Farmer-Herder Conflict and National Security in Nigeria: The Benue State in Perspective

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Abstract

The Farmer-Herder conflict in Nigeria has emerged as a critical challenge to national security, with its epicentre in Benue State. This study investigates the multifaceted dimensions of the conflict, its historical roots, and its implications for the broader security architecture of the country. Employing a comprehensive approach, the paper delves into the socio-economic, political, and environmental factors that contribute to the escalation of tensions between farmers and herders, unravelling a complex web of issues that threaten the stability of the State. The agrarian nature of Benue State, characterised by fertile land and a predominantly farming population, exacerbates competition for resources with nomadic herders seeking pasture for their livestock. This struggle over limited resources has intensified due to climate change impacts, population growth, and weak governance structures. The conflict not only results in loss of lives and property but also undermines social cohesion, exacerbates ethnic and religious fault lines, and poses a tremendous threat to food security. This study adopts an Environmental Security and Resource Scarcity approach as its framework. The study generated data using both primary method through interviews and secondary method through existing literature such as books, journals, internet sources, etc. The findings of the study revealed that there is a competition for scarce resources, particularly land and water, as burgeoning populations and climate change intensify the struggle between farmers and herders in Benue State. The study, therefore, recommends the development and implementation of sustainable land use policies that take into account the needs of both farmers and herders.

Keywords: Farmer-Herder, Conflict, National Security, Benue State, and Nigeria.

Introduction

Conflict is a precarious phenomenon that poses significant practical challenges to global peace and security. It has dispossessed many people of their life-supporting economic activities thereby flaring divisions and ruining once symbiotic relations among members of societies (Centre for Democracy & Development). The conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria has received attention by researchers, scholars and analysts. In recent years, however, there has been unprecedented change in the narrative, manner and contexts of the conflict as well as the trend of reporting such conflicts. Thus, farmer-herder conflicts, though not a new phenomenon is becoming increasingly lethal and dynamic (Bassett, 1998; Tonah, 2006; Bagu and Smith, 2017).

In Nigeria, the frontiers of the farmer-herder conflict have expanded to include states like Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa in the north central and Kaduna, Zamfara and Katsina in the north west as well as Adamawa and Taraba in the north east. These states have recorded casualties (Gever and Essien, 2019) and there is no indication of an immediate resolution of the conflicts. Considering its current magnitude, the farmer-herder conflict, which has now taken a new crime-related

dimension, it can be placed next to the Boko Haram insurgency in terms of its impact on Nigeria (Centre for Democracy & Development).

Nowadays, studies on farmer-herder conflict often depict herders as Fulani and farmers as non-Fulani. Some scholars have even gone to the extent of associating the herders as Muslims and farmers as Christians (Ademola- Adelehin, 2017; Thematic Report, 2017); a situation that has the potential to trigger religious uprisings. Worthy of note however, is that farmers and herders have lived a symbiotic life in the past (Bagu and Smith 2017); both contributing significantly to the nation's economy.

Therefore, Farmer-Herder conflict in Nigeria has become a pivotal concern for national security, and Benue State serving as a focal point for its examination. This protracted conflict, characterised by clashes between sedentary farming communities and nomadic herders, has profound implications for the stability and security of the nation (Adams, 2019). According to research by Mustapha (2019), the competition for dwindling resources, particularly arable land and water, has intensified tensions between agrarian communities and nomadic herders. Historically rooted in competition for resources, particularly arable land and water, the Farmer-Herder conflict has escalated due to demographic changes, climate variability, and weak governance structures (Ibrahim, 2017).

Benue State, situated in the heart of Nigeria, serves as a microcosm of the broader issue, encapsulating the complexities of the Farmer-Herder conflict. As noted by Abdullahi (2020), the state has experienced recurrent clashes marked by violence and displacement, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that fuel this conflict. The implications of the conflict extend beyond local communities, impacting national security by straining social cohesion and fostering an environment conducive to extremism (Ibeanu, 2018). As noted also by Onuoha (2020), the strife in this region underscores the intricate interplay of socio-economic factors, ethno-religious tensions, and competition for resources, contributing to a complex web of challenges that extend beyond local communities (Onuoha, 2020).

