

## **CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT ON FOOD PRODUCTION IN SELECTED AGRICULTURAL ZONES OF KWARA STATE, NIGERIA**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

*Conflict over scarcity of resources is a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria which continues to resonate between farmer and herder with negative consequences for food production. This study investigates the causes and consequences of farmer–herder conflict on food production in Kwara State, Nigeria using Agricultural Zone D as a study area. Mixed methods research design was employed and respondents include farmers, herders, traditional rulers, security officers, local government officials, agriculture and veterinary officers. The study found the destruction of crops, farmland and animals, use of under-age in grazing, poisoning of cows and access to arable land as the major causes of the conflict in the competition over arable lands for farming and grazing. The conflict has caused displacement of families and individuals, injuries and loss of lives in the Zone. Measures adopted to mitigate the conflict include interventions by security personnel and traditional institution with less recourse to litigation process. The challenges include inadequate compensation, deflated trust in the security personnel and lack of trust in the traditional institution mechanism. This study recommends promulgation of new and enforceable laws, government intervention backed with adequate resource allocation, capacity building among security personnel, traditional institution and establishment of alternative dispute resolution.*

**Keywords:** *Conflict, Farmer-Herder, Food Production, Scarcity and Dispute Resolution*

### **Introduction**

Manifestation of land resource conflict of different dimension happens across the globe, and it has been observed to be responsible for the incessant clash between pastoralists and farmers in many countries of the world particularly in the developing nations. Although conflict per se, is not bad: it is perhaps a necessity in the evolution and development of human organizations. However, when conflict degenerate to violent and destructive clash, it becomes not only unhealthy but also counter-productive and progress-threatening (Olufemi, 2021). The ongoing violent conflict between Russia/Ukraine has produced nothing but compounded and endangered human security worldwide among which is the food insecurity in term of acute increases in food prices for the most vulnerable with significant pressure on production and distribution of wheat, maize, sunflower seed, and sorghum in Europe (Jagtap *et al.*, 2022).

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 55 million out of its 456.7 million populations were undernourished as a result of pandemic, protracted violent conflict and other factors like climate change that makes hunger more common in the area. The situation is worse where there is conflict, such as in Yemen and Syria. The UN estimates the number of Yemenis afflicted by food insecurity to 24 million; 83% of the population in 2021, with 16.2 million needing emergency food (World Bank, 2021). In Africa, conflict of different variety exists, thus insurgency, banditry, political revolutions, ethno-religious conflict etc, have negatively affects human security like food, community, physical and economic (United Nation Economic Commission for Africa, 2017). The Africa continent is one of the major beneficiaries of conflict involving farmers and herders that affected food production in other part of the world. According to Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2021) the herding tradition commonly associated with the nomads of Central, East, North, and West Africa, in countries like Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Sudan contributed a lot to the increases feud between farmers and herders, while Burkina Faso, Ethiopia as well as Democratic Republic of Congo are all at the heart of this conflict between farmers and herders (DRC) (Okoli, 2017).

The expansion of cities and towns, the rise of the population, commerce, and other crucial aspects of human progress are all supported by an organized, sustained, and efficient food supply, hence farming and herding are two but key sources of food and livelihood for a vast majority of people especially in developing countries like Nigeria. This has put lots of pressure on available land resources. Food and livestock produced by farmers and herders remain the major food store that feed both the urban and rural populace in the country. It is therefore evidence that access to enough food is one of the most fundamental problems that each human society faces due to manifestation of conflicts, climate change, natural and human disasters among many other factors, like crops attacks, pandemic and epidemic outbreaks (Ani *et al.*, 2022; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017). Struggle over usage of arable land between farmers and herdsman seem to be deflecting availability, accessibility and affordability of the food and livestock in Nigeria (Sotunde, 2018). States like Benue, Kogi, Taraba, Nassarawa, Niger and part of Kaduna have become centered for violent conflict between farmers and herders in the recent time (Crisis Group, 2018). Even though these States are known for large quantity of food production in Nigeria, attacks on farmers and reprisal attacks on herdsman in those states spread asymmetrically without being checked (Sodiq, 2023).

