

Identity Politics and Conflict Issues among Farmers in Ibarapa Area of Oyo State: Implications for Food Security

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Abstract

Conflicts between pastoral Fulani herdsmen and arable crop farmers in the Ibarapa Area of Oyo State, Nigeria have become phenomenal and a recurring decimal in recent years. Crises have continued to escalate with consequences for food security in the region and particularly in the nation because of the comparative advantage for food production which the area enjoys. The polyglot nature of Ibarapa and its rich arable savannah land is a potential recipe for ethnic conflict. This study investigated the identity politics and issues underlying ethnic clashes and skirmishes, and their impact on agricultural productivity and communal co-existence. The study employed qualitative method of data collection. Secondary information was collected through a survey of extant literature and was analyzed qualitatively to assess the dynamics of conflicts arising from crop damage, cattle theft and rustling and other critical issues. Thematic analysis was carried out through content analysis. The findings showed that competition over scarce resources (land and water) primarily drives social exclusion, heightens conflicts and complicates reconciliation. The study found out that disruption in ethnic and economic relations drastically alter the balance of food production and food security. It concludes on a multifaceted approach to addressing the conflicts including proper resource management, promotion of equitable access to resources and inclusivity concern in social and agricultural policy formulation and implementation to promote food security and sustainable development.

Keywords: Development, Farmer-herder conflict, Food security, Identity politics, Inclusivity.

Introduction

In Nigeria, disputes between farmers who cultivate arable land and pastoral Fulani herdsmen have become recurring and commonplace. Skirmishes of varying sizes appear to be occurring throughout the nation as a result of economic and ethnically motivated problems, especially those contestations involving land for arable and nomadic uses. Due to exclusivity of property claims among cohabiting ethnic nationals in Oyo State, instances of ethnic miasma are prevalent. Notably, the towns of Igbo Ora, Eruwa, Idere, Ayete, Igangan, and Tapa which are located in the Ibarapa area, which encompasses Ibarapa East, Ibarapa Central, and Ibarapa North have been experiencing ethnic and occupationally motivated conflicts. This occupational competition has

led to violent confrontations that threaten both agricultural output, food security and communal harmony and healthy existence (Adebayo et al., 2021). However, there are instances of intra-ethnic and intra-occupational crises cutting across cleavages in the zone, but the more pronounced are inter-ethnic and inter-occupational, involving sedentary Yoruba arable crop farmers and Fulani migrant herders.

These disputes have significant socioeconomic repercussions that affect food security. In addition to upsetting communal harmony and local farming activities, the conflicts exacerbate Nigeria's larger domestic interest and particularly, food security crisis. The livelihoods of many families are at risk as a result of the violence and instability that cause agricultural productivity to drop. Ethnic mistrust and tension that already exist are made worse by identity politics, which makes attempts to resolve conflicts even more difficult (Ogunleye & Adeyemo, 2020). Addressing the underlying causes of the disputes and advancing sustainable agricultural methods for food production require an understanding of these dynamics.

Disagreements among crop farmers and herders had traditionally proven worse by the inadequacy of local resource mobilization and management which materializes in unequal access to land. Potential attempts at reconciliation are obscured by the cyclical mistrust and animosity that have evolved from this. Given its relevance to food security, ethnic unity, and national stability, resolving the dispute between Fulani herders and crop farmers in Oyo State's Ibarapa area calls for a multipronged strategy. Therefore, it is necessary to focus attention on such issues of ethnic relation, tensions and food security in an area that is essential to Nigeria's agricultural economy. It may be possible to mitigate tensions and promote food security in a region that is vital to Nigeria's agricultural landscape (Adebayo et al., 2021; Ogunleye & Adeyemo, 2020; Ibrahim & Adetunji, 2022).

In Nigeria, agricultural production is essential to maintaining food security. Given that more than 70% of the population depends on agriculture for a living, the nation has a comparative edge in agricultural output. Roughly 51% of Nigeria's workforce is employed in this industry, which generates roughly 22.35% of the country's GDP (FAO, 2021). Nevertheless, despite its importance, Nigeria confronts a number of interwoven problems which reduce agricultural productivity, including crises among farming communities, inadequate agricultural infrastructure, inefficient land tenure systems, and the effects of climate change (FAO, 2021). Production and consumption are now significantly out of balance as a result of these problems. Reliance on food imports is the economic result with its aftermath felt in the nation's balance of payment.