This paper covers the general introduction of the study and proceeded to review some literature on the subject matter. The study also delved into looking at the theoretical framework that guided the study. The methodology adopted was also taken into account as remote factors of the conflict were discussed, Historical roots of farmer-herder conflict in Benue State – Nigeria, the implications of farmer-herder conflict on the broader security architecture of Nigeria were also discussed, The study proceeded to discuss the socio-economic, political, and environmental factors of farmers-herders conflict in Benue State, it then unravelled the role of State and Non-State Actors in perpetuating or mitigating the conflict between farmers-herders in Benue State, Nigeria, farmer-herder conflict management approaches in Benue State and Nigeria were examined, the paper concluded by discussing findings, conclusion and recommendations respectively.

Literature Review

The Farmer-Herder conflict in Nigeria, particularly in the Benue State, poses a significant threat to national security, intertwining historical grievances, resource competition, and cultural differences. Academic research underscores the complexity of this conflict, highlighting its multi-faceted nature. According to Adebayo (2020), longstanding tensions between farmers and

herders, exacerbated by environmental challenges and demographic shifts, have led to increased violence and displacement.

Several studies underscore the economic and social implications of the conflict. Ojo and Agba (2019) emphasise the devastating impact on agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods, contributing to a cycle of poverty. The government's response, as analysed by Ahmed (2021), reveals a mixture of policy measures and security interventions. However, the effectiveness of these efforts remains a subject of debate, with critiques of inadequate implementation and enforcement.

The conflict's national security ramifications are evident, with concerns about its potential to escalate into broader instability. Adigun et al. (2022) argue that the Farmer-Herder conflict, if left unaddressed, could have far-reaching consequences for the stability of the entire nation. Understanding the conflict's dynamics in Benue State is crucial for formulating comprehensive and context-specific strategies to mitigate its impact on national security.

Theoretical Framework

The Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria is a complex issue that involves various factors, and different theoretical frameworks such as; Identity and Ethnoreligious Conflict approach; Governance and Political Economy theoretical perspective; and Security Studies and Conflict Resolution theory, as well as Social Conflict Theory, which can provide insights into different aspects of the conflict. However, this study adopts an Environmental Security and Resource Scarcity approach. The Environmental Security and Resource Scarcity approach is primarily associated with the work of Thomas F. Homer-Dixon. He is a prominent scholar who extensively explored the links between environmental stress and violent conflict. The key ideas were developed and gained prominence during the early to mid-1990s, particularly with the publication of his influential works. This framework emphasises the role of environmental factors, resource scarcity, and climate change in contributing to conflicts (Homer-Dixon, T. F, 1999).

The competition for limited resources, such as land and water, can be a significant driver of the farmer-herder conflict (Gleditsch, N. P, et al, 2007; Nnoli, O, 1980). Therefore, in Nigeria and particularly in Benue State, there is consistent friction between farmers and herders over farmlands and grazing areas, and this generates conflicts in a gigantic proportion. However, critics argue that Homer-Dixon's approach can be overly deterministic, suggesting a direct causal relationship between resource scarcity and conflict. This perspective might oversimplify the complex social, economic, and political factors that mediate the relationship between environmental stress and violence. Conflicts often arise from a confluence of factors, and reducing the causality to resource scarcity alone might neglect other critical variables.

Methodology

Benue State was selected for this study. Four Local Government Areas (LGAs), Guma Logo, Katsina-Ala and Ukum were chosen in the State based on the prevalence of farmer-herder conflict in the localities. Qualitative data was generated through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Personal Observation. In all, 20 KIIs were conducted, five from each selected Local Government Area in the State. The areas were sampled purposively based on the frequency and

the scale of the conflict. Apart from the above, secondary data were utilised through existing literature such as; books, journal articles, policy reports, and information from based-line data.

Table 1: The Distribution of the KIIs Across the Selected Local Government Areas in the State.

State		
Benue	**Local Government Area**	**No. of KIIs**
	Guma	5
	Logo	5
	Katsina-Ala	5
	Ukum	5
	Total	**20**

Source: Field-Survey, 2023.

