and activities in the study area	147(29.2)	131(26)	19(3.6)	92(18.0)	114(22.6)
10	Has led to destruction of means of livelihood	169(33.4)	160(31.8)	49(9.8)	63 (12.5)	62(12.2)
11	Reduction of Internally Generated Revenue	128(25.4)	142(28.3)	39(7.6)	108(21.4)	86(17.0)
12	Has scared away youths and investors from engaging in farming	146(29.0)	128(25.4)	40(7.8)	117(23.2)	72(14.3)
13	Increase vulnerable people and humanitarian problem	135(26.7)	130(25.8)	42(8.5)	87(17.2)	109(21.6)
14	Low productivity and low income for farmers and herders	216(42.9)	170(33.8)	-	46(9.2)	71(14.0)
15	Poor access to financial assistance	160(31.8)	164(32.6)	47(9.4)	63(12.5)	69(13.6)
16	Abandon of farming	174(34.5)	149(29.6)	-	89(17.6)	91(18.1)
17	Discouragement of investment in agro allied areas	80(15.9)	86(17.0)	81(16.0)	125(24.8)	131(26.1)
18	Reduction in household resources	129(25.8)	140(27.8)	24(4.7)	115(22.7)	95(18.9)
19	Increase in vicious circle of poverty	220(43.6)	213 (42.3)	11(2.1)	59(11.8)	-
20	Outbreak of hunger and disease	257(51.0)	130 (25.7)	28(5.6)	44(8.7)	44(8.7)
21	The available are hoarded by the traders	129(25.6)	105(20.9)	66(13.0)	74(14.7)	129(25.6)

Key: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree, SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; IN= Indecision
 Researchers Survey Report, 2024

Conclusion and Recommendations

The farmers-herders conflict in Oyo State, Nigeria, is not only a security issue but also a significant threat to food security. As rural communities rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods, resolving this conflict is essential for enhancing food production, promoting economic stability, and ensuring food security in the region. A comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict, including resource scarcity, weak governance, and climate change, is required to create a sustainable future for both farmers and herders. Addressing the root causes of the farmers-herders conflict is essential to enhancing food security in rural communities like Oyo State. Several strategies could be adopted to mitigate the conflict such as implementation of sustainable land use policies which will clearly define grazing reserves and protect farmland thereby preventing conflicts over resources. The establishment of grazing routes, ranching systems, and water points

for herders would reduce the need for migration and limit confrontations. Again, restoring the role of traditional authorities in conflict mediation, alongside formal governance structures, could help manage disputes before they escalate into violence. Integrating community-based approaches to conflict resolution that involve both farmers and herders could promote dialogue and mutual understanding.

Also, supporting both farmers and herders in adopting climate-resilient practices, such as improved irrigation systems, drought-resistant crops, and sustainable grazing practices, could reduce the impact of climate change on resource scarcity. This would enable both groups to maintain their livelihoods without resorting to conflict. Lastly, coordinated efforts between federal, state, and local governments are necessary to develop comprehensive policies that address land use, migration, and climate change in a way that promotes sustainable agricultural practices and prevents conflict.

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