The implications of low agricultural productivity extend beyond economic metrics; they directly affect food security. Food and Agricultural Organization (2021) projects Nigeria's population to reach 400 million by 2050, with the demand for food on the increase substantially. Contemporaneously, many Nigerians experience food crisis, malnutrition and excruciating hunger due to inadequate domestic food production capabilities. For instance, only 57% of the rice consumed in Nigeria is produced locally, leading to a deficit that is often filled by imports or illegal smuggling (FAO, 2021). This situation is aggravated by skyrocketing food prices and

inflation, which surged to 35.41% in early 2024 (WFP, 2024). The inability to meet local food demands not only threatens nutrition but also worsens poverty levels across the nation.

Identity Politics and Issues of Ethnic Crisis

Identity politics in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with ethnic issues, significantly impacting agricultural productivity and communal living. The country's diverse ethnic configuration, shaped by historical, social, and political developments, has led to a complex web of identity-based conflicts. Historically, colonial legacies had instituted a aura of tension, as the arbitrary boundaries drawn by colonial powers failed to consider the existing ethnic affiliations, leading to a competitive struggle for resources and political power among Nigeria's major ethnic groups (Abdu, 2011). This competition often manifests in violent clashes, particularly in regions where agricultural activities are central to the local economy.

The politicization of ethnicity has resulted in a zero-sum game where gains for one ethnic group are perceived as losses for another. This dynamic is evident in areas like Jos, Mangu area of Plateau State, Benue agricultural areas, the fringe of land along Southwest and Northwest Nigeria bordering Oyo, Kwara and Kebbi states vis a vis Benin Republic border, where historical coexistence has been overshadowed by recent violence driven by political elites who exploit ethnic identities for personal gain (Miller, 2024). As local governments favor certain groups over others, long-standing grievances surface, leading to violent confrontations that not only destroy lives but also disrupt agricultural production. Farmers are often caught in the crossfire of these conflicts, leading to reduced crop yields and loss of livelihoods, which further challenges food security in the region.

Moreover, the impact of these ethnic clashes extends beyond immediate violence; they create lasting divisions within communities. Ethnic segregation becomes entrenched as communities and social spaces are divided along identity lines, fostering an environment where economic cooperation becomes increasingly difficult (Miller, 2024). This fragmentation undermines communal efforts to enhance economic productivity and resilience against external shocks such as climate change. As young people grow up in these divided environments, they are less likely to engage in collaborative farming practices that are essential for sustainable agricultural development. Focusing the underlying issues of identity politics and ethnic clashes is crucial for restoring communal coexistence and enhancing agricultural productivity in Nigeria. By tackling the root causes of conflict and emphasizing shared interests over divisive identities, Nigeria can create a more helpful ecology conducive to agricultural growth and food security.

Theoretical Framework

Human Needs Theory offers a particularly suitable theoretical framework for this study. The theory posits that conflicts often arise when fundamental human needs such as identity, security, recognition, and participation—are threatened or unmet (Burton, 1990). In the context of Nigeria, where ethnic identities are deeply rooted and often politicized, conflicts between groups such as Fulani herdsmen and local farmers can be understood through this lens. The competition for land and resources is not merely a struggle for economic survival; it is also a struggle for

recognition and respect of cultural identities. When these needs are ignored or undermined, as they were, tensions escalate into violence, further worsening food insecurity as agricultural activities are disrupted and in most cases are suspended in view of the pervading unsecured work environment (Adelaja & George, 2019).

Another relevant theory is the Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes the role of group identity in shaping intergroup relations. According to this theory, individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In Nigeria, ethnic identities significantly influence how groups perceive each other and interact. The nation is seen as a medley of people who mix but never combine. The polarization between farmers and herders has led to an "us versus them" mentality, where each group views the other as a threat to its existence and relevance. This dynamic has resulted in violent clashes over resources and land use, as each group seeks to protect its interests and assert its identity (Amao et al., 2018). Understanding these identity dynamics is crucial for addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting peaceful coexistence.

