



Herders Farmers Crisis and Food Security in Nigeria- A Case of Benue State.

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Abstract

Food security is an area of research that is gaining the attention of scholars, because of its importance to human survival. However, there is limited scholarly interventions on how the unabated activities of herder's farmer's crisis as affected food security in Nigeria, and Benue state in particular. The focus of this study is to identify and interrogate the triggers of herder's farmer's crisis in Benue state, and how it has impacted on the quality and quantity of food in the state. The sample comprised 1600 farmers who were selected through a multi-stage cluster technique. The analysis for the study was done using simple percentage and mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were used to describe demographic and other salient information in the data. The multiple Standard Regression was performed to determine the impact of herder's farmer's crisis on food security in Benue state. Results revealed among others that the location of the state within the tropical rain forest which has provided it with arable lands was a motivational factor for herdsman incursion to provide food for their herds. Findings also showed that the incursion of the herders into Benue state came with negative implications such as limited agricultural output that as resulted in food scarcity and shortage. We also found out that the brazen attacks on local indigenes on their farmlands had severely discouraged them from going to their farms, while some had found alternative in other unproductive vices. Such a findings are wakeup call for political leaders to come up with holistic and honest strategies such as confinement of the herds in one location, instead of open method that is in practice. Kinetic approach could also be applied to curb the expansionist tendency of the herders for the sake of peace, and to make the state and the country food secured and sufficient.

Key words: Herders, Farmers, Crisis, Food security, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria has been plagued with different security challenges that are gradually making the country to lose its pride of place among the comity of nations. Nigeria, according to Brosche & Elfyrsson

(2012) is a country that once pride herself as the giant of Africa but has been unexpectedly brought to her kneel by the overwhelming security challenges. The security issues ranges from Boko-Haram Insurgency, Armed Banditry, Herder's- Farmers Conflicts, Kidnaping among others. A cursory historization of the past achievement of Nigeria in terms of military might, is that of a country that had played a pivotal interventionist role in ensuring sub-regional security. For instance, Olufemi (2021) noted that the establishment of ECOMOG was a direct initiative of Nigerian government under the leadership of Gen. Ibrahim Babaginda military regime. The primary reason that informed its establishment was to introduced peace and security in troubled and wanton parts of West Africa, success was archived in this regard in Liberia, Sierra-Loen among others during its formative years. Conversely, Nigeria that once possessed the capability to secure not only her territory but that of the whole West Africa, the reality of the present time, is a countrygrappling with a seemingly unsurmountable internal security quagmire. It is often said that an ambience void of security of lives and property could largely serve as discouragement to prospective investors, hindered infrastructural development, destabilized farming activities (Erondu, & Nwakanma, 2018).

Abamyan, Gwambeka, and Aver (2020) opine that agricultural sector, is the largest employer of labour in Nigeria because it is not age bound, as different categories of people could freely engage in it, either on a commercial or subsistence basis. By reason of difficulty in getting white collar job after leaving school, a teeming number of Nigerian youths seems to have found solace in farming activities to safe themselves from the stigma of joblessness. Those that embarked on agricultural activities on a commercial basis, apart from making their own profit, have also meet the food demand of consumers that are not given to commercial farming or that are not inclined to farming activities, hence balancing the equation.

Benue State is unarguably branded as the "food basket of the nation". Because of the rich arable land in the state and the desire, passion, and zeal of the indigenes to explore the opportunity that was given to them by nature and providence. But the burgeoning cases of herder's farmer's crisis in the state seems to have affected agricultural output and food security of the state. Olufemi (2021) argues that the conflicts between the herder's and local farmers started in 2015, and as snowballed into a serious problem of food security. He argued further that, the body language of security personnel seems to have served as encouragement to the herders, who brazenly carry out their nefarious activities with utter impunity. The state of Benue was in the time past reputed for calmness, peace and serene with huge agricultural potential before the incursion of the marauders into the state, an action that the local indigene sees as serious affront taken too far. The concept of food security according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), hinges on all requirements needed to access sufficient and nutritious food for a healthy and functioning life (FAO, 2015). The major aim of food security is to ensure individual access to adequate food always needed and utilization of such food to meet body growth and development. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations identified four components of food security to be: availability, access, utilization and stability and these components must be simultaneously satisfied to meet it objectives.

