

**AN ASSESSMENT OF FARMERS/HERDERS CONFLICT AND FOOD INSECURITY
IN NIGERIA; 2010 - 2023**

By

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Abstract

This research examines the long-standing conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria and its effect on food production. The growing conflict over land for crop farming and the contestation of that land by herders for grazing has long been a phenomenon in Nigeria. However, the conflict has demonstrated significant potential to exacerbate food insecurity, with attendant repercussions nationwide. The study is qualitative in nature and premised on identifying the relationship between farmers and herders in Nigeria and the incessant resource conflict from 2010 to 2023. Our data were generated from primary and secondary sources, with content analysis as the analytical method. Drawing on Thomas Homer-Dixon's (1999) eco-violence theory, this study argued that groups often weigh the advantages and disadvantages of every social relation. It argues that deliberate incursions into farmland for grazing by herders who are mainly of Fulani extraction threaten their relationship with other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The study recommends demarcation of grazing reserves for herders along their grazing tracks across Nigeria; the government should encourage sedentary grazing through ranching; and the government should also repeal the regulations by engaging traditional leaders to find solutions to farmers/herders conflicts, as a basis for ensuring unity and socio-economic Development. The study shall help advance the ethos of peaceful coexistence between farmers/herders across communities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Farmers, Herders, conflict, Food Insecurity, Grazing.

Introduction

Over the years, agriculture has been the bedrock of the Nigerian economy, contributing up to 60% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through the export of various agricultural commodities. However, natural resources are the strength of every human society; nonetheless, the process of harnessing them and their judicious use is what appears tough and wrong in Nigeria. However, according to Bruch et al. (2019), cited in Marie (2020), there is a growing scientific consensus on the significant role that natural resources play in violent conflicts. This has reflected in Nigeria from intra-state clashes between farmers/herders to inter-state clashes across boundaries. In most instances, the benefits or profits from these land resources are what generate the conflict. The farmers/herders issues are prominent in the middle belt region, with a high concentration in Benue and Nasarawa states, which serve as hubs of this menace, alongside other states, due to their year-round green vegetation.

The studies of Nyong & Fiki (2005), cited in Adisa (2012:99), maintained that the necessary condition to provide food for both human and animal consumption and the raw materials that could be exported to meet the always-growing demands has resulted in what they term as "intensification and extensities" of land usage. The stiff competition between these two groups, farmers/herders, manifested in open and closed conflicts in many parts of Nigeria. The growing conflict has worsened the security of lives and made crop farming difficult, leading to a food crisis.

The Fulani are divided into three categories, viz., the nomadic-pastoral or Bororo Fulani, the semi-nomadic Fulani, and the settled or 'town' Fulani. They can be identified or differentiated by their settlement patterns, as noted by Okibe (2022). In Nigeria, people in most communities practice farming for both livelihood and export purposes. However, when clashes occur, failure from both farmers and herders to accept responsibility for gross misconduct leads to a cyclical form of violence, particularly where the state apparatus is absent or dysfunctional.

The recurrent conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria has intensified, particularly in the 21st century. The conflict has raged for decades, affecting the nation's security, agricultural production, human security, and mobility, Kuusaana & Bakar (2015) cited in Ezenwa et'al (2022). Relevant research on the causes of farmers/herders conflict in Nigeria, such as Lenshie, Okengwu, Ogbonna, and Ezeibe (2020), Daramola (2005), De Haan (2002), Ingawa, Ega, and Erhabor (1999), and Tonah (2002), attributed the conflict between the two groups to scarce environmental resources like grazing, water, and land. The destruction of farmers' crops by cattle due to careless pastoralists' encroachment was the leading cause of the crisis.

According to Fasona and Omojola (2005), conflicts over land use for agricultural purposes, mostly between farmers/herders, accounted for 35 per cent of reported strife in Nigeria, while political, ethnic, and religious strife occurred at lower frequencies. This study argued that inequitable access to land and the diminishing land resources also account for the continued strife between farmers/herders in Nigeria. In furtherance of our argument, it is evident that one of the notorious and intractable conflicts in Nigeria at the dawn of the fourth republic in 1999 is the farmers/herders conflict, which has occurred across the nation's six geopolitical zones.