The Resource Scarcity Theory provides insight into how competition over limited resources can lead to conflict. This theory suggests that when resources such as land and water become scarce due to population growth or environmental changes, competition intensifies among different groups (Homer-Dixon, 1994). In Nigeria's Ibarapa region, the increasing pressure on agricultural land due to climate change, migration and demographic shifts has heightened tensions between pastoralists and farmers. Understanding this relationship between resource scarcity and conflict is essential for developing strategies that promote equitable resource management and mitigate food insecurity.

As theorized by the human needs' scholars particularly, John Burton, conflicts often arise when fundamental human needs—such as identity, security, recognition, and participation—are threatened or unmet. In the context of the Ibarapa area of Oyo State, Nigeria, this theory is particularly apt to understanding the ongoing ethnic conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers. The competition for land and water resources has intensified due to population growth, migration and environmental changes, leading to clashes that disrupt agricultural productivity and threaten food security (Okunlola, 2023). As these groups vie for control over essential resources, their underlying needs for identity and security become increasingly compromised, resulting in a cycle of violence that attenuates stability in the region.

In Ibarapa, ethnic identities of both the Fulani herdsmen and the local farmers play a crucial role in shaping their interactions. The herdsmen's nomadic lifestyle often clashes with the sedentary farming practices of the local communities, creating a perception of threat to their way of life (Amao et al., 2018). This situation is compounded by historical grievances and socio-economic disparities that fuel resentment and mistrust between the groups. According to the human needs' theory, when these fundamental needs are not acknowledged or addressed, protracted conflict is likely to ensue (Burton, 1990). In this light, addressing the needs for recognition and security for both groups is essential for fostering peaceful coexistence and mitigating conflict.

Moreover, food security is intricately linked to these dynamics. The ongoing conflicts disrupt agricultural activities, leading to reduced crop yields and increased food insecurity among affected communities (Adelaja & George, 2019). As farmers abandon their fields out of fear of violence, their ability to meet basic nutritional needs diminishes. This not only affects individual households but also has broader implications for community stability and economic development in Ibarapa.

Understanding Conflict Dynamics

Conflict is a multifaceted phenomenon. It has political, sociological, economic, psychological facets among others. Conflict arises from a variety of factors, including competition for resources, historical grievances, and social inequalities. In many regions, particularly in Africa, conflicts often manifest as violent confrontations between different groups competing for land, water, and other essential resources. For instance, the ongoing clashes between pastoral Fulani herdsmen and arable farmers in Nigeria illustrate how resource scarcity can escalate into violence, driven by both environmental pressures and socio-political dynamics (Mastrorillo et al., 2016). These conflicts are further complicated by the legacy of colonialism, which has left behind arbitrary borders and divided communities imposed on ethnic formations, thereby intensifying competition and mistrust (Nnoli, 1978).

The Role of Identity Politics

Identity politics plays a crucial role in shaping the nature and intensity of conflicts. Ethnic affiliations have remarkably influenced individuals' perceptions of their rights to resources, including land; leading to a sense of entitlement that sparks violence when those perceived rights are threatened (Adetunji et al., 2020). In Nigeria, the Fulani herdsmen's identity as nomadic pastoralists often puts them at odds with sedentary farming communities, creating an "us versus them" mentality that creates tensions (Adeleke & Adebayo, 2022). This politicization of identity usually leads to social exclusion, where marginalized groups feel disenfranchised and resort to violence as a means of asserting their identity and claims to resources.

Consequences of Conflict

The consequences of conflicts extend far beyond immediate violence; they have profound implications for social cohesion and economic stability. In conflict-affected areas, agricultural activities are often disrupted due to violence, leading to food insecurity and economic decline (Brinkman & Hendrix, 2011). The destruction of infrastructure further complicates recovery efforts, making it difficult for communities to partake in productive engagements, social gathering, access markets or obtain essential supplies (FAO, 2022). Additionally, its psychological toll on affected populations can lead to long-term trauma and social fragmentation. As communities become polarized along ethnic lines, rebuilding trust and fostering cooperation becomes increasingly challenging.