The acclaimed Agatu Massacre of 2016 was reported to have claimed 500 lives. The state highway was rendered too dangerous to traverse hence the farmers' inability to transport harvested agricultural products to the market for both local and national supplies. According to Nextier Violet Conflict Database (2024), so many towns and villages under Logo, Gwer West, Ukum, Agatu, Buruku, Guma and Katsina-Ala, Local Government Areas in Benue State have been ravaged by armed conflict. The state reported so many attacks and protracted clashes between the nomadic herders and the farmers. From 2013 to 2014, the incidences of attacks persisted. For instance, on January 18 to 27, 2024, the incidence recorded 10 deaths. Some herders that can no longer bear the brunt of reprisal attacks, couple with anti-open grazing law enacted by some States' government like Benue and Taraba were forced to migrate to relatively peaceful and conducive States in the South west and part of North Central States such as Kwara State. In the recent time, communities in Kwara South, Central and North who had witnessed an influx of these herdsman searching for greener pasture for their herds at the detriment of farming activities going on in these communities or/and running away from incessant attacks taking place in other part of the nation have resorted to protest by the traditional institutions in Kwara South who complained of encroachment and destruction of their farms by newly migrated herdsman (Olufemi, 2021; Adebayo, 2021).

However, similar scenario of farmers-herders feud occurred in South West States and the government of the affected States such as Oyo, Ondo and Ekiti were forced to send herdsman out of the States with a law banning open grazing, allegation of encroachment on State forest reserve and also the heat of non-state actor from the Yoruba nationalist (Sunday Adeyemo) and his cohort (Olufemi, 2021). In addition to climate change and others factors, many migrant Fulani herders came to settle in Kwara State. For instance, in 2015, there was a huge confrontation between herdsman of Fulani descent and native farmers in the Kwara State (Adegbite, 2016). The conflict started from Alapa community in Asa Local Government in Kwara Central Senatorial District and spread to communities in Kwara South Senatorial District: Oro-Ago in Ifelodun Local Government and Eruku in Irepodun Local Government (Adegbite, 2016). While the dust of Eruku and Oro-Ago incidents is yet to settle, farmer-herders conflict occurred in Patigi Local Government in Kwara North senatorial district, where farmers and herdsman clashed at a community called Matokun (pmnewsnigeria, 2015). It was reported that members of the community staged a reprisal attack on the Fulani herdsman, with casualties recorded on both sides. Aside several destructions done to the large cassava farm, several farmers and herdsman sustained injuries (Tribune News, January 8, 2022). Since then, food inflation has been on a steady increase contrary to what is obtainable in the State. For example, in 2020, food price was reported to have risen by 3.88% in the State (Izuaka, 2020), but recent report released as at January 2024, showed that Kwara State is second in the rise of food prices with 45% increase as against 2023, 38.48% and 2022, 19.18% (Oyekanmi, 2023; NBC, 2023). This study, therefore, examined the causes and consequences of farmer-herders conflict on the food productions in selected agricultural zone of Kwara State, Nigeria.

**Research Objectives**

The aim of the study was to investigate the causes and consequences of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Food Production in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State. The Objectives of the studies were to:

- i. investigate the causes of Farmer-herder conflict on food production in in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State
- ii. examine the level of food production before farmer-herder's conflict in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State; and
- iii. explore the level of food production after the conflict in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State.

**Research Questions**

- i. What are the causes of Farmer-herder conflict on food production in in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State?
- ii. What is the level of food production before farmer-herder's conflict in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State?
- iii. What is the level of food production after the conflict in Selected Agricultural Zones of Kwara State?

**Methodology**

This research employed qualitative secondary techniques to address the research questions. These methods allowed the researcher to collect comprehensive data for a deeper understanding of the issue under investigation. The study targeted residents of Ifelodun and Irepodun Local Government Areas (LGAs), with a population of 529,300 according to City Population (2022). It also included staff from the Kwara State Emergency Management Agency (KWSEMA), FADAMA Cares, Kwara Agricultural Development Project (KWADP), security agencies, and other relevant bodies in the area. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents from five communities (Igbaja, Omu-Aran, Oro, Oke-Ode, and Babanla) in Kwara Agricultural Zone D, which were chosen due to recurrent farmer-herder conflicts. Participants included farmers, herders, eyewitnesses, traditional and religious leaders, members of the Farmers Association of Nigeria, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, and representatives of security and agricultural agencies. In total, 138 respondents participated, with 133 completed questionnaires analyzed using descriptive statistics. Additionally, 16 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted, and the responses were subjected to content analysis.