The major problem confronting food security in Nigeria today is the Herders-Farmers conflict. For example, there is shortage of food supply that has resulted in non- availability, hence increases prices of available one by the reason of such crises (Ogbette, *et al*, 2018). The conflict seems to have become a source of discouragement to local farmers in embarking on faming activities because most of them are pessimistic of low turnout, or zero return on their labour and investment.

Farmers in Benue state have been seriously destabilized and largely demoralized from doing what they know how to do best, a situation that have potential of posing a big threat to food security in the state in particular and the country in general. The government efforts at all levels in addressing the crisis has done little to salvage the situation as affected areas are still displaced, economically stagnated and underdeveloped (Olufemi, 2021). An examination of the background source of the crises is such that was propelled by a search for pasture by the pastoralist in a domain different from, and better than their own in terms of herds feed (Awotokun & Nwozor 2020). Scholars such as Erondu, and Nwakanma, (2018) noted that the movement of the herder's into the state has expansionistic connotation and not just for herd's feed. The two submissions above would, however, serves as major direction for this study.

Kubiat (2019) gave a further insight on the instigators of the crisis, and aptly submitted that the conflict resulted from the displacement of herders due to climate change in their ancestral

home of northeastern part of the country. This change in climate in the northeastern region according to Odoh and Chilaka (2012) has made the herdsman to move from their communities seeking for pasture and fertile land for their herds to graze against their own dry and unfertile land. In the process of their migration, they find refuge in north central region forcefully mapping out their own grazing land or seek temporary locations within an array of fertile land to feed their herds on the lands belonging to local indigenes. It is this unexpected encroachment by herdsman into those farmlands that have prompted the unending clash between the herdsman and farmers. The conflict between herdsman and farmers is a twin evil with both social and economic consequences. The conflict according to Owoeye (2021) has destroyed communities leaving them displaced, (women and children inclusive), destroyed the source of livelihood of farmers, endangered the food availability of the nation. While the conflict has been on the increase since it began, there is barely any part or zone of the country that has not suffered from the effects of the crisis in terms of food scarcity and inaccessibility (Brosche & Elfversson, 2012).

The peculiarity of the state where most of the population are either subsistence or commercial farmers occasioned by the arable land bestowed by providence is well indicative of the fact that, the state stand a better position to be food self-sufficient, a feat the country at large could leverage on. But disturbingly, the situation in the state, is that of despair, discouragement on the part of the indigenes who suddenly lack courage to work on their farmland due to fear of attack, by unknown gun wielding men. Apart from the commoners that are mostly affected by the crisis, the same could be said of the elite, a case in point according to Olufemi (2021) was the open attack on the state governor by suspected herdsman while on his farm near Tyo-mu along the Makurdi-Gboko highway. The governor was quoted to have said that 'If I can't go to the farm as governor with the entire security around me, then who else can go to the farm?'. The crisis between the herder's and farmers seems to be one of the biggest problems threatening food production and security in Benue state- Nigeria, because of the audacious way the herders are perpetrating their activities. Without doubt, human beings need food in terms of quality and quantity to survive, so it is understandable that the food security is an indispensable need of man. The above assertion was corroborated by Ogbette *et al* (2018) who submitted that the most prevailing issue in human developmental process in Nigeria is inadequate food supply that has resulted to malnutrition, hence reducing the quality of life of the people. Benue State 'the food basket of the nation' is one of Nigeria's most resourceful states as it is a major source of food production in Nigeria (Ajibefun, 2018). Taking into consideration the increasing cases of herder's farmers crisis in the state, this study undertook the task of analysing its implication on food security. Thus, the major question, which the paper contended with, is how has the crisis between herdsman and farmers affected food security in Benue state- Nigeria?

Theoretical Exposition: Eco-Violence Theory (EVT)

The eco-violence theory was popularized by Homer-Dixon in 1942, the main crux of the theory is premised on the assumption that reduction in available resources and unequal access to resources often leads to scarcity, this however causes a large number of the population to migrate to a new area which often triggers conflict as a result of scarcity of resources. The struggle for scarce resources instigated by one group against the other more often than not could lead to a condition of deprivation and violence (Blench, 2010).