Conflictual Identity Relations in Nigeria

Identity politics in Nigeria has emerged as a significant force shaping the political landscape and societal interactions among various ethnic and religious groups. Defined as political behavior motivated by a group's shared identity—such as ethnicity, religion, occupation or gender—identity politics has often led to polarization and exclusion of certain groups, particularly during electoral processes (Macedo, 2005). In Nigeria, the mobilization of voters along ethnic and religious lines has been evident in recent elections, where political parties strategically appeal to specific identities to secure votes. This practice not only neglects critical national issues like economic development and security but also fuels inter-group tensions and violence, as seen in the sharp divides during the 2019 general elections (Okafor, 2019). The implications of this phenomenon are profound, as it can undermine governance quality by prioritizing loyalty to ethnic or religious affiliations over merit and competence (Akinola, 2020).

The roots of identity conflict in Nigeria can be traced back to a combination of factors such as intolerance, activities of conflict entrepreneurs, and ethnic profiling (Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations, 2023). The colonial legacy has left behind a fragmented society where ethnic identities have been politicized, leading to a struggle for dominance among various groups (Otite, 1979). This struggle often manifests in violent confrontations that further entrench divisions within communities. The consequences of such identity conflicts are severe, resulting in political polarization, loss of lives and property, and a decline in national cohesion (Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations, 2023).

Moreover, the youth population in Nigeria plays a critical role in the dynamics of identity politics. With approximately ninety-five million young people representing nearly 45% of the total population, their exclusion from governance; albeit the legislation on youth inclusiveness. The political terrain has made them susceptible to manipulation by political elites who exploit ethnic and religious sentiments for their gain (Akinyetun, 2024). This manipulation perpetuates cycles of conflict and weakens national integration efforts. Research indicates a significant positive correlation between identity politics and group conflict among Nigerian youths, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive governance that addresses their concerns while promoting unity (Akinyetun, 2024).

To challenge the divisive effects of identity politics on national integration, scholars argue for a shift toward promoting justice, equity, and fairness in governance (Wonah, 2010). Establishing institutions that foster dialogue among diverse groups can help rebuild trust and cooperation essential for national cohesion. Additionally, strengthening commissions focusing on identity mobilization and national integration could promote narratives of unity among Nigerians (Akinyetun, 2024). By addressing the underlying issues related to identity politics while fostering an inclusive political culture, Nigeria can work towards overcoming its challenges related to conflict and division.

Profile of Conflicts in Ibarapa Area of Oyo State

Ethnic conflicts between crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen in the Ibarapa area of Oyo State, Nigeria, have been marked by a series of violent incidents that have escalated over the years. These clashes typically arise from disputes over land use and resource competition, leading to significant socio-economic consequences for both communities. Below is a profile of notable incidents of farmer-herder conflicts in Ibarapa.

One of the most shocking incidents occurred in January 2021 when Tajudeen Omideyi, a farmer from Igangan, lost his brother after a confrontation with Fulani herders. After chasing some Fulani women off his cashew farm, his brother was attacked, tied to a tree, and beheaded. This brutal act highlighted the escalating violence and lack of accountability among the herders, (Omideyi, 2021). Such extreme violence serves as a grim reminder of the deteriorating security situation in the region.

Farmers in Ibarapa have consistently reported cases of crop destruction due to herdsmen allowing their cattle to graze freely on farmland. For instance, in December 2020, a farmer's barn was set ablaze by herders after he confronted them about their cattle damaging his crops. This incident resulted in the loss of an entire year's harvest and led to physical assaults on the farmer, illustrating the severe repercussions of these conflicts (Omideyi, 2021). The destruction of crops not only affected the individual farmers but also threatened food security in the community.

The rise of kidnapping for ransom has become a critical issue in Ibarapa, often linked to the farmer-herder conflicts. Initially starting as retaliation or reprisal against farmers, kidnapping has evolved into organized crime. Reports indicate that many farmers have been abducted, with ransoms demanded by armed groups that exploit the chaos created by these ethnic tensions (Adeyemo et al., 2024). This trend has instilled fear among farmers and further complicated the already volatile relationship between the two groups.