Data collection instruments included questionnaires, KIIs, and IDIs. Primary data were collected through interviews, while secondary data were gathered from books, journals, and newspapers. The data collection process involved interviews conducted in various settings such as offices, homes, and palaces. Data for this study were analyzed through qualitative methods. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis.

**Results**

The study aimed to investigate the causes and consequences of Farmer-Herder Conflict on food production in selected agricultural zones of Kwara State. The results are presented in accordance with the research objectives below as follows:

**i. Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Food Production**

The major causes of conflict between farmers and herders in the study area were identified as the destruction of crops, attacks and killings of cattle, and the use of under-age children for grazing. Farmers, in response to the damage caused to their crops, sometimes resorted to self-help measures, including poisoning, rustling cattle, or violently attacking the herders and their cattle. Some farmers, discouraged by the damage, abandoned farming altogether, relying on faith in God, while others sought legal compensation for the destruction of their produce. Conversely, herders attributed the conflict to climate change and the lack of available grazing routes. They largely denied responsibility for the destruction and blamed farmers for their destructive responses or arbitrary compensation demands for relatively minor damage to crops.

**ii. Level of Food Production before Farmer-Herder Conflict**

Before the onset of farmer-herder conflict, food production in the study areas was characterized by abundant supply and quality food products (both crops and cattle). The availability of nutritious and quality food, moderate prices, and sufficient surplus production were key indicators of food security. Farmers not only produced food for household consumption but also engaged in farming as a business, which contributed to an overall surplus of food in the market. Additionally, crops were allowed to ripen before harvesting, ensuring the production of high-quality food.

### **iii. Level of Food Production after the Conflict**

After the onset of the farmer-herder conflict, the level of food production significantly declined. There was a noticeable decrease in food nutrients, an increase in food prices, and a shortage of commercial food production. The conflict discouraged farmers from engaging in large-scale farming, which previously contributed to abundant food supplies and enabled transportation to other regions for sale. As a result, the availability of food products in the market diminished, and the economic sustainability of farming in the area was severely impacted.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The findings arising from the study revealed that destruction of crops, attack and killing of cattle, and use of under-age children in grazing are the major causes of conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the study area. Furthermore, the study revealed that encroachment on grazing routes, access to arable land and resource water, climate change and response to slight provocation are contributing factors responsible for farmers and herdsmen conflict in the study area. The causes of farmer-herder conflict on food production in the study area are multifaceted. Abugu (2021) discusses how destruction of crops, attacks on cattle, and the use of underage children for grazing are major sources of conflict. In response to crop damage, farmers sometimes engage in self-help measures such as poisoning or rustling cattle, which can escalate the violence. The destruction of crops leads some farmers to abandon farming altogether, while others seek legal compensation (Adebayo, 2021). Herders, on the other hand, attribute the conflict to climate change and the lack of available grazing routes (Brottem, 2021; Crisis Group, 2018). Herders largely deny responsibility for crop destruction and place blame on farmers for their retaliatory actions and compensation demands (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021). Also, the study of Adekunle and Adisa (2010) supported the findings of the study when they note that farmers and herdsmen clashes in Nigeria emanated from the resultant increase in competition for arable land which often times led to serious manifestation of hostilities and social friction among the two user-groups in many parts of Nigeria.

The availability of nutritious and quality food, moderate prices, and sufficient surplus production were key indicators of food security. Farmers not only produced food for household consumption but also engaged in farming as a business, which contributed to an overall surplus of food in the market. Additionally, crops were allowed to ripen before harvesting, ensuring the production of high-quality food. Before the onset of the farmer-herder conflict, food production in the study areas was characterized by abundant and high-quality food supplies, with farmers producing food both for household consumption and as a business, contributing to surplus production. This situation ensured food security, characterized by nutritious food, moderate prices, and surplus availability in the market (Ani & Anyika, 2022). The farmers' focus on allowing crops to ripen before harvest also ensured a consistent supply of high-quality food, which was economically beneficial (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017).