Within the context of herder's/farmers conflict, the eco violence theory according to Adogi (2013) helps to capture a concise understanding into the nature and driving force of the clashes between the herders and local farmers in Benue state. Limited natural resources resulted in heightened competitive stakes being placed on available natural resources by communities which has tendency to escalate into intensified violent conflict. Vital to the assumption of this theory is that competition over scarce ecological resources leads to conflict. This could imply that the migration of herder's to Benue state was informed by the availability of huge resources that could serve the needs of the herder's. The theory is relevant to the study because it would help to explicate the issues surrounding herder's farmer's conflict in Benue state with it attendant implications on food security in the state.

Food Security a Conceptual Exposition

In terms of food production and poverty, food security is a very essential factor. It has been defined by various scholars in various ways. Food security is a goal that national and international

organizations have tried to achieve. The term food security has been used overtime to mean different things, it can be used to describe or measure household and individual welfare (Ojo,2007). Food security addresses the risks of people not having access to needed food. Household food security exists when every person within the family has unhindered access to food items in terms of quality or quantity, for an appropriate and beneficial meals and sustainable lifestyle for a good standard of living. (World Food Summit Declaration, 1996). Food security is a condition when there is access of all people at all times to a nutritious staple food for a healthy living (World Bank). Food security is germane for the survival of mankind, and a crime trouble free society.

Furthermore, food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Idachaba, 2006). From the above definition, food security simply implies constant access by all people to sufficient food for a healthy, progressive life (Reutlinger, 1985).

Food security has been recognized as a significant concern, spanning a range of individual to global level. Food security is indispensable for mankind's survival and his economic activities including food production. The concept of food security is taken to embrace three specific aims; to ensure adequate supply of food, maximal stability in food supply and ensuring access to adequate supply to those that need them (FAO, 1983). It means that food security has 2 major components, they are:

- Adequate access to food
- Means to acquire food

This implies that nutritional and safe food must be adequately available and there must be assurance as to reliable means of acquiring such food. Food Security can also be seen as the means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and dietary needs for an active and robust life. Food Security is also the provision of alimentary, abundant and healthy food and the availability and accessibility of such food to people.

Statistically, and according to World bank report, agriculture at both subsistence and commercial level provides employment for about 45% Nigerians. The empirical evidence revealed above, is an indication that agricultural sector is the largest employer of labour in the country. In this wise, efforts must be put in place by government to ensure that such a sector is well and properly managed for a sustained interest of the citizens in it. Apart from the foregoing, it is also argued that, agriculture is a one of the contributor to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). In that, the revenue flow to the government on a monthly, and annual basis hinges on the lucrateness of the agricultural sector.

In his own exposition of food security, Anderson (1990) captured the import of the concept on its relevance to human life on a day-to-day basis. This suggestive of the truth that what air is to human survival is what daily food supply is to mankind, and should be ready available in an equitable manner across the population. One major thing to be understood is that the availability of food does not make a country adequately qualified to be classified as a food secure nation. In other for a country to remain sustainable in food security, the supply of food must be at the same increasing rate as population.

In a situation where the local food production in a country is unable to meet the citizen's food demand, states are at liberty to meet foreign nations for supply to meet their domestic demand. As a matter of fact, foreign policy objectives of some country hinges on agriculture, and steady food production and supply, and use it as a means through which they achieve their objectives. Apart from cases of or situation of natural disaster which could be occasioned by drought, erosion, and situation of war among others, countries are meant to meet their local food demand. Otherwise, it could in turn deter the production of food in the recipient nations causing these nations to depend more on the donor nations (Ikoku, 1980).

In a similar vein, food secure people are those whose food intake is above the energy requirement as well as those that show physical symptoms cause by energy sufficiency resulting from balanced diet and the body's ability to use food effectively as a result of good immunity.

Above all, pertinent to food security, is the availability of sufficient, nutritious, healthy and balanced diet meals to people at all times, the hygiene and safety of food should also be paid proper attention as food availability to the general public for the sake of good health. It is not enough for food to be available, but also the source from which it was gotten matters, the process

of preparation that is the chemical substances used to preserve and prepare should be well known to safeguard the wellbeing of people. Safety procedures should be considered in the process of food production and availability. In a nation, food security, does not only apply to the availability of a healthy, and nutritious meal but also to when the food does not harm the health of people (Davies, 2009).