Following various violent encounters, local farmers expressed fears of reprisals if prominent herder leaders returned to Ibarapa after being expelled. For example, after the expulsion of Seriki Saliu and Iskilu Wakili—two influential Fulani leaders—farmers worried that their return could lead to renewed violence and further loss of life (Omideyi, 2021). This ongoing cycle of fear perpetuates distrust between communities and complicates efforts toward reconciliation and peace building.

Reports have also surfaced regarding sexual violence and harassment attributed to herders against women in farming communities. These incidents contribute to the overall atmosphere of fear and hostility between the two groups. In surveys conducted among farmers in Ibarapa, many reported experiences of threats and violence not only against their property but also against their families (Adeyemo et al., 2024).

Such violations sustain tensions and highlight the urgent need for comprehensive conflict resolution strategies that address both immediate security concerns and underlying socio-economic issues affecting the Ibarapa region. The underlying causes of the conflict are multifaceted. A significant factor is the demographic pressure resulting from population growth,

which has increased the demand for land for both farming and grazing (Okunlola, 2023). Additionally, inadequate access to grazing reserves has exacerbated tensions, as herders are forced to seek alternative grazing areas that often overlap with farmland (Nigerian Journal of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology, 2023). Revenge attacks also play a critical role in perpetuating the cycle of violence, as grievances from previous conflicts lead to retaliatory actions that escalate hostilities (Amao et al., 2018). Furthermore, environmental issues such as climate change have altered traditional grazing patterns, pushing herders into new territories and increasing competition with farmers (Mbow et al., 2020).

The impact of these conflicts on agricultural productivity is profound. Studies indicate that conflicts have led to significant reductions in crop yields and income for affected farmers. For instance, research shows a 62% negative impact on the income and standard of living of farmers due to these conflicts (Amao et al., 2018). The fear of violence has deterred many potential farmers from engaging in agricultural activities, leading to decreased food production and heightened food insecurity in the region (Adelaja & George, 2019). Moreover, the destruction of property and loss of livestock during conflicts further diminish the economic viability of farming in Ibarapa (Okunlola, 2023).

Another significant cause of conflict is the competition for resources. When groups or individuals perceive that they are competing for limited resources—be it land, water, or financial assets—tensions can arise (Tonah, 2006). This is particularly evident in agricultural settings where farmers and herders vie for land use. Structural conflict theory posits that such competition is built into the organization of society itself, where inequalities and social exclusion can exacerbate tensions (Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000). The perception of scarcity often leads to aggressive behaviors as groups fight to secure their interests, resulting in ongoing cycles of conflict.

Differing priorities and values also contribute significantly to conflict. Individuals or groups may prioritize different outcomes based on their values or beliefs, which can lead to clashes when those priorities come into direct opposition (SAGU, n.d.). For instance, a farmer may prioritize crop yields while a herder prioritizes access to grazing land. Without mutual understanding and respect for each other's values, these differing priorities can lead to disputes. It is essential for parties in conflict to engage in dialogue that seeks to understand these differing values and find common ground.

Strong emotions often play a critical role in escalating conflicts. Emotional responses often stem from past experiences and traumas that influence how individuals react in conflict situations. When emotions run high, rational thinking may be compromised, making it difficult for parties to negotiate their differences effectively. Emotional attachment to the natural place of birth by Yoruba ethnic extraction and similar attachment to itinerant pastoral lifestyle of the migrant Fulani in the semi savannah landscape of Ibarapa area create fertile ground for conflictual and antagonistic relationship among farmers in the area.

Food Security

Food security in Nigeria has become a pressing issue occasioned by a combination of factors including poverty, climate change, conflict, and poor agricultural practices. Recent analyses indicate that over 100 million Nigerians are currently facing food insecurity, with 18.6 million experiencing acute hunger (WFP, 2024). The rising food inflation rate, which surged to 35.41% in January 2024, further complicates the situation, making it increasingly difficult for many citizens to access sufficient and nutritious food (NESG, 2024). The government's response has included plans to distribute fertilizers and grains to farmers, but experts argue that these measures alone will not address the systemic issues plaguing the agricultural sector (Premium Times, 2024).