The data obtained from these areas were subjected to content analysis. Ethical issues like consent of local authorities, ensuring the anonymity of the respondents, as well as the confidentiality of the responses, were respected at all stages of the research. During interviews, participants were reminded that participation was voluntary; they did not have to respond to every question, and they may choose to stop the interview at any time. All responses included in the final report were anonymised.

Remote Factors of the Conflict

i. **Tenure and Transhumance Insecurity:** Tenure insecurity relates to the conflict between farmers and herders, caused by multiple factors, such as population expansion, shrinking and drying up of water belts, changing agricultural production system and an absence of good governance (Muhammad, I., et al, 2015). In most of the study areas, crop farming in wetland areas has significantly increased, especially along animal watering points. In addition, extensive and excessive grazing has multiplied in recent times with 21,913.75 km2 in the northcentral states set aside for such (Centre for Democracy & Development). The movement of herders in search of fodder and water for their livestock is a usual practice.

    This movement often ends in the southern part of the country (Bassi, H. 2018). As the land in the far north becomes arid between February and May, pastoralists move down south for grazing, water and safety. However, this movement, which involves grazing along the open savanna and farms now creates serious farmer-herder tension because of the violent dimension that now accompanies the practice. It instigates perpetual conflicts, particularly in the north-central region (Bassi, H. 2018; Ibrahim, A. 2018; Olayide, O. E. 2017). The Nigerian state has often accused foreign herders from the Sahel region of invading settled farming communities in the northcentral part of the country (UNOWAS, 2018). The involvement of 'aliens' (i.e. the migratory herders from the neighbouring West African countries) in cattle rustling, banditry, armed robbery and kidnapping in the northwestern part of Nigeria provides reliable evidence of the nexus between transhumance and conflict in the region.

ii.   **Population Explosion and Environmental Scarcity:** Population explosion is a global phenomenon characterised by an unprecedented increase in the number of individuals (Smith, 2019). This surge in population has raised concerns about its impact on the environment, leading to environmental scarcity issues (Brown, 2020). The intricate relationship between population growth and environmental resources is a critical area of study (Johnson, 2021). These demographic changes contribute significantly to social conflicts in society.

According to the Centre for Democracy & Development, Nigeria's population has increased from less than 50 million in the 1950s to more than 200 million in 2021. Considering Nigeria's surface area of 91.07 million hectares, a landmass of about 923,768 km2 and a coastland of about 850 km2 (Amusan, L. et al, 2017), its estimated 206 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020) have overstretched the available land for expansion and production. Farming activities have expanded thereby making it imperative for the farmers to encroach into lands that were earlier earmarked as grazing routes and reserves. Moreover, water points and cattle routes have been infringed upon by farmers; increasing tension among users.

In addition, environmental and resource scarcity contribute to the rising farmer-herder feud. It has created conditions for the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups within the competition bracket (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014). Other sources of conflict linked to resource scarcity exacerbated by climate change can heighten socio-economic stressors and harm sources of livelihoods which could accentuate poverty, which can in turn spur conflict (Babatunde, 2019).

Historical Roots of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Benue State – Nigeria

The farmer-herder conflict in Benue State and Nigeria has deep historical roots, shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Colonial legacies play a pivotal role, with British colonial policies disrupting traditional land-use patterns, creating tensions between settled farmers and nomadic herders (Ibeanu, 2002). Land tenure systems imposed during this period have had lasting implications, contributing to resource competition and conflicts over territory (Ibeanu, 2002).

Ethnic and religious dimensions further complicate the conflict, with historical grievances and identity-based tensions exacerbating the already complex situation (Mustapha, 2011). The clash between settled agricultural communities and nomadic herders is intensified by economic shifts, as the transition from subsistence to commercial farming fuels competition for arable land and economic opportunities (Akpenpuun, 2018). Additionally, demographic changes, including population growth, have heightened pressure on limited resources, leading to increased disputes (Akpenpuun, 2018).

Inadequate governance, characterized by weak enforcement of land-use policies and ineffective dispute-resolution mechanisms, allows the conflict to persist (Mustapha, 2011). The historical roots of the farmer-herder conflict in Benue State and Nigeria underscore the complexity of the issue, emphasising the need for comprehensive and context-specific approaches to address its multifaceted nature.

