

**THE MENACE OF FARMERS-HERDSMEN CRISIS ON FOOD PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

*The farmers-herdsmen crisis in Nigeria poses significant challenges to food production in the country leading to disruption in farming activities, crop losses and economic hardship to farmers. The conflict over land resources has resulted into the displacement of communities, hindering agricultural productivities and contributing to food insecurity in the country. This paper therefore takes a look into the menace of farmers-herdsmen crisis on food production in Nigeria. The study utilizes descriptive research design. 1200 samples were randomly selected from the target population. The data were collected through questionnaire and interview. The findings from the study shows that the crisis has a direct implication on food production in Nigeria which has affected both public and private sectors. This study therefore recommends that, it is high time for both governmental and non-governmental organisations to stand up to their action by embarking on policies and programmes that will curtail the ugly incidence.*

**Keywords: Menace, Farmers, Herdsmen, Food Production and Nigeria**

**Introduction**

It is a fact that man must always compete for resources that are usually in short supply. Herein lays the basis for crisis in society. Following the tradition of Marxian analysis, crises have always emerged in the face of competition for scarce resources and the exploitation and exclusion of one social group by another, especially in production relations. Marx, as noted by Applerouth and Edles (2008) also contended that the struggle to realize economic interests also underpin crisis in society. In congruence with this line of thought, the land is identified as the critical factor at the center of the crisis or crisis between the cattle herdsmen and the farmers. Farming and herding are the basic traditional livelihoods of most Nigerians, and both require land for their practice. Whereas the farmers require arable land to cultivate their crops, the herdsmen depend on land for healthy foliage for their animals.

Violation of rights regarding the use of land is also responsible for the crisis between the cattle herders and farmers. Every social group has the right to carry on with its legitimate productive activities within the stipulated laws of Nigeria. Such laws must be fair and balanced to all, as much as possible. Therefore, when people fail to respect the rights of others or treat them unfairly, without equity and justice, crisis of this kind will surely become commonplace. Livelihoods are important to their practitioners, but one livelihood must not be seen as being regarded as more important than others. If this reality is disregarded even in the least of ways, the crisis will result (Igbo, 2003). Alade (2018) also clearly supported this opinion when he reiterated that when the quest for social order, restraint, mutual respect, and resolution of crisis are trampled by a group that displays insensitivity to the mores, traditions, and customs of society, the result is crisis. In the light of the considered crisis between the herders and farmers who usually operate within the same environment, when sharing land resource, if consideration is not accorded to the interests of both groups, crisis is inevitable.

According to Gefu and Kolawole (2003), the periodic crisis between herders and farmers in Nigeria are largely due to intensification and extension of production activities that are necessitated by the increasing human population. Similarly, Fabiyi and Otunuga (2016), Mikailu (2016), and Alade (2018) have argued that the crisis between the two groups can be traced to problems relating to land and water use, obstruction of traditional migration routes, livestock theft, and crop damage which tend to trigger more disputes.

Studies by Fabiyi and Otunuga (2016) revealed the root causes of the crisis stem from two events that have combined to exacerbate the resource challenges imposed by Nigeria's burgeoning cattle population. For Fabiyi and Otunuga (2016), and Onwuamanam (2016), climate change has slowly changed the landscape of Northern Nigeria. Much of the far north has been inundated by desertification. The Northern tip of the foraging grounds of Nigeria's cattle has disappeared. Watering grounds are disappearing. Lake Chad, once a massive oasis in the North-Eastern tip of Nigeria has lost 95% of its volume over the last 50 years.

It was observed that the attack has created social dislocation and continuous suspicion among Fulani and other ethnic groups within the areas of attack. Herdsmen are now looked upon with social stigma as people are no longer comfortable with herdsmen who are generally undertaking their legitimate nomadic business. The social integration and cohesion which hitherto exist among herdsmen and residents have been battered as most communities no longer socialize with herdsmen. Previously, herdsmen were allowed to join community associations and relate with members of the community. Currently, they are strongly denied the privilege of joining such associations where they exist. This inevitably has created social dislocation. In some communities, it has been resolved that no member shall provide land for herdsmen to graze their herds. This has greatly affected social relations (Michael et al, 2017). Nzeh (2015) asserted that before the present farmers-herdsmen crisis assumed a dangerous dimension, the relationship between them had been cordial and symbiotic. He further posited that, upon herdsmen's entry into Nigeria via the Nigeria/Cameroon border in search of pasture, the herdsmen settled in Borno/Adamawa where they found pasture and they had a peaceful symbiotic relationship with the farmers which was beneficial to both groups. He further asserted that the availability of land for both farmers and herdsmen, given the subsistence nature of farming and the few numbers of cows that the herdsmen bred then, made them co-exist peacefully, void of unhealthy competition over scarce resources. This same cordiality has usually played out between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria until recently (Goke, 2018).

