

# Herdsman/Farmers Crisis: A Threat to Food Security in Benue State-Nigeria

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## Abstract

This Study examines Herdsmen/Farmers Crisis as a threat to Food Security in Benue State-Nigeria. The study was guided by 3 research objectives and used a descriptive survey design, this enabled the researchers to collect and analyze data from a sample of the entire population without any manipulations. The population for the study was 300 respondents; this consisted of 150 farmers and 150 Fulani herdsman. Data was generated through a research instrument titled Farmers/Herdsman Relationship Questionnaire" (FHRQ) and was analyzed using descriptive statistics specifically, frequency counts, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used and a 2.50 decision point was set to accept or reject each question items. Findings of the study on the causes of these crises show 8 items of the 9 with a mean of above 2.50, including destruction of farmlands and overgrazing with a mean of 3.54 and 3.39 respectively. Others are harassment of nomads by host community (3.46), theft of cattle (3.69). On the effects of these crises, especially on the family and the nation, result on the 10 items presented, 9 items were accepted and includes, scarcity of food produce (3.40), reduction in output and income of farmers/herders (3.10). Based on the findings, it was concluded that farmers/herders clashes affects both sides of the occupation and requires a lasting solution for national development to strive. Therefore, it was recommended that there must be a deliberate design to enlighten and mobilize farmers and herders to understand the ecology/environmental influence on the natural resources available in the localities, the grazing approach of the Fulani herdsman should be re-organized and the modern ways of grazing should be adopted.

**Key words:** Herdsmen, Farmers, Crisis, Food security, ethno-religious bigotry

## Introduction

Crisis in Nigeria, have created a rift in human relations, caused serious threat to food security with consequent on health, education and other social effects (Basil, 2015). Crisis is inevitable as long as people live together, especially in a multi-ethnic, cultural and religious community like Nigeria. However, crisis that are not resolved at whatever levels leads to various forms of retardation and underdevelopment resulting from the destruction of lives, farmland and property. Recently, Nigeria has been bedeviled with the increasing number of crisis in some parts of the country, if not the whole country, especially in the last two decades (Adisa, 2011). Most of these crisis are generally regarded as

ethno-religious bigotry and antagonism.

According to Adisa (2011) & Bassey (2014), the crises in most part of Nigeria especially the Fulani herdsman and farmers clash are largely due to the use and scarcity of grazing fields. Farmers can no longer farm peacefully because of Fulani herdsman interruptions which have become violent in some cases. These Fulani herdsman and farmers crisis have pitched Christians and Muslims against each other. According to Gundu, (2017) the crisis has had devastating effects on inter-group relationships especially in Nasarawa Eggon in Nasarawa State and Agatu people and between the herders Fulanis and the farming Tiv population of Benue State. Apart from the loss of lives,

farmlands, food produce and property, it has profound effect on residential relationships, leading to new trends in the polarization of communities. This is evident in a physical manifestation of mono-religious areas in Nasarawa and Benue States, with Christians and Muslims living in dominant religious clusters (Ofem and Bassey, 2014).

Over the last decade, reports of farmer-herder crisis have increased exponentially. Crisis between Fulani herdsman and farmers is one of Nigeria's most persistent security problems and has left thousands of people dead in recent years. The largest spike in reporting occurring between 2013 and 2014, may be as a result of an increased number of incidents, increased awareness on the issue, or both. It may likewise be attributed to the 2015 presidential elections and the increased Boko Haram activity during this period. In any case, the increasing number of articles covering this issue signifies the growing urgency of this crisis (Blench, 2010). The prevalence of crises in the country has become a major concern for well-meaning Nigerians considering the impact on the peace, security as well as the economy of the nation. Destruction of lives and properties has almost become an everyday affair. These happenings have created a fearful atmosphere that discourages both domestic and foreign investors. By and large the economy of the nation is threatened

Herder-Farmer crises in Nigeria occur as a result of resource scarcity; there exists a growing scarcity of arable land and water sources that are equally essential to sustain crop cultivation and cattle herds. Farmers encroach on grazing routes, and have expropriated land designated to grazing reserves, while herders often destroy crops, pollute water sources and trespass on farms to feed their cattle. This is further exacerbated by the growing

population of farmers, herders and their herds, increasing scarcity of arable land due to droughts, impending desertification of the Sahel-savannah, land degradation, and cultural differences among ethnic groups that predominantly farm or graze cattle (Fiki and Lee, 2005).