Assessing previous government efforts in curtailing herder's farmer's conflicts

The socio political and geopolitical tension in Nigeria has taken another dimension (Alabi,2015). The response of federal government towards the herder-farmers conflict is a dimension which has further intensified the clash between herders and farmers. The supposedly indifference of the government towards the conflict has made it worsen over time. For instance, Decree 41 of 1989 empowered the federal government to create National Commission for Nomadic Education which is now known as Nomadic Education Act, Cap No. 20 Laws of the Federation. The major aim of this decree was to incorporate nomads into national life through availability of basic education and livelihood training and also to teach them how to make the most of their economic potential through novel methods of cattle rearing (Alabi,2015).

Unfortunately, Alabi (2015) opined that the federal government seems to have failed to provide sufficient ground for the smooth take off of the program as it currently suffers lack of human resource and a neglected structure. Evidence such as Idacha (2006) also shown that the federal government reluctance towards the conflict is evident in their insufficient provision of security to areas affected by the conflict particularly Benue state which is the major source of food production in Nigeria. More importantly, the federal government has failed to meet up with issue of grazing reserves aimed at reducing the conflicts between the herder's and local farmers. As a result of the slow response of government towards the issue, the existing reserves are depleting which is further intensifying conflict between herders and farmers as the herders have to search for pasture and encroach farmlands in a bid to do so.

While trying to proffer solutions to the economic, political, and security issues that had been brought about by the herder-farmers conflict, African Union introduced the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in 2007. The initiative was introduced to tackle the issue of desertification in southern Sahel region of Africa. Nigeria responded in agreement to this initiative by establishing the Great Green Wall Agency (GGWA) to combat desertification which has necessitated herder's movement from the Northern region to the middle belt region searching for grazing fields and water for their herds (Kwaja, 2013). It was created to protect northern states from desertification but as far as its achievements have gone, it has not maximized its objectives.

Methods

The study employed a descriptive cross-section survey design to elicit data among persons especially farmers affected in the conflicts on key issues raised. This design is justified because of its capacity to collect original data about a population that is too large to observe directly as well as effective for measuring attitude, perceptions, and beliefs in a large population (Babbie, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012; Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Therefore, this design assisted the researchers in examining the synergy between herder's farmer's crisis and food security in Benue state – Nigeria. The study also sought to find out some factors that has triggered the herders and farmers conflict in the state, and its implication on food security.

Study Population

The target population for this study includes: (1). Local farmers in Agatu local government area of Benue state. The selection of the local government was informed because it is the epicenter of agricultural activities in Benue state. It consists of verse arable land suitable for farming activities, factor that had attracted both indigenes and non-indigenes to the location. This implies that it is the agricultural hub of Benue state. The sample size of one thousand six hundred 1600 was statistically derived and served as source of quantitative data for the study. The researchers determined the 1600 sample for the study with the Cochran (1963, p.75) equation '1' which yields a representative sample for population that are large, and it is as follows, as highlighted by Melugbo, Ifunanya and Onuwka (2020):

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{(P)^2 (1-P)}$$

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$$(P)^2 (1-P)$$

Table 1. Demographic data of respondents

Item	N	%
Sex		
Male	940	69.7
Female	410	30.4
Age in years		
18-32	280	20.7
33-43	720	53.3
44-54	230	17.0
55 and above	120	8.9
Occupational status		
Unemployed	570	42.2
Public servant	460	34.1
Private business	320	23.7
Educational level		
Primary	620	45.9
Secondary	465	34.4
Tertiary	180	13.3
No education	85	6.3
Marital status		
Married	738	54.7
Unmarried	546	40.4
Divorced	66	4.9
Types of farming activities		
Commercial farming	990	73.3
Subsistence farming	360	26.7

Table 2: Implications of herders/farmers conflicts in Benue state- Nigeria (food shortage & insecurity)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	0.75	0.75	0.75
	Disagree	15	1.11	1.11	1.86
	Neutral	40	3.0	3.0	4.86
	Agree	460	34.1	34.1	38.96
	Strongly Agree	825	61.1	61.1	100.0
	Total	1350	100.0	100.0	

In the analysis carried out, findings revealed that there is a sharp decline in farming/agricultural activities in Benue state that has resulted in food insecurity occasioned by herder’s farmers conflicts in the state.

Table 2, above reveals that 825 of the respondents which represents 61.1% of the study strongly agreed that herder’s/farmers conflicts was a major reason for food crisis and limited supply in Benue state- Nigeria.