The impact of the herdsmen-farmers' crises on the affected communities and the country as a whole cannot be underestimated. These crises have direct implication on food production because the farmers cannot go to the farm at their own convenient time due to attacks by the herdsmen. Crises have resulted in a reduction in the outputs of crops by the farmers. This reduction is informed as a result of the destruction of crops, indiscriminate burning and displacement of farmers and their families in most cases. The protracted crisis in Nigeria has caused and still causing several socio-economic problems for its people (Gürsoy, 2020). One of the effects of the crisis is on agriculture, which is supposed to be improving constantly to be able to sustain the basic nutritional needs of the rapidly grown population. Agriculture does not improve fast enough as the state and local governments do not invest in farming technologies and infrastructure as they do in other sectors such as oil production. As a result of not having enough food production, farmers try to increase their agricultural lands which causes crisis between them and the herders. The crops also get damaged during the encounter with animals, as they just eat what they find, and sometimes the herdsmen are not able to control their animals, and sometimes they intentionally let them graze in the growing farms. The negative effects of the crisis in agriculture create a vicious circle of bigger problems, which the citizens are not able to get rid of by themselves (Ofuoku and Isife, 2010).

The confrontation of cattle headers and farmers in recent times has affected food production in the country. The cases are common among states in the *Middle belt* area of the country and this is commonly pronounced among states such as Taraba, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Adamawa (Dickson and Musa, 2011). The attacks are reprisal and are intermittence in nature. It has resulted in the destruction of a lot of lives and property in the country. Williams and Muazu (2010) also stated that the major source of concern to pastoralists was grazing land and the influx of other herders inside the shore of the country exacerbated the situation. This is because there was inadequate grazing area for increasing numbers of herders and increasing number of the animal population. The clash of the herders with cultivators or crop farmers is on the issue of land. In another related instance appertain to the herders' confrontation with the farmer in the later part of 1996, there was a radio Nigerian report that confirmed that one district head and twenty-three others were killed in Katsina State and all this was as a result of the crisis of farmers and pastoralists.

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entry into Nigeria via the Nigeria/Cameroon border in search of pasture, the herdsmen settled in Borno/Adamawa where they found pasture and they had a peaceful symbiotic relationship with the farmers which was beneficial to both groups. He further asserted that the sufficiency of land for both farmers and herdsmen, given the subsistence nature of farming and the few numbers of cows that the herdsmen breed then, made them co-exist peacefully, void of unhealthy competition over scarce resources. This same cordiality has usually played out between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria until recently (Goke, 2018). However, crisis between farmers and herdsmen emanated as a result of the increase in the population of both the farmers and the herdsmen. This was a sequel to the increase in the need for more farmland. Other causes of the crisis include a change in climate condition leading to draught and dessert encroachment; improvement in technology that brought about irrigation; the need to cultivate and produce more of the cash crops newly introduced. The crisis between farmers and herdsmen is reinforced by the farmers' habit of extending the boundary of their farms to livestock route and the herdsmen's habit of allowing cattle to veer into the farmers' farm to eat their plants and drop their dung either on the farm or on the pedestal route (Moritz, 2003). The farmers-herdsmen crisis in Riyom Plateau State; Agatu in Benue State, Nimbo in Enugu State affirms the fact that farmers-herdsmen crisis is assuming a national integration threatening dimension in Nigeria (Oyeyipo, James and Sanda, 2015).

Also, the recent farmers-herdsmen attacks in the Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State, pose threat to the peaceful co-existence of the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. The intractable nature of the crisis has prompted many studies by different researchers. Most of these studies note that the crisis is caused by population explosion, climate change, trampling of farmers' farms, rapping of female farmers, encroachment of livestock routes, and muddling of water ponds of communities by the herds. This crisis resulted in the loss of human lives and cattle, displacement of farmers and/or herdsmen, and reduction in farm produce as some of the general effects of the crisis in Nigeria. (Abbass, 2012), (Audu, 2013), (Nformi, and Mary-juliet 2014) (Ofem and Basse, 2014), (Ezeh, 2015), (Doyin, 2017) and (Akorede, 2018). Farmers-herdsmen crisis has gone beyond being a threat to individual lives but have now attained a national integration threatening dimension (Aliyu and Akinwande, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide the study, they are:

1. How do the farmers-herdsmen crises affect food production in Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between Food production and Farmers-herdsmen crisis?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the survey research design of the *ex-post facto* type. The study focused on two states in North-Central (Benue and Niger States) and two states in South-West (Ondo and Oyo States). The study engaged mixed methods of data collection. These include qualitative and quantitative sources of data collection. Qualitative data was sourced using questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted through the use of 4 research assistants that helped the researcher in administering the questionnaires. While quantitative data was obtained from the interviewed. The interview was conducted with the aid of tape recorder to capture sections of the interview. Secondary data was obtained from library sources such as textbooks, journals, official document, newspapers, seminars and workshop papers, and the internet. To achieve the objectives of the study, the sample was drawn from the population. The sample for the study comprises one thousand two hundred (1,200) respondents. Three hundred (300) respondents were randomly selected from each of the 2 states representing each of the two geo-political zones. The qualitative data was analysed using Regression Analysis. Qualitative data gathered from interviews was transcribed and subjected to textual analysis

## **RESULTS**

### **How do the farmers-herdsmen crises affect food production in Nigeria?**

This section of the study analysed the opinion of the respondents on how farmers-herdsmen crisis affect food production in Nigeria with a view to unraveling how farmers-herdsmen crisis in Nigeria has affected food production.

**Impact of Farmers-Herdsman Crises on Food Production in Nigeria**

		Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
<b>FOOD PRODUCTION</b>									
1. Farmers-herdsmen crisis has significant influence on food production in Nigeria	432	36.0%	710	59.2%	19	1.6%	5	0.4%	
2. Cost of foods get skyrocketed as a result of farmers-herdsmen crisis	478	39.8%	669	55.8%	16	1.3%	8	0.7%	
3. Food vendors and other manufacturers are confronted with many difficulties due to farmers-herdsmen crisis	553	46.1%	596	49.7%	13	1.1%	11	0.9%	
4. Local production of foods have been grossly affected due to crisis between farmers and herd-men	458	38.2%	686	57.2%	19	1.6%	10	0.8%	

The table shows the effect of farmers-herdsmen crises on food production. For the food production, the results show that food vendors and other manufacturers are mostly affected with 46.1% of the respondents strongly agreeing that the farmers-herdsmen crisis has significant influence on food dealers. In the face of such crisis, cultivation may be as difficult as harvesting which may reduce the supply of farm produce to the food vendors from whom the final consumers obtain their products.

The following qualitative data obtained from a respondent best captures the consequences of the crises:

The crisis has affected food production in the country because it has bred unimaginable consequences like food shortage. The continuous rise in the prices of food stuffs buttresses this. The herdsmen-farmers crisis is not healthy for a nation like Nigeria that depends so much on agricultural produce for survival. There is so much tension in the land that farmers cannot toil the soil as expected, neither can the herdsmen moves freely as they would have desired **(KII/Student/40yrs/January15,2023)**.

The respondent’s position was shared by another respondent who had this to say:

The crisis has affected food production in the country. The two competing parties are the major sustenance of our economy, especially in relation to food productions. Also, in the face of crisis little or no production can take place. As a result of fear, farmers will refuse to go to their various farms for the fear of being mobbed and killed while on the farm land **(KII/Lecturer/34yrs/December21,2022)**.

The two narrators have undoubtedly regarded the two occupations (farming and herding) as being indispensable to the human sustenance as no human can live without food. It is only after being fed with good food that human can begin to undertake other activities. However, the farmers-herders crisis has created a situation whereby the affected occupations are becoming difficult to be carried out while the consequences may extend beyond the warring parties to others whose survival largely depends on the threatened occupations. In the face of threat to life as shown in the foregoing narratives, it is the end-users of the products supplied by both farmers and herders that suffer in the form of hike in prices of the supplied products. This confirms the Yoruba aphorism that it is the grass that suffers where the fight of two elephants takes place. And given the interrelationships between economy and politics, the crises affecting the economic activities are bound to affect the political space with 31.6% of the respondents strongly agreeing that the crisis has created political instability in the country. The themes that emerge from the results in Table 4.3 indicate that the farmers-herdsmen crisis in Nigeria has far-reaching consequences beyond the direct impact on the farmers and herdsmen involved. The crisis affects food production in the form of an increase in the cost of foodstuffs consequent upon inadequate local production of food. This situation puts pressure on food vendors and other manufacturers who face many difficulties. The crisis has also led to a rapid decrease in the country's economy, with the foreign reserves greatly affected. This situation has resulted in hardship for both the government and

people in the country. The crisis has also increased poverty levels, hindered government developmental programs and put government policies and programs on hold. Finally, the crisis has led to political instability in the country, further exacerbating the situation. The survey results demonstrate that the farmers-herdsmen crisis in Nigeria has a significant impact on various aspects of the country's socio-economic and political landscape. The findings highlight the need for urgent and sustained efforts to address the crisis and prevent its further escalation.