The Implications of Farmer-Herder Conflict on the Broader Security Architecture of Nigeria

The implications of the farmer-herder conflict on the broader security architecture of Nigeria are profound and multifaceted, impacting various dimensions of societal well-being, economic stability, and political cohesion. Internally, the conflict has led to widespread displacement, creating a humanitarian crisis that strains resources and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities (Mustapha, 2011). The displaced populations often face inadequate living conditions and limited access to essential services, posing challenges to both state and national security.

Economically, the disruption of agricultural activities in conflict-affected areas has significant repercussions. Farmers and herders alike suffer economic losses, affecting food production and overall economic well-being. The economic impact ripples through the broader society, contributing to poverty and economic insecurity (Ibeanu, 2002). A 2017 report indicated that in Benue and Kaduna States an estimated $2.3 million or 47% of their internally generated revenue (IGR) in 2015 was lost to the conflict (Thematic Report, 2017). IGR is heavily reliant on rural agricultural production and considerable parts of the rural areas are marred by insecurity. Farming activities in those places are restricted to nearby farmlands due to the increasing spate of insecurity (Centre for Democracy & Development).

The security forces in Nigeria find themselves overextended due to the demands of managing the farmer-herder conflict. Deploying military and police resources to address the conflict diverts attention and resources from addressing other security challenges, potentially creating vulnerabilities elsewhere (Mustapha, 2011). Nigeria in general, is said to be losing an average of $13.7 billion annually to the farmer–herder conflict (Mercy Corps,2015). The crisis has exacerbated unemployment and economic hardship, putting rural dwellers into chronic penury (Centre for Democracy & Development). It also limits market development and economic growth by 'destroying valuable property, preventing trade, deterring investment and eroding trust between market actors' (Thematic Report, 2017). As reported by Amaza (2018), the conflict equally has a consequential effect on food (in)security

Ethnic and religious polarisation is a critical security implication. The conflict contributes to existing divisions within Nigerian society, fostering tensions along ethnic and religious lines. Such polarization undermines national unity, complicating efforts to build a cohesive and stable state (Mustapha, 2011). The narrative emerging from identity framers in the media and popular discourse further ignites the conflict. The protagonists in this saga are often presented as being nomadic Fulani cattle herders, who are mostly Muslims, against sedentary farming communities of several other ethnic extractions, who are often, but not always non-Muslims (Centre for Democracy & Development). This ethno-religious interpretation of the conflict is gradually gaining ground and making an indelible dent on the existing fragile Muslim-Christian relations in the country. Support for this claim comes from the recent attacks on northern Muslims resident in the southern part of the country as a reaction to the activities of "Fulani herdsmen" in those areas, (Bagu, C. & Smith, K;2017).

Ethnicity and ethnic chauvinism have permeated the fabrics of Nigerians to the extent that genuine attempts to solve the problems of national security and development are ethnically or religiously interpreted and misinterpreted

Food security is another concern as the conflict disrupts agricultural activities, leading to decreased production and increased food insecurity. This poses a threat to the well-being of the population and contributes to social unrest. The farmer-herder conflict has also led to regional spillover effects, exacerbating security challenges beyond state borders. The porous nature of borders in some regions allows the conflict to transcend national boundaries, contributing to regional instability (Ibeanu, 2002). To address these implications and ensure broader security, a comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed, encompassing conflict resolution, economic development, and governance reforms.

The Socio-Economic, Political, and Environmental Factors of Farmers-Herders Conflict in Benue State

The escalation of tensions between farmers and herders in Benue State, Nigeria, is a complex phenomenon driven by a confluence of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. Socio-economically, the competition for scarce resources, particularly arable land and water, has intensified as both farmers and herders seek to meet their livelihood needs. Population growth and changing economic dynamics, including a shift from subsistence to commercial farming, contribute to heightened resource competition (Akpenpuun, 2018).

Politically, issues related to governance, land tenure systems, and the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms exacerbate tensions. Weak governance structures and inadequate law enforcement allow disputes to escalate, contributing to a cycle of violence and reprisals (Ibeanu, 2002). Ethnic and religious dimensions further complicate the political landscape, as historical grievances and identity-based tensions contribute to the conflict's complexity (Mustapha, 2011).