It is noted that in 2020 alone, the conflict was reported across 22 states, including the FCT. A study conducted by Ogbotte, Attama, and Okoh (2018) revealed that Fulani herders allegedly attacked the Agatu community in Benue state in 2016.

The scholars maintained that:

“In February 2016, over 300 persons from the communities were

massacred, while some 7000 were displaced. Some reports showed that many people died in ten Agatu communities at the hands of suspected herdsmen in early 2016. These killings were accompanied by the destruction of houses and other properties, as well as allegations of rape. According to their leader, the attacks were reprisals against the Agatu people for killing a prominent Fulani man and stealing his cattle in 2013 (Ogbotte, Attama & Okoh 2018:47 in Idagu et'al 2021).

In this regard, the Fulani are primarily herders and are among the largest ethnic groups in the Sahel and West Africa. They are widely dispersed in Nigeria and found across all regions. Furthermore, Nnaji & Samuel (2019) maintained that the global terrorism index (2015) highlighted the Fulani herders (militants) to constitute the fourth deadliest militant group globally, with a record in Nigeria that shows the killing of 1,299 persons in 2014 alone. However, the insensitivity of the Fulani herders to the plight of their host communities by reason of their deadly activities is highly responsible for the dire situation many communities find themselves in Nigeria. However, it is against this backdrop that this study examines the nexus between farmers/herders conflict and food insecurity in Nigeria, 2010-2023.

The long-standing conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria stems from agricultural practices. If the conflict is allowed to escalate, the impact will surely be on food and animal products due to the loss of animals and crops for human consumption (Ikezue & Zeah, 2017). This will further affect the country's political economy.

Conceptual Review

Conflict: The term has been defined differently by many scholars. Singer (1949) posited that conflict is a derivative term from the Latin word *Confligere*, which denotes striking together or clashing. It further suggests that it initially meant an actual encounter with a firearm. It also means a fight or struggle which is intense, such as the recurrent farmers/herders clashes in Nigeria.

Farmers/Herders Conflict: The farmers-herders conflict is an old phenomenon in Nigeria. From an environmental security perspective, the farmers-herders conflict is resource-related or nonviolent. Such conflicts often erupt from physical or social scarcity of natural resources. Hence, resource-related conflict is best explained as conflict over scarce resources (Turner, 2004).

Food Insecurity: Food insecurity is reflected across disciplines such as agriculture, anthropology, economics, nutrition, and sociology. These fields have all made valuable contributions to the subject. However, comprehensive and valid measures of food insecurity are needed to ensure accurate current and future projections of the concept. Such measurements should be built upon a foundation of standard definitions. The United States Department of Health and Human Services defined food insecurity as a household-level economic and social situation of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. This definition captures the essence of food insecurity, encompassing both economic and social dimensions that affect individuals and households.

Concept of Food

Food is an essential part of the life of every human being. Hence, any conflict between farmers and herders will leave a community with no security of its food as a means of livelihood. Okibe (2022) still maintained that food security in Nigeria is threatened primarily by the government's failure to protect herder-farmer relations. More emphasis is placed on diversifying agricultural activities by improving farming practices to adapt to new technological advancements that can boost food production and supply, and achieve stable pricing. There is still a bottleneck in the Sustainable Development Goals (1 and 2), which are premised on ending poverty and hunger

by ensuring food security. Okibe (2022) argued that between 2018 and 2020, at least 21.4 per cent of Nigerians experienced severe hunger. The farmer/herder conflict has affected Nigeria's GDP, as the country failed to meet its domestic food needs.

Gbamwuan and Atim (2022) emphasised that women in Nigeria are a powerful force in crop production, processing, and utilisation. They further maintained that women usually suffer the brunt of most conflicts in our societies, especially farmers and herders' clashes, where their farming activities are truncated because they are killed, maimed, raped, displaced, which leads to loss of job, poverty, and a serious threat to food security. The social structure that was designed to accommodate "Ruga" was for the Purpose of regulating grazing activities and to resolve conflict between and within sedentary farmers and the Fulani group, Ellwood (1995), cited in Bello & Abdullahi (2021). Ruga was opposed because farmers viewed it as a means to confiscate their farmland, thereby undermining their food security.