**Relationship between Food production and Farmers-herdsmen crisis**

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.205 <sup>a</sup>	.042	.041	.53948

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.288	1	15.288	52.531	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	348.658	1198	.291		
	Total	363.947	1199			

a. Dependent Variable: Food production

b. Predictors: (Constant), Farmers and Herdsmen crisis

This ANOVA table shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between food production and farmers- herdsmen crisis ( $F(1, 1198) = 52.531, p < .000$ ). The regression sum of squares (SS) is 15.288 which indicates the amount of variance in food production that can be explained by farmers and herdsmen crisis. This table indicates that in the model, the variable "Farmers-herdsmen crisis" has a significant negative effect on food production. This is shown by the standardized coefficient of  $-.327$ , its t value of  $-7.248$  and a Sig. value of  $.000$  (less than  $.05$ ). This means that when there is an increase in farmers-herdsmen crisis, it has a significant negative effect on food production.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings revealed that farmers-herdsmen crisis has a significant negative effect on food production in Nigeria. The farmers-herdsmen crisis in Nigeria is a complex problem that has been exacerbated by a number of factors, including climate change, inadequate access to land and water resources, competition over natural resources and grazing rights, population growth, disparities in socio-economic development between farmers and herders, as well as the proliferation of small arms. This crisis has had a devastating impact on food production in Nigeria. The dispute between farmers and herders is especially serious since it has a negative impact on agricultural productivity. Competition for scarce land, which both communities want for farming or grazing their livestock, is one of the main drivers of violence. When these confrontations occur, fields and crops are destroyed, resulting in lower harvests or even crop collapse. In addition to the physical harm caused by competing groups, there can be psychological damage when individuals are forced off their lands or see violence against other people who live nearby, resulting in dread, which diminishes people's willingness to work on farms even further. Additionally, increasing insecurity as a result of armed conflict means fewer people are willing to invest in farming, resulting in poorer agricultural productivity overall. Furthermore, greater conflict can lead to limited availability to inputs such as fertilizers and other agrochemicals, resulting in lower yields from current farms as well as a decreased ability to create new farms/fields at all, resulting in even less food production overall. Finally, armed groups' interference can mean that roads used for transporting food produce become blocked or made off-limits, resulting in decreased levels of output available for consumption either locally or nationally. Indeed, given the supply restriction combined with demand held constant, this may even lead to an increase in prices, meaning families have less money available to purchase food items, forcing them to choose malnutrition or starvation instead.

The result also shows that, farmer herdsmen crisis has had a significant negative impact on food production throughout Nigeria, with consequences ranging from crop destruction to decreased yields combined with higher prices due to limited transport routes and input availability, all combining to cause greater harm to those already impoverished by preexisting structural inequalities. In the view of Afolabi (2018). He was of the view

that youths used to getting their sustenance through violence take a longer time to return to being productive, creating a situation where there are able bodied youths unable to work because they lack the core skills that would be normally incidental to their livelihood. Furthermore, as numerous farming communities have been displaced, unemployment which was already an issue has escalated along with declining food production. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (2018) estimates that the number of food insecure people in Nigeria stood at about 11 million as at August 2017, with the number projected to increase in the short term. This scenario holds worrying implications on economic, social and security-related fronts.

### **Conclusion**

This study has established that food production in Nigeria faces great threat as a result of recurring rivalry between the farmers and the herdsmen. The crisis between the farmers and the herdsmen in the county poses a significant threat to food production. Conflict over land use and resources have led to displacement of farmers, disruption of farming activities, and loss of crops and livestock. This instability hampers agricultural productivity, contributing to food insecurity and economic challenges in the country.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study therefore recommends that:

1. Government at all levels including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) should embark on policies and programmes that will discourage violence between the two rival groups but rather strengthening harmonious relationship between them which will in turn leads to increase in the food production activities.
2. Government should address the root causes of the crisis between the farmers and the herdsmen and promoting peaceful coexistence between the farmers and herdsmen which is crucial for sustainable food production.

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