Although there are a lot of factors responsible for food shortage, the most common amongst these factors according to empirical findings carried out is the conflict between herders and farmers. Across the country, there is a continuous high demand for staple food, a situation that has led to limited and poor supply (Punch news, p.9 2018).

Corroborating the findings further, is a survey conducted by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), it showed daily decrease in food items in the country (Vanguard, p.12 2021), it is reported by various housewives according to the survey that the decrease is either 50 or hundred percent.

According to reports captured by (Guardian news, 2021) residents of Makurdi, the Benue state capital laments over shortage of food stuff saying that they were surprised over the sudden decline in food in terms of quantity and quality! It was a common belief among the residents that the threat posed by the herders along farm ways was a huge source of discouragement to farmers, from going to their respective farms, thereby leading to reduced harvest.

The summary of our findings under this category is submitted; thus, the crisis between the herder’s and farmers has denied the population access to quality food, the quantity of food has also been badly affected, thereby exposing the population to hunger and malnutrition.

Table:3 Implication of herder's farmer's crisis in Benue state- Nigeria (Declined interest in farming activities)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	0.89	0.89	0.89
Disagree	28	2.07	2.07	2.96
Neutral	38	2.81	2.81	5.77
Agree	422	31.3	31.3	37.07
Strongly Agree	850	63.0	63.0	100.0
Total	1350	100.0	100.0	

The table 3 above appeared to be a true representation of the herder's farmer's quagmire in Benue state- Nigeria, because the attitude of the population towards farming activities have been badly affected. Most of the respondents sees engagement with farm practice at both subsistence and commercial level as embarking on suicide mission, instead most of the practicing and potential farmers have followed another route to earn a living for themselves and dependents. For instance, respondents that strongly disagreed were 12 (0.89%), respondents who disagreed were 28 (2.07%), respondents who were neutral about their opinion were 38 (2.81%), respondents who agreed were 422 (31.3%), respondents who strongly agreed were 850 (63.0%). In conclusion, 850 (63.0%) strongly agreed that the displacement and subsequent occupation of farmland by the herders as resulted in reduced passion and interest for agriculture in the state thereby reducing the quality and quantity of food in the state. As a turnout of the clash between herders and farmers, it has led to increase in unemployment among local farmers within the affected communities and a handful of them have found alternative in different forms of crime. This finding re-echoes the discovery of Bello (2013, p. 136) who concluded that people's passion for farming in Benue state- Nigeria has greatly decreased, and it as badly affected food security in the state.

Discussion

The focus of this study was on the identification of the triggers of herder's and farmer's crisis in Benue state- Nigeria, and its consequences on food security. It was discovered that desire by the herders to secure a convenient and suitable location for their herds to graze against the will of the local indigenes was a serious motivator for the herder's and farmer's crisis in the state a situation that is consistent to eco-violence theory as utilized in this study. Another factor for the unabated conflict between the two contending groups was wanton destruction of farmer's farmlands. The study's findings are discussed in this section of the study. Firstly, the study found that the crisis over land, and desire to occupy the land by the herders has destabilized most of the local farmers, which has affected food security negatively in terms of quantity and quality. Scarcity of a product would advertently propel inflation of the products; the resultant effects of this problem was its telling outcome on food security. Because food items in terms of quality and quantity were no longer within the reach of the people of the state. From the report of our empirical findings, it was discovered that most of the population were active, energetic, happy, and proud farmers before the herdsmen gained unbelievable inroad to the state, this was consistent with (Ogbette, Attama *et al*, 2018). We further found out that, farmer's passion for farming activities has seriously deteriorated in the state, the implication of this is that, it is the diversion of energy required for agricultural purposes to other unproductive engagements within the state, thereby hampering food security. Findings also revealed that most of the staple food consumed in the country originated from Benue state, and it was gathered that the indigenes were happy doing their farming work because of the generous returns they got from their efforts, but this success story had turn out to tale of woes.

Conclusion

In all, the findings of the present study are a pointer to the fact that the crisis between the herder's and farmers had fueled food insecurity, scarcity, in Benue state- Nigeria. While this study is restricted to only Benue state, further research is encouraged to understand these unique implications/consequences in other states with similar experience. Such additional research design as that of the qualitative type could be employed to gain unexpected insights into the subject matter.

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