Nigerians are familiar with reports of incessant clashes between the majority Muslim north and Christian south, (Beetseh, Dzever and Terwase, 2018), although these narratives are not completely false, as evidenced by the fact that a majority of crisis occur in the most diverse middle belt states, Plateau, Taraba, Kogi and Benue, these are oversimplified narratives of deeper issues, such as increased insecurity following the emergence of Boko Haram, increased access to arms and automatic weapons, and also the exploitation of farmer-herder crisis by Boko Haram terrorists (Rashid, 2012). The consequences of all these crises are felt by families especially in the area of food security and malnutrition.

Food security focus primarily on food supply problems such as assuring the availability and to some degree the price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level. That supply-side is the international and institutional set of concerns reflected in the changing organization of the global food economy that had precipitated the crisis. Food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2002). Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern (Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2002). Essentially, food security can be described as a phenomenon relating to individuals. It is the nutritional status of the individual household member that is the ultimate focus, and the risk of that adequate status not being achieved or becoming undermined. The latter risk describes the vulnerability of individuals in this context. Vulnerability may occur both as a chronic and transitory phenomenon.

The issues of famine, hunger and food crisis were also being extensively examined in the world food conference following the events of the mid-1970s. The outcome was a redefinition of food security, which recognized that the behavior of potentially vulnerable and affected people was a critical aspect. A third, perhaps crucially important, factor in modifying views of food security was the evidence that the technical successes of the Green Revolution did not automatically and rapidly lead to dramatic reductions in poverty and levels of malnutrition. These problems were recognized as the result of lack of effective demand, (Overseas Development Institute (ODI) 1997). The study tried to look at the causes of farmer/herders crisis and the role of government in curbing this menace and further investigated the effect of these crises on families in Benue state.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the causes of herdsmen/farmers crisis in Benue State, Nigeria
2. To examines the effect of herdsmen/framer's crisis on food security in Benue State

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The study used a descriptive survey design, this enabled the researchers to

collect and analyze data from a sample of the entire population without any manipulations.

### **Population of the Study**

The population for the study was 300 farmers and Fulani herdsmen from Nassarawa and Benue States, both as farmers and herders of cattle and for the herders are nomadic seasonal settlers.

### **Sample and sampling techniques**

A stratified random sampling technique was adopted. The sample for the study was 300 this consist of 150 farmers and 150 Fulani herdsmen respondents.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

A self-developed questionnaire titled "Farmers/Herdsmen Relationship Questionnaire" (FHRQ) used to collect the needed data for this study. The instrument was divided into two sections namely section A, and B. Section A sought for the personal data of the respondents/ participants in the study, Section B consisted of items that produced responses on the causes of Fulani – Herdsmen and farmers clashes from the respondents, the role of government in mitigating in the herdsmen/farmers crisis, and Effect of Herdsmen/farmers crisis on food security. A 4 – point rating scale was used to rate response options which are Strongly Agree (SA) (4), Agree (A) (3), Disagree (D) (2) and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1).

The instrument was validated using face and content validity by giving the designed questionnaire to two experts in Tests and Measurement.

### **Data Analysis techniques**

The data generated through the instrument were analyzed using descriptive statistics specifically, frequency counts, percentage, mean, and

standard deviation were used and a 2.50 decision point was set to accept or reject

the respondent's response to each question items on the questionnaire.

## Results and discussion

**Table 1:** Causes of Herdsmen/ Farmer Crisis in Benue state

| s/no. | Items                                                                                  | Farmer Mean         | Decision point | Herdsmen Mean       | Decision point |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1     | Destruction of farmers crops in the farm                                               | 3.54                | Accepted       | 3.57                | Accepted       |
| 2     | Over- grazing of fallow land by the herdsmen                                           | 3.39                | Accepted       | 3.41                | Accepted       |
| 3     | Harassment of nomads by host communities                                               | 3.46                | Accepted       | 3.44                | Accepted       |
| 4     | Contamination of streams used for potable water by cattle leading to scarcity of water | 3.15                | Accepted       | 3.15                | Accepted       |
| 5     | Theft of cattle in the community                                                       | 3.69                | Accepted       | 3.71                | Accepted       |
| 6     | Disregard of traditional cultural rules, practices and norms of the community          | 3.04                | Accepted       | 3.06                | Accepted       |
| 7     | Sexual harassment of women by nomads                                                   | 3.14                | Accepted       | 3.16                | Accepted       |
| 8     | Indiscriminate bush burning leading to destruction of farm produce                     | 3.75                | Accepted       | 3.75                | Accepted       |
| 9     | Indiscriminate and open defecation by cattle on roads and houses                       | 2.25                | Rejected       | 2.40                | Rejected       |
|       | <b>Overall mean</b>                                                                    | <b>3.27 (81.8%)</b> |                | <b>3.29 (82.2%)</b> |                |

The table 1 presents the mean response for both the farmer and the herdsmen on the causes of herdsmen/farmer crisis in Benue state. Eight of the nine question items were

accepted based on 2.50 decision point set in the study as the causes of the herdsmen/farmers crisis in Benue state.