The influx of the predominantly Muslim herders to the southern part of Nigeria for grazing creates demographic redistribution, which further creates fear among the local farming communities, who are gradually diminishing as they feel vulnerable to incessant attacks (International Crisis Group, 2017). This displacement and loss of land impede the security of food and other means of livelihood that the land can provide; equally, there is a need for a mechanism to mitigate the contributions of contributors to the conflict.

Bailey (2022) argued that food inflation would worsen as insecurity threatens to drive farmers from their farmlands in Nigeria. This is prevalent in the Middle Belt and the North-east, where the activities of the terrorists are forcing people to abandon farming. However, according to Bailey, Ibrahim Kabiru (National President of the All-Farmers Association of Nigeria) stated that farmers fear being kidnapped, suggesting that some crops due for harvest would be left to spoil. According to data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, about 1200 farmers were kidnapped in the first half of 2021, which has risen from 45 in 2010. The SBM intelligence report also has it that between July, 2021 and June, 2022, 3420 people were abducted across Nigeria.

Our investigation revealed that a 50kg bag of fertiliser that previously sold for N15,000 now sells for as much as N48,500 or even N50,000 in most farming communities in Nigeria. Furthermore, the prices of petroleum and diesel, which were previously set at N250, N600, and N600, respectively, are now set at N1050 and N1250, respectively. This has forced food prices to rise by more than 100 per cent. Ajaja et al. (2022) argued that the persistent rise in food prices across Nigeria is unsettling many families due to hunger. They argued that the bulk of Nigeria's arable land is in the North. However, they lamented the threat to security in places like Zamfara, Katsina, Nasarawa, and Benue states, where some farmers have to pay levies ranging from N100,000 to N1m to terrorists to enable them access their farms. Boko Haram terrorists in May 2022 invaded the outskirts of Kala Balge Local Government Area of Borno and killed 50 farmers. In many instances, if a farmer cannot pay due to a lack of funds, they agree with the terrorists to receive crops after harvest. In southern Nigeria, some farmers also complained about herders invading their farmlands.

Other scholars, such as Higazi (2016), Dimelu et al. (2016), and Okoli & Okpleke (2014), argued that the increase in farmer-herdsmen strife is a result of an increase in cattle rustling activities and the yearly expansion of land for cultivation, which resulted in a decrease in grazing routes in Nigeria. At the same time, some scholars linked farmer-herder strife to an ethno-religious dichotomy that had existed since pre-colonial times (Baca, 2015). Bello (2014) aligned the pastoralist-farmer crisis in Nigeria with ethnicity, religion, indigene/settler syndrome, besides the primordial sentiments and other forms of political gimmicks, which all affect food prices. In the same vein, lack of access to farm and grazing fields is traced by the institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (IPCR – UNDP, 2012) to be the cause of constant clash between these two groups

and also struggle for the use of the green land and fresh water by both pastoralists and farmers to maintain their farming and grazing activities (Perpetua, et'al 2018).

Causes of Farmers and Herders Conflict in Nigeria

Contestation, which degenerates into conflict between farmers and herders, is not far-fetched. The International Conflict Group (2017) maintained that because herders have limited access to grazing lands due to increased human settlements, intensive agricultural land use, and other constraints, they are forced to compete for land and other resources, which has caused serious conflict. However, some causes of conflict between farmers and herders are as follows:

Desertification: Desertification is a process in which fertile land becomes increasingly unproductive due to overgrazing and poor land management. This further reduces grazing area and farming activities, as it also forces migration and displacement. Changes in weather patterns also contribute to desertification.

Climate change: The effects on farmers and herders' conflicts are enormous, as it causes resource scarcity through drought or flooding, reducing the availability of sustainable water for both crop and animal grazing. It creates economic strain by reducing agricultural productivity, which in turn fuels instability due to dwindling resources. It changes the distribution of plants and animals by shifting ecosystems. However, besides other social and cultural factors that generate long-standing grievances, climate change is often described as a "threat multiplier.

Land tenure rights and ownership: Scholars such as Hember (2005) and Ukamaka et al. (2017), cited in Deborah (2023), posited that herders' claims to equal tenure rights and land ownership have increased as a result of strife between the two groups. This is evidenced by the frequent granting of temporary settlement to the herders, which has created a situation where the 'host and stranger' relationship is strained.