In another light, the result of the finding demonstrated the level of food production before the advent of farmer-herder conflict in the study area. Thus, the finding showed availability of quality and nutritious food products (crops and cattle), moderate price of food (crops and cattle), abundant supply of farm produces (across the study area), surplus and sufficient food production (crops and cattle) as the major indices of food production before the advent of farmer-herder's conflict in the study areas. Some other indices measured in the study are the easy movement of farm produces from agricultural zones to the city and increase patronage of farming and herding of cattle as viable profession. Finding from objective three demonstrated the consequences as a reflection of the level of food production after the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the study area. The result of finding

showed that there is low level of food production majorly as applicable in the area of drop in food nutrient, increase in the prices of food, cattle and shortage in commercial food production. Other indices of low level of production suggested in the study are bad harvest and reduction in agricultural production (crops/animals), reduction in patronage of engaging in farming and herding of cattle and reduction in household food consumption. However, after the conflict began, there was a significant decline in food production in the affected areas. The decrease in food production was marked by lower food quality, higher prices, and a reduction in commercial food production. The conflict discouraged farmers from engaging in large-scale farming, which had previously contributed to abundant food supplies. As a result, the availability of food in the market decreased, and the economic sustainability of farming was compromised (Jagtap & Trollman, 2022; Oladipupo, 2022). Additionally, the disruption in farming activities severely affected the food security situation in the region, making it harder for farmers to transport and sell their produce in different markets (Sotunde, 2018). Similarly,, this finding is corroborated with the assertion of Adisa and Adekunle (2010) that farmers-herdsmen conflicts have the capacity to destroy source of livelihood as it is currently adding to the shortage of food and its high cost and that of Audu (2013) that in the face of prevailing disproportionate increase in food production to the growing population, farmers-herdsmen conflicts have further compounded food security because many farmers are abandoning the farm for fear of being maimed or killed.

### Conclusions

This study showed that the farmer-herder conflict has significant impact on food production in Kwara State, Nigeria. The conflict has far-reaching consequences, particularly in terms of reduced agricultural productivity, higher food prices, and a decline in food quality. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the conflict, which is driven by factors such as competition for land, water scarcity, and climate change, as well as cultural differences between farmers and herders. The conflict has resulted in decreased crop yields, livestock production, and an overall loss of livelihoods for both parties involved, further exacerbating food insecurity and economic hardship. Despite various government efforts, the persistence of the conflict remains a major barrier to the region's agricultural development and stability. The decline in food production and disruption of supply chains have significantly affected food security, making it harder for communities to access affordable and nutritious food. As farmers and herders retreat from their economic activities due to insecurity, the social and economic fabric of the region is increasingly strained, leading to more displacement and greater hardship. Consequently, the study calls for a holistic approach to resolve the underlying causes of conflict and to restore peace and food security in the region.

### Recommendations

In light of the findings, several key recommendations are proposed to address the farmer-herder conflict and mitigate its impact on food production:

- 1. Kwara State community leaders being the** host communities and Fulani herdsmen should be actively involved in decision-making processes through public forums. These forums would foster dialogue such as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms at the local level should be prioritized over formal court settlements, which are often time-consuming and ineffective and allow both parties to engage in peace-building efforts. This participatory approach will help in understanding each other's grievances and in finding sustainable solutions to the conflict.
- 2.** In response to the decline in food production after the conflict, the government should focus on enhancing security measures to encourage farmers to return to their farms. This can be achieved by introducing localized policing systems and providing adequate protection in conflict-prone areas. Additionally, farmers should be provided with financial incentives or support systems (such as access to storage facilities) to reinvigorate food production, improve yields, and restore economic sustainability to the agricultural sector.
- 3.** To improve the level of food production before the conflict, sustainable land management practices should be introduced to prevent future resource competition between farmers and herders. Clear delineation of grazing routes and access to water resources should be established, ensuring both groups can coexist peacefully. Collaborative efforts between local governments and agricultural stakeholders are necessary to create a

framework for shared resource usage, enhancing food security and minimizing the potential for conflict over land and water.

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