**Table 2:** Effects of farmer/herdsmen crisis on food security

| s/no. | Items                                                                 | SA  | A   | D   | SD  | Mean                | Std. Dev | Decision point |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------------------|----------|----------------|
| 1     | Loss of farm produce in storage and those on the farm land            | 29  | 166 | 90  | 15  | 2.70                | .712     | Accepted       |
| 2     | Displacement of farmers/herdsmen from their settlement                | 59  | 137 | 45  | 59  | 2.65                | 1.008    | Accepted       |
| 3     | Reduction in output and income of farmers/nomads                      | 120 | 180 | -   | -   | 3.40                | .491     | Accepted       |
| 4     | Scarcity of farm products due to farmers displacement                 | 90  | 166 | 29  | 15  | 3.10                | .767     | Accepted       |
| 5     | Loss of house and properties in the affected communities              | 75  | 89  | 61  | 75  | 2.55                | 1.119    | Accepted       |
| 6     | Low revenue generation by Government                                  | 74  | 74  | 122 | 30  | 2.64                | .963     | Accepted       |
| 7     | Reduction in household resources and scarcity of food                 | 75  | 150 | 15  | 60  | 2.80                | 1.031    | Accepted       |
| 8     | Infrastructural damages in the ravaging communities                   | 74  | 89  | 60  | 77  | 2.53                | 1.122    | Accepted       |
| 9     | Low national GDP due to shortage in farm and human resources          | 44  | 181 | 75  | -   | 2.90                | .622     | Accepted       |
| 10    | Diversion of national income to control the menace increases wastages | 30  | 60  | 105 | 105 | 2.05                | .975     | Rejected       |
|       | <b>Overall mean</b>                                                   |     |     |     |     | <b>2.73 (68.3%)</b> |          |                |

The table 2 presents the frequency, mean and standard deviation on the effects of farmers/herdsmen clashes on food security. Ten (10) question items were presented to the participants, nine of the question items were accepted based on 2.50 decision point set in the study. The accepted question items were loss of farm produce, displacement of farmers/herdsmen from their settlement, scarcity of farm produce among others. One item was rejected by the participants which was diversion of national income to control the menace. However, the respondents revealed that the clashes have effects on the food security in Benue state. The overall mean was 2.73 representing 68.3%.

### Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study show destruction of farmers' crops, over-grazing, harassment of nomads by the communities among others. One item was rejected by both the farmers and the herdsmen which is indiscriminate defecation by cattle on roads. The response obtained revealed that the listed causes of herdsmen/farmer crisis were actually causing the crisis being experience respectively. Finding also reveals loss of farm produce, displacement of farmers/herdsmen from their settlement, scarcity of farm produce among others. One item was rejected by the participants which was diversion of national income to control the menace. However, the respondents revealed that the clashes have effects on the food security in Benue state. This finding agrees with the findings of Alhassan, (2013) which says the natural and physical endowment in terms of semi-arid vegetation and water resources is most responsible for the choice of the areas for grazing. In these villages where grazing occurred follow by fights, the damages by both the herdsmen and farmers reported included overgrazing and unsustainable land for farming; theft of cattle and goats;

destruction of crops; hardening of soils rendering them infertile and difficult when tilling for crop growing; physical fight with machetes and sticks; pollution of drinkable water; destruction of reservoirs and source of drinkable water; burning of rangelands, fadama and houses; and damages to irrigational facilities. The destruction has direct impact on the peoples' livelihood as their economic activities are tied to these environmental resources like water, land (soil), and vegetation (herbs and food crops).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper focuses on herdsmen/farmers crisis a threat to food security in Nigeria. Herdsmen/farmers crises disrupt government activities and cause panic to the public. The look at the ways of curbing the menace such as there must be a deliberate effect to enlighten and mobilize the parties in conflict to understand the ecology/environmental influence on the resources available in the localities. The grazing approach of the Fulani herdsmen should be re-organized and the modern ways of grazing should be adopted. The State Government must make herdsmen keep to agreed routes and farmers avoid farming across them with stern government policy and strict compliance and Provision of adequate security to both parties in all their areas of abode and prosecution of any culprit according to the law of the land with fear or favor among others.

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There must be a deliberate design to enlighten and mobilize the parties in conflict to understand the ecology/environmental influence on the resources available in the localities
2. The grazing approach of the

Fulani herdsmen should be re-organized and the modern ways of grazing should be adopted.

3. The State Government must make herdsmen keep to agreed routes and farmers avoid farming across them with stern government policy and strict compliance.
4. Provision of adequate security to both parties in all their areas of abode and prosecution of any culprit according to the law of the land with fear or favour.

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