Environmental factors, including climate change and resource scarcity, play a significant role. Changes in weather patterns and decreasing availability of grazing lands exacerbate the challenges faced by herders, leading to increased mobility and competition for resources (Olayide, 2017). Addressing the tensions requires a multifaceted approach, considering the socio-economic, political, and environmental dimensions. This includes sustainable resource management, equitable governance structures, and conflict resolution mechanisms that account for the complex interplay of factors contributing to the farmer-herder conflict.

The Role of State and Non-State Actors in Perpetuating or Mitigating the Conflict between Farmers-Herders in Benue State, Nigeria

The conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State, Nigeria, is significantly influenced by the actions of both state and non-state actors. The role of these actors can either perpetuate or mitigate the tensions, contributing to the complex dynamics of the farmer-herder conflict.

State actors, including government institutions and security forces, play a crucial role in shaping the conflict. In Benue State, inadequate governance, corruption, and the failure to implement and enforce effective land-use policies have contributed to the persistence of disputes (Umar & Salihu, 2019). State security forces, when deployed, can either exacerbate or alleviate tensions based on the nature of their interventions. In some instances, heavy-handed approaches may escalate the conflict, while proactive and impartial measures can contribute to resolution.

Non-state actors, such as community leaders, traditional authorities, and civil society organizations, also influence the conflict. Their involvement can either perpetuate or mitigate tensions depending on their capacity to mediate and facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties (Adibe, 2011). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups may play a crucial role in raising awareness, promoting conflict resolution, and addressing the root causes of the conflict. To mitigate the conflict, there is a need for collaboration between state and non-state actors. Policies that address land-use issues, enhance security, and foster inter-community dialogue are essential. Furthermore, the inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding efforts (Adibe, 2011).

Farmer-Herder Conflict Management Approaches in Benue State and Nigeria: A Comprehensive Analysis
The persistent farmer-herder conflict in Benue State, Nigeria, demands effective management strategies to address its complex and multifaceted nature. Various approaches have been employed by both state and non-state actors, aiming to mitigate tensions and foster sustainable peace. This analysis explores the key conflict management approaches and their implications for the resolution of the farmer-herder conflict.
State-Led Approaches

i. **Policy Reforms and Legislative Measures:** The Nigerian government has implemented policies and legislative measures to regulate land use, grazing, and conflict resolution. However, challenges in policy implementation, corruption, and inadequate governance structures have hindered the effectiveness of these measures (Umar & Salihu, 2019).

For instance, the Anti-Open Grazing Law enacted by Benue, Ekiti and Taraba States, which forbids pastoralists from grazing openly in undesignated routes and fields has only complicated and compounded the existing tensions and conflicts between farmers and herders. Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State signed the bill into law in 2017. Governor Darius Ishaku of Taraba State signed the Bill into law in 2018 while Former Governor Ayodele Fayose of Ekiti State also signed the Bill in 2018. These bills promoted the alienation of herders, even though some of them have lived in such states for over a century. Beyond legal measures, several other efforts have been made, and are still being made, in an attempt to resolve the conflict. Apart from the conspicuous efforts of NGOs in promoting community dialogue, state governments and religious leaders as well as community leaders are taking part in such efforts (Centre for Democracy & Development).

There have been several negotiations between state governments and the bandits for example in Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states. However, they have failed to yield any

fruitful results. The Dr. Ahmad Mahmoud Gummi peace and dialogue initiative which started in 2020, and remains ongoing, has also yet to prove useful. He is engaging the bandits in dialogue and preaching against them across different parts of the North-West.

ii.   **Security Deployment:** Deployment of security forces to conflict zones is a common strategy to maintain order. In Benue State, there were military deployments such as operations Ayem Akpatuma and Whirl Stroke. However, the heavy-handed approach has, at times, escalated tensions, emphasising the need for a more nuanced and community-sensitive security strategy.

iii.   **Peacebuilding Initiatives:** Government-initiated peacebuilding programs aim to facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties. While these initiatives seek to foster understanding and cooperation, challenges in gaining community trust and active participation persist.