One of the primary drivers of food insecurity in Nigeria is the ongoing conflict between pastoralists and farmers. This conflict not only disrupts farming activities but also instills fear among agricultural workers, particularly women, who may avoid farming due to concerns about violence and sexual assault (Adelaja & George, 2019). The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has also significantly impacted food production by displacing communities and limiting market access (Adelaja & Weatherspoon, 2020). These conflicts contribute to rising food prices and aggravates malnutrition rates among vulnerable populations, especially children (FAO, 2020). As insecurity continues to undermine agricultural productivity, addressing these conflicts becomes crucial for improving food security.

Climate change further complicates Nigeria's food security landscape by altering rainfall patterns and increasing the frequency of droughts and floods. These environmental changes have detrimental effects on crop yields and livestock production, disproportionately affecting rural communities that rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods (Mbow et al., 2020). Implementing climate-smart agricultural practices is essential for building resilience against these challenges. However, current efforts are hampered by inadequate infrastructure for storage and transportation, leading to significant post-harvest losses—estimated at over 40% of total production (Premium Times, 2024). Addressing these infrastructural gaps is vital for enhancing food availability and reducing waste.

To achieve sustainable food security in Nigeria, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This includes investing in agricultural technology, improving supply chain logistics, and promoting gender equality within the agricultural sector (Lagos Food Bank, 2024). Empowering women farmers can significantly enhance productivity and contribute to poverty alleviation. Furthermore, comprehensive policies that address the root causes of conflict and promote inclusivity are essential for fostering a stable environment conducive to agricultural development. By prioritizing these strategies and collaborating with various stakeholders—including government agencies, NGOs, and international partners—Nigeria can work towards ensuring that no citizen goes hungry.

Nexus of Conflict Dynamics, Identity Politics and Food Security

The nexus of ethnic identity, ethnic conflict, and food security in Nigeria is a complex interplay that significantly impacts the livelihoods and well-being of communities. The relationship between ethnic conflict and food security is cyclical; conflicts can lead to food insecurity while food insecurity can exacerbate existing tensions, as an hungry man is an angry man. For instance, violent conflicts have been shown to decrease food consumption scores by approximately 16% among affected households (de Chaisemartin & D'Haultfoeuille, 2020). In Nigeria, the destruction of crops and livestock during conflicts not only reduces immediate food availability but also disrupts long-term agricultural productivity. This situation is particularly dire in conflict-prone areas where local economies are heavily reliant on agriculture for sustenance. The inability to produce sufficient food leads to increased reliance on food imports and humanitarian assistance, further entrenching communities in cycles of poverty and vulnerability (WFP, 2024).

Moreover, social inequalities rooted in ethnic identity can heighten vulnerability to food insecurity. Marginalized ethnic groups often face systemic discrimination that limits their access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and agricultural support (PreventionWeb, 2023). These disparities have resulted in fragile livelihoods that are ill-equipped to withstand shocks such as conflict or environmental changes. For instance, women from marginalized ethnic groups may be disproportionately affected by food insecurity due to cultural barriers that restrict their participation in agricultural decision-making (PreventionWeb, 2023). This systemic exclusion not only perpetuates cycles of poverty but also fuels resentment and conflict among different ethnic groups vying for limited resources.

Prognosis for Sustainable Food Security.

To achieve sustainable food security in the Ibarapa area, it is essential to implement effective resource management strategies that address both agricultural productivity and conflict resolution. Establishing designated grazing reserves for Fulani herdsman can help mitigate competition for land and water resources, allowing both pastoralists and farmers to coexist more peacefully (Adelaja & George, 2019). Additionally, improving irrigation systems and investing in water management technologies can enhance agricultural output while reducing dependency on rainfall. The Nigerian government should also prioritize the development of infrastructure, such as roads and storage facilities, to facilitate better access to markets and reduce post-harvest losses, which currently account for a significant percentage of agricultural produce (Punch Newspapers, 2024). By adopting these strategies, the region can improve its agricultural resilience and ensure a more stable food supply.