Land-use policies: Ambiguous land ownership laws and poor governance lead to disputes over land rights and ownership, with severe consequences for food security.

Security issues: Banditry, violence, and lack of law enforcement in the society can escalate tensions, which may lead to violent confrontations with repercussions on food production.

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative, descriptive method, based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary sources are historical documents, magazines, books, journal articles, newspapers, and other internet sources. In the same vein, the primary sources are interviews conducted to elicit information on the prices of essential food items, which were regularly inflated due to the farmers-and-herders' protracted conflict in Nigeria. However, the study also adopted a content analysis approach, in which data were obtained through an extensive literature review of books, scholarly journal articles, and other relevant internet sources. Each piece of data collected for this study is generated across the six geopolitical zones, which, taken together, encompass an approximate population of 237 million according to the world, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the Eco-violence theory postulated by Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999) as a tool for analysing the impact of farmers/herders conflict in Nigeria. The theory was refined because it is a dominant social theory that views society as a collection of systems that must be knitted together for unity through interdependency and interrelationship. The theory holds that a society, such as that in Nigeria, is characterised by overdependence on a scarce environmental resource related to crop production. According to Nwosu and Ofoegbu (1986), as cited in Shedrack (2020), social functions in political science refer to the contributions of any activity or behaviour pattern to the maintenance of a society, which, to a large extent, relies on reciprocal efforts for mutual coexistence. Hence, in applying the Eco-violence theory, it is important to understand that Nigeria is viewed as a whole system, in which the states and the

composition of other ethnic groups that make it up are considered parts that should work toward unity, peace, and mutual coexistence.

While Nigeria grapples with decisions that are colored by vested interest, such that it protects either ethnic, regional, or religious domains, this study argues that the Eco-violence theory is relevant in this work as it relates to the state's failure in balancing land regulations in Nigeria, which is attributed to bad leadership, corruption, poor policy formulation, and implementation. In furtherance of our argument, the relevance of Eco-violence theory to this study is that the phenomenon of farmers/herder's conflict cannot be adequately understood in isolation from the socio-political and ecological context of Nigeria's internal and regional security crisis. The underlying issue in this regard is the country's weak state structure, which lacks legitimacy and the capacity to govern (Okoli, 2019).

Arising from the foregoing, the basic assumptions of the Eco-violence theory based on its intersection with farmers/herders' conflict in Nigeria are:

- i. It is premised on economic resources, with their attendant scarcity, which often propel violence.
- ii. It is a concept centred on the processes of cost-benefit analysis and interdependence.
- iii. There is a conflict of interest among communities over the value and attractiveness of the scarce resource.
- iv. It goes hand in hand with political pressures that exacerbate settlers' desires to grab land.
- v. Competition and domination of the scarce ecological resources trigger violent conflict.

Application of the Theory

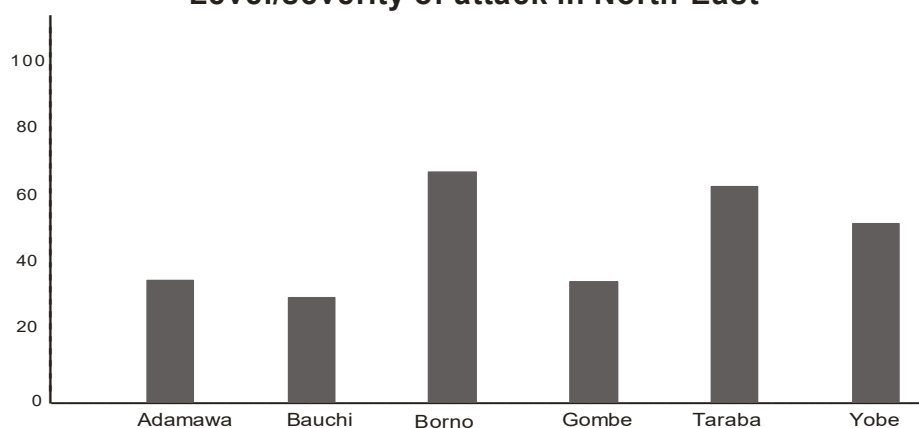
The eco-violence theory is adopted as a framework for this study because it is an emerging theoretical construct

that seeks to explain relationships between environmental factors and violent clashes, as it is prevalent in many parts of Nigeria. When individuals and groups are deprived of certain privileges by the state that they deem legitimate, the state itself becomes "threatened or weakened in terms of social cohesion" (Buzan, 1993), cited in James & Olusola (2016).