Non-State Actors' Involvement

i.   **Community and Traditional Leaders:** Local leaders and traditional authorities play a crucial role in conflict resolution. Their involvement in mediation efforts and community dialogues is essential for reaching sustainable agreements and promoting reconciliation (Adibe, 2011).

ii.   **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** CSOs and NGOs contribute significantly through awareness campaigns, advocacy, and capacity-building programmes. They act as intermediaries between communities and the government, facilitating communication and promoting peaceful coexistence.

iii.   **Ethnic and Religious Dimensions:** The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is deeply rooted in ethnic and religious dimensions. Historical grievances and identity-based tensions add complexity to management efforts, necessitating nuanced approaches to address the root causes (Mustapha, 2011).

Discussion of Findings

The findings on the Farmer-Herder conflict in Benue State reveal a complex interplay of factors contributing to the heightened tensions and security challenges in Nigeria. The key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with 20 people from the four selected Local Government Areas of Guma, Logo, Katsina-Ala and Ukum, in Benue State, and the literature reviewed revealed the following findings:

i.   One key discovery is the competition for scarce resources, particularly land and water, as burgeoning populations and climate change intensify the struggle between farmers and herders. This underscores the pressing need for sustainable land-use policies and resource management strategies to alleviate the strain on both communities.

ii.   The study discovered the role of historical grievances, ethnic animosities, and economic disparities as significant catalysts for the conflict. Unresolved disputes and historical injustices have created a breeding ground for mistrust and hostility, further fueling the cycle of violence. Efforts to address the Farmer-Herder conflict must thus include

mechanisms for truth and reconciliation, fostering a sense of justice and equity among affected communities.

iii. The findings also underscore the inadequacies in security infrastructure and law enforcement, pointing to the necessity for improved surveillance, intelligence gathering, and swift response mechanisms. Strengthening security measures alone, however, is insufficient; a holistic approach encompassing economic development, education, and community engagement is imperative to address the root causes of the conflict.

iv. Ultimately, the findings emphasised the urgency of a comprehensive and collaborative strategy. National and regional authorities, alongside local communities, must work in tandem to implement policies that promote sustainable coexistence, economic prosperity, and social harmony, thereby safeguarding Nigeria's national security and fostering a more resilient and inclusive polity.

Apart from the interview findings, a body of literature data also revealed some valuable insights into the dynamics of the Farmer-Herder conflict in Benue State and the country at large. For instance, the study by the Centre for Democracy and Development has presented very wonderful insights into the conflict, thus:

> "In Benue State, farmer-herder conflicts have been a frequent occurrence which escalated from 2014 to date. The conflict reached its peak in 2018 after the enactment of the Anti-Open Grazing Law by the State Government that forced many herders into neighbouring Nasarawa State. The maxim wagaa or wausu (ranch or ruin your cattle) in the Tiv language became the new norm in Benue State. The activities of government security agents and livestock guards in the state also contributed to the intensification of the conflict. The conflict similarly assumed an ethno-religious dimension in the sense that Tiv farmers accused the herders of trying to wage a holy war with the sole intention of appropriating their farmlands. During an FGD session, the herders said they were treated as second-class citizens; an assertion also known as indigene-settler that is often pervasive in Nigeria. The Anti-Open Grazing law appears to usurp the herders' rights to land in favour of the indigenous farmers in Benue State. The move will potentially continue to ignite violence if the herders feel a continued sense of alienation."

Elsewhere in Nigeria, the story is not different from what is said and seen in Benue State. "In Kaduna State, for instance, the farmer-herder conflict heightened between 2012 and 2013, de-escalated between 2013 and 2019 but has recently re-emerged with intensity of attacks and heavy casualties in 2020. Owing to the thin dividing line between ethnicity and religion, the conflict in Kaduna State has taken on ethno-religious dimensions" (Centre for Democracy and Development).

The study further stated that;

> In Nasarawa State, farmer and herder conflict is reported to be associated with the spiralling effects of the unrest in the neighbouring Benue State. According to some respondents, on average, there was a daily movement of at least 50 herdsmen into Nasarawa State from the neighbouring Benue State from 2018-2019. This exerted pressure on existing resources in Nasarawa communities, heightening the risk of conflict. In addition to migrants from Benue State, herders also came to Nasarawa from Bauchi State in search of lush green pasture for their cattle as well as water, especially around the banks of River Benue. This competition for common resources in addition to ethnic violence between Jukun and the Alago from Keana has fanned the flames of conflict in the state (Centre for Democracy and Development).