Equitable access to resources is vital for reducing tensions between farmers and herders while enhancing food security. Policymakers should focus on revising land tenure systems to ensure that both groups have secure rights to land and resources (Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2024). This could involve implementing community-based resource management practices that allow local stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes regarding land use. Additionally, providing financial support and access to credit for marginalized groups can empower them to invest in their agricultural practices. By leveling the playing field and

addressing historical grievances related to resource allocation, communities can work together more effectively to prevent conflicts from arising.

Incorporating inclusivity in agricultural policy formulation is crucial for fostering long-term peace and food security in Ibarapa. Policymakers should engage local communities—both farmers and herders—in the decision-making process to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed (Kungaba & Ibietan, 2021). This participatory approach can lead to more effective policies that reflect the realities on the ground and promote cooperation among different ethnic groups. Additionally, policies should focus on enhancing agricultural productivity through investments in infrastructure, technology, and education tailored to the specific needs of the community. By prioritizing inclusivity in policy formulation, Nigeria can create a more cohesive society where diverse groups work collaboratively toward common goals.

Establishing platforms for dialogue between conflicting groups is another critical recommendation for achieving sustainable food security. Facilitated discussions can help build trust and understanding between Fulani herders and local farmers, allowing them to address grievances constructively rather than resorting to violence (Amao et al., 2018). Community leaders, NGOs, and government representatives should collaborate to create safe spaces for dialogue where participants can share their concerns and negotiate solutions. Additionally, implementing conflict resolution mechanisms—such as mediation or arbitration—can provide structured approaches to resolving disputes before they escalate into violence. These efforts will contribute to a culture of peace and cooperation within the community.

Investing in education and capacity building is essential for long-term conflict resolution and sustainable food security enhancement. Providing training programs for both farmers and herders on modern agricultural practices, conflict resolution techniques, and sustainable resource management can empower communities to adapt to changing circumstances (Idrisa et al., 2008). Furthermore, educational initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance and understanding among different ethnic groups can help reduce prejudice and foster social cohesion. By equipping communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate challenges collaboratively, Nigeria can build resilience against future conflicts while enhancing food security.

Implications for Policy Development

In order to effectively address these conflicts, it is essential to engage in dialogue that recognizes the identities and needs of both groups. This dialogue should aim to foster mutual understanding and cooperation, creating an environment where both herders and farmers can coexist peacefully while managing shared resources. Such an approach not only addresses immediate tensions but also lays the groundwork for long-term stability and food security.

In addition to fostering dialogue, implementing policies that promote equitable access to resources is crucial. This includes developing sustainable land management practices that accommodate both pastoralists and farmers, ensuring that their needs are met without compromising food production (Adelaja & George, 2019). For instance, establishing designated grazing reserves can help reduce competition for land while providing herders with secure areas

for their livestock. Furthermore, investing in agricultural infrastructure—such as irrigation systems, storage facilities, and transportation networks—can enhance productivity and reduce post-harvest losses

The role of education and capacity building cannot be overlooked in this context. Providing training programs for farmers on modern agricultural practices can significantly enhance productivity and resilience against external shocks such as climate change or conflict (Idrisa et al., 2008). Additionally, educating communities about conflict resolution strategies can equip them with the tools needed to address grievances constructively rather than resorting to violence. By focusing on education and capacity building, stakeholders can foster a culture of collaboration that promotes both food security and social cohesion.

Moreover, addressing food security in Ibarapa must involve a comprehensive evaluation of existing agricultural policies. The Nigerian government has made strides in promoting agricultural development through various initiatives; however, these efforts often lack coordination among federal, state, and local levels (Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2024). Strengthening institutional frameworks that facilitate collaboration between different levels of government is essential for implementing effective food security strategies. This includes involving local communities in decision-making processes to ensure that policies are tailored to their specific needs and challenges.

In conclusion, achieving food security in the Ibarapa area amidst ongoing ethnic conflicts necessitates a multifaceted strategy that prioritizes dialogue, equitable resource management, education, and coordinated policy efforts.

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