Applied to this study, the eco-violence theory also provides insight into the nature and dynamics of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, which negatively impacts food security. It is pertinent to note that the Eco-violence theory developed by Homer-Dixon (1999) holds thus: Persistent decreases in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, whether due to population growth and resource access, act singly or in various combinations to increase scarcity. This occurs across specific population groups, cropland, water, forests, and fish; thus, it reduces economic productivity for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands. However, migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts whenever they move to new areas. At the same time, a decrease in wealth can also cause conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1999, p. 30), as cited in Okoli & Atelhe (2014).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Figure 1
Level/severity of attack in North-East



Source: Researcher's Compilation

From figure 1 above, Borno state has a higher level of clashes between farmers/herders due to Boko Haram insurgency, which has threatened the state and prevented farmers from accessing their farms due to fear of attack or destruction of farm produce by the herders, who often camouflage as insurgents. The state remains the hub of the insurgents, where more than ten local governments are affected and denied farming for several years since the inception of the insurgency. Taraba state is also a flashpoint for farmers/herders' conflict due to its green vegetation. Clashes over grazing land have led to a series of attacks by herders and reprisal killings by farmers in a bid to protect their communities from encroachment by herders. Yobe and Adamawa states have traces of herder-clash incidents, while Gombe and Bauchi states have the least level of attacks in the North-East region.

Table 1: Food Price Changes on Selected Food Items in the Last Six Years

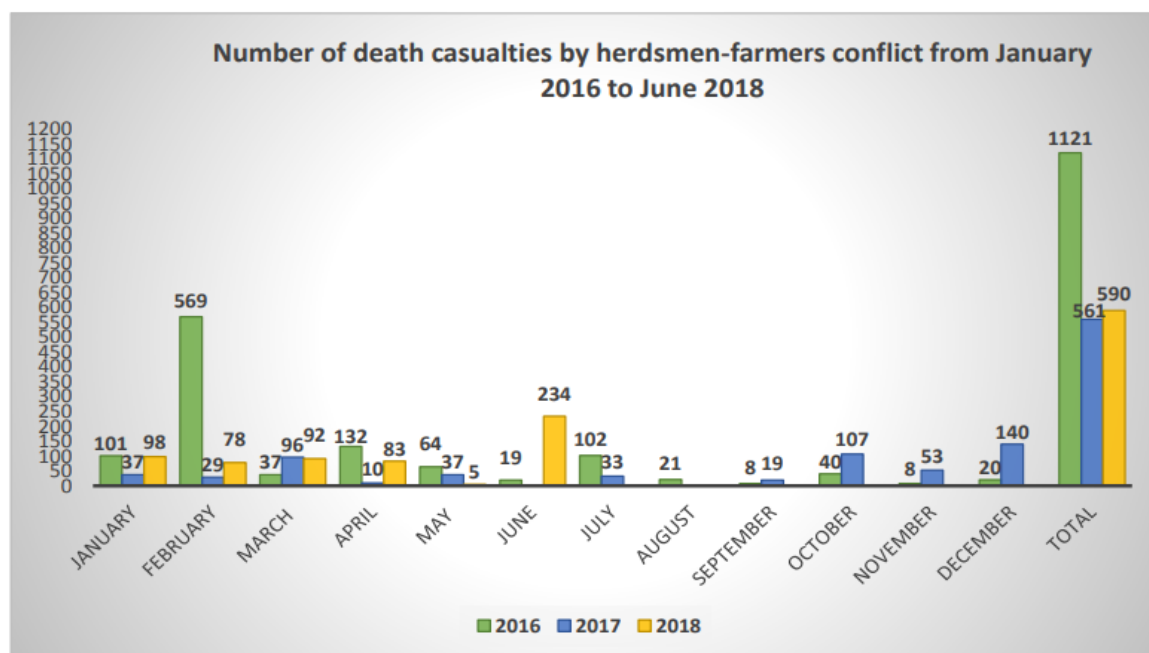
S/N	Items	Quantity	2023 Price	2022 Price	2021 Price	2020 price	2019 price	2018 Price
1	Beans	100kg	55,000	42,000	38,500	35,000	28,000	24,000
2	Rice	50kg	53,000	38,000	36,500	35,000	33,500	30,500
3	Garri	50kg	28,000	21,000	17,500	19,000	18,000	14,000
4	Yam	100 Tubers (Medium)	85,000	70,000	65,000	62,000	58,000	50,000
5	Palm Oil	25 litres	28,000	25,000	22,000	21,500	21,000	17,000
6	Veget. Oil	25 litres	36,000	32,500	30,500	28,000	24,500	23,000
7	Noodles	70kg	3,800	3,000	2,400	2,100	1,900	1,800
8	Beef	1 kg	3,000	2,600	2,400	2,300	2,100	1,800
9	Wheat Flour	50 kg	35,000	27,000	17,000	13,500	11,500	10,500
10	Sugar	50kg	36,000	26,000	25,000	22,000	14,000	11,500
11	Maise	100kg	45,000	32,000	30,500	29,000	27,000	24,500
12	Guinea Corn	100kg	41,500	30,500	29,500	28,000	25,000	22,500
13	Millet	100kg	44,500	32,500	31,500	30,500	29,000	25,000
14	Wheat	100kg	58,000	39,000	38,000	36,500	35,000	32,000
15	Fresh Pepper	1 Basket	24,500	18,000	13,000	12,000	10,500	9,000
16	Onions	1 Bag	86,000	85,000	68,500	60,000	95,000	59,000
17	Fresh Tomatoes.	1 Basket	22,500	19,000	16,000	15,000	14,500	12,000
18	Fish	1kg	2,200	1,900	1,750	1,650	1,500	1,350

19	Egg	Crate	2,800	1,900	17,00	1,550	1,200	1,050
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Source: Researchers' compilation.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's inflation rate was about 30%, a significant increase that has left citizens perplexed. Inflation in Nigeria has become an uncontrolled phenomenon that appears beyond the government's reach. The yearly increase in commodity prices provides evidence of this. However, among the factors that caused inflation are the protracted farmers-and-herders conflict, which has overwhelmed most rural farming communities, particularly in areas with greener vegetation that attracts herders year-round.

Figure 2



Source: Okoro, 2018

The data captured by Okoro in Figure 2 above shows a significant increase in deaths recorded from farmers-herders' conflict in 2016, with a total of 1121 casualties, compared to the records of 2017 and 2018, which stand at almost half the 2016 figure. Consequently, the months of January to May appear to be the most prevalent period when farmers and herders engage in confrontations, which lead to death or injuries. This is because the period is often drier than the rainy season, from June to October.

Table 2: Some Cases of Violent Farmer-Herdsmen Conflicts in Nigeria from 2010 to 2023

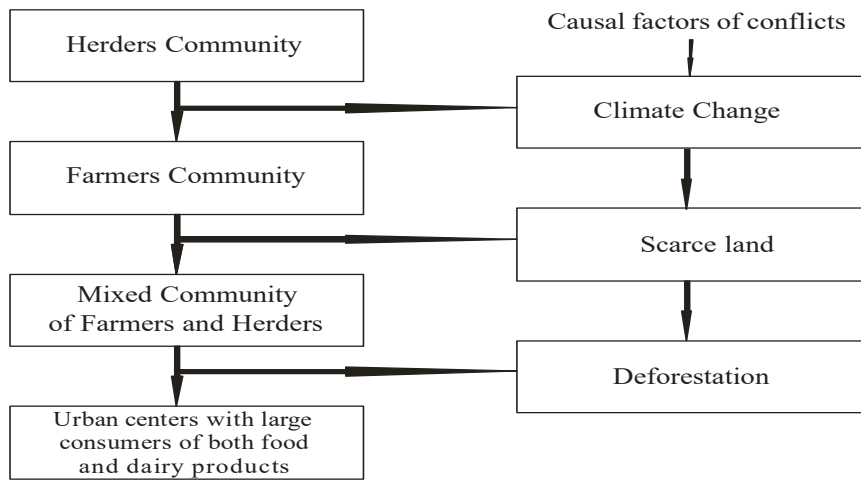
S/N	Date	Description	Place	Source
1	5/6/2010	Clashes between farmers and herders in the surrounding areas of Maiduguri resulted in the deaths of 20 people and many injuries.	Borno State	The Guardian, 6 June 2010
2	15/4/2011	Herders clash with farmers in Yewa South Local Government Area, Ogun state—several deaths with significant destruction of crops.	Ogun State	Daily Trust, 16 April 2011
3	20/11/2011	Tension escalated between farmers and herders, resulting in clashes, injuries, and property damage in Ekpoma.	Edo State.	Punch, 21 November 2011
4	26/3/2012	Clashes between farmers and herders in Kaura Local Government Area resulted in the death of 30 people and the destruction of properties.	Kaduna State	Premium Times, 27 March 2012
5	3/6/2013	50 people dead in clashes between farmers and herders in Barikin Ladi Local Government	Plateau State	Human Rights Watch 2013
6	7-8/3/2014	Wukari and Jalingo communities witnessed violent clashes between farmers and herders, leading to several deaths and loss of properties.	Taraba State	BBC News March 2014
7	2/7/2014	Herders and local farmers clash with several deaths and the destruction of farms in Kogi.	Kogi State	Vanguard July 2014
8	27/1/2015	17 persons killed in attacks on Abugbe, Okoklo, Ogwule, and Ocholoyan communities in Agatu Local Government by blood thirsty herders.	Benue State	Daily Post

9	18/9/2015	Clashes in Ayete and Igboora communities in Ibarapa North Local Government between farmers and herders led to multiple fatalities and injuries caused by illegal grazing.	Oyo State	19 September 2015 Vanguard Nigeria
10	27/4/2016	Herders held eight farmers hostage for hours in Obiaruku, Ukwani Local Government.	Enugu State	Culled from Jacob, O.E. et'al 2023. PJAEE 20(2)
11	20/5/2016	Herders killed two people and injured 11 others in a disagreement over grazing on native farm land in Oke-Ako, Ekiti, Ikole Local Government.	Ekiti State	” “
12	13/5/2017	Herders on a rampage killed four people in Abraka, Ethiope East Local Government	Delta State	thisdaylive.com
13	13/2/2018	One worker was killed in an attack in Akure South Local Government, with many dispersed	Ondo State	BBC News Pidgin
14	24/6/2018	21 people were killed in Dowaya, Demsa Local Government, in an overnight attack.	Adamawa State	Punch Newspaper
15	24/6/2018	Thirteen people were killed in clashes between a cattle rustlers vigilante group in Maru Local Government.	Zamfara State	thisdaylive.com
16	8/10/2019	One hundred fifty rustlers attacked Sokoto villages and carted away cows at gunpoint.	Sokoto State	punchng.com
17	5/09/2019	One killed in clash between farmers/herders in Iggi village in Birninkudu Local Government.	Jigawa State	dailypost.ng
18	3/8/2020	Armed clashes between herders and local farmers led to the deaths of many people, with others severely injured, over access to farmland in Shiroro Local Government Area.	Niger State.	Vanguard, 4 August 2020.
19	02/07/2021	Herders cut off a farmer's two hands in the Ome community in Obi Local Government	Nasarawa State	nairaland.com
20	2/11/2022	Court remands three herders for burning a groundnut farm worth N1.5m in Kebbi	Kebbi State	vanguardngr.com
21	01/05/2023	Two farmers were killed in the Udei community in the Guma Local Government.	Benue	Peter Duru vanguardngr.com
22	12/2/2023	Clashes over rights to grazing land between herders and farmers in Emohua Local Government resulted in the deaths of many people, and others were injured.	Rivers States	The Nation, 13 February 2023

Source: Researchers' Compilations from Newspapers and Human Rights Documents.

Table 2 above shows locations/hot spots where farm conflicts between r-herder conflicts have occurred, along with the severity of damage to properties and the properties of both farmers and herders during the study period. However, the study's findings indicate that contestation has led to increased population growth, further triggering competition for the scarce land available for farming and animal grazing in Nigeria.

Figure 3: Flowchart of Farmers/Herders communities with causal factors of conflicts



Source: Authors compilation, 2025.

Figure 3 above shows a flowchart illustrating the fundamental causes of violent conflict between farmers and herders, especially on land that is scarce relative to Nigeria's rapidly growing population. However, the impacts of climate change also make it easier for herders to relocate to areas with greener vegetation, especially in southern Nigeria. These movements cause some herders to invade farms in certain localities, which typically results in direct conflict between the two groups. Conflict between farmers and herders is also exacerbated by deforestation, which is primarily an artificial problem. This is because the herders are forced to relocate in search of areas with abundant foliage where their animals may graze.

Discussion of Findings

Geopolitical zones present the findings of the study to provide a clear understanding of the farmers/herder's conflict across Nigeria within the study's time frame.

North-East

The North-East (NE) comprises the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Borno, Taraba, and Yobe. The region is home to predominantly Kanuri, Jukun, and Fulani, who are found in every state, particularly Adamawa, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. The region has a projected population of 26 million, accounting for 12 per cent of Nigeria's total population. The region is known for farming, especially in Taraba, Lake Chad in Borno, Southern Gombe, and parts of Adamawa. Farming, a significant activity, was disrupted by the Boko Haram insurgency prior to the period covered by this study and remains disrupted to this day. Herders took advantage of the insurgency by trespassing onto farms, resulting in clashes between them and farmers across the region.

According to Francis et al. (2022), from 1996 to 2016, about 121 people were killed in Bauchi and Gombe states due to farmers/herders conflict. Consequently, the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET) declared an acute food crisis in Borno and Yobe, along with other states in the region, due to the menace of Boko Haram, which has impeded food production, besides killing a significant number of farmers in the region.

North-Central

The North-central comprises the states of Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi, Plateau, Kwara, and Niger. These states are referred to as the food basket of the middle belt region of Nigeria. The hub of herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria is this zone, due to its year-round green vegetation. Deaths associated with farmers/herders' number up to 847 in 2014 within the five states of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, and Kaduna, according to (IEP, 2015:43). In recent incidents,

Benue state tops other states in the zone with communities such as Agatu, Guma, Gwer East, Gwer West, Logo, Makurdi, Kwande, Gboko, and Katsina-Ala that are prone to several attacks from herders. (68%) The deaths in Benue are linked with clashes between farmers and herders, resulting in loss of food production and livelihood in many communities affected. The (IEP, 2015) further mentioned Fulani herders as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world in 2014, as 1229 were killed by Fulani, of which 847 were killed in North Central alone. This has led to partial or permanent morbidity, with breadwinners of many families being eliminated in the crises, which caused severe destitution in affected households (Okoli & Iortyer, 2016).

North-West

The North-West (NW) comprises the states of Kano, Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Jigawa, and Kaduna. The region is notably dominated by Hausa and Fulani, who are in the majority, with some ethnic minorities. In the North-west region, Zamfara state is the hub of farmers-herders conflict due to the prevalence of banditry and cattle rustling. The synthesis of farmers and herders' conflicts in the state has affected all neighbouring states and poses a serious threat to the security of lives and food crops. According to Bello and Abdullahi (2021), between 2016 and 2021, about 250 people were killed in Anka and Maradun Local Government Area of Zamfara state, which has further led many to abandon farming activities, thereby reducing agricultural output. The conflict has expanded to Katsina and Sokoto states due to rural banditry.

South-East

South-east Nigeria comprises five states, viz., Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo. The vegetation in this zone is also green and very attractive to herders for grazing. Abuse of land regulations/usage often leads to clashes between herders and the host communities. According to Okibe (2022), and data from Nextier SPD violent conflict database, from September 2020 to September 2021, the farmer-herder clashes occurred 71 times, resulting in 406 deaths, 49 injuries, and 15 people kidnapped. It is also noted that between 2016 and June 2022, the clashes led to the deaths of 150 herders and farmers in the South-east, with thousands displaced. Communities that are notable for clashes in the South-east are found within Abia state: Isuochi-Umunneochi, Ngwa, Uzuokoli, Ebem, Oboro, Ibere Ohaji, and Ariam; Enugu state: Adani, Nimbo, Eha-Amufu, Ugbawka, Oduma, Nde-Abbor, Uzouwani and Ezeagu; Ebonyi state: Izzi, Ikwo, Ezza, Ezillo and Egedegede; Anambra state: Igbariam, Ebenebe, Ogbu, Umulum, Omor and Oba-Annam with few other communities in Imo state such as Ohaji-Egbema community and its neighboring environment. In some