From the above findings, it can be said that the Farmer-Herder conflict in Nigeria poses a tremendous threat to the nation's national security architecture, despite the stranded efforts being made by the government and non-state actors at different levels.

Conclusion

The Farmer-Herder conflict in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State, presents a dire threat to national security that demands immediate attention and comprehensive solutions. The persistent clashes between farmers and herders over dwindling resources have not only claimed countless lives but have also exacerbated existing socio-economic and ethnic tensions. The situation in Benue State serves as a microcosm of the broader challenge facing Nigeria.

Addressing this crisis requires a multifaceted approach that combines effective law enforcement, community engagement, and sustainable agricultural and pastoral practices. Strengthening security measures in affected regions is essential, but it must be complemented by efforts to foster dialogue and understanding between farming and herding communities. Additionally, promoting alternative livelihoods, investing in education, and implementing land-use reforms can help mitigate the root causes of the conflict.

Furthermore, collaboration between federal, state, and local authorities is paramount, along with international support and partnerships. Only through a concerted and coordinated effort can Nigeria hope to alleviate the Farmer-Herder conflict's strain on national security. By prioritizing peace-building initiatives and embracing inclusive policies, the nation can pave the way for a more stable and harmonious future, ensuring the well-being of its citizens and the integrity of the state.

Recommendations

Addressing the Farmer-Herder conflict in Benue State and its implications for national security requires a multifaceted approach. Based on the above findings, this paper makes the following recommendations that policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders could consider:

i.   **Traditional and Religious Leaders:** Traditional and religious leaders are important in community-level conflict resolution processes, especially between farmers and herders.

The best way to involve traditional leaders would be to give them statutory recognition and specific leadership functions. They are closer to the people at the grassroots and command their respect. Unfortunately, the crucial role which traditional rulers played in the resolution of conflict at the local level has been eroded, in the sense that the modern system of governance has usurped their power and influence. The efforts of the traditional leaders are constrained by this new system, which stripped them of their capacity to enforce laws or prosecute offenders.

ii.   **Conflict Resolution and Mediation:** Establish community-based conflict resolution mechanisms involving representatives from both farmer and herder communities. Encourage dialogue, mediation, and conflict resolution training to foster understanding and cooperation.

iii. **Resource Management and Land Use Policies:** Develop and implement sustainable land use policies that take into account the needs of both farmers and herders. Invest in resource management strategies to mitigate competition for land and water, including the establishment of grazing reserves and agricultural zones.

iv.   **Security Infrastructure Improvement:** Strengthen law enforcement and security infrastructure in conflict-prone areas. Provide training for security personnel on conflict-sensitive approaches and community policing to enhance their ability to prevent and respond to incidents.

v.   **Climate Resilience and Agriculture Support:** Implement climate-resilient agricultural practices and support programs to reduce vulnerability to environmental changes. Promote agricultural diversification, provide access to improved farming techniques, and invest in infrastructure to enhance productivity.

vi.   **Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Launch educational initiatives to promote understanding and tolerance among different communities. Foster awareness about the economic and social benefits of peaceful coexistence and the shared responsibility for national security.

vii. **Economic Development Initiatives:** Implement economic development programs in conflict-affected areas to create alternative livelihoods. This could include vocational training, job creation, and small-scale enterprise development to reduce dependency on traditional agricultural practices.

viii. **Truth and Reconciliation Efforts:** Initiate truth and reconciliation processes to address historical grievances and promote healing. Involve community leaders, religious figures, and other influential individuals to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation.

ix.   **Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration between different government departments, NGOs, and international organizations to address the conflict comprehensively. This includes cooperation on security, development, agriculture, and social initiatives.

x. **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of implemented interventions. This will help adapt strategies based on real-time feedback and lessons learned.

xi. **International Cooperation:** Collaborate with neighboring countries and international partners to share experiences and best practices. Seek support for regional initiatives that address common challenges related to transhumance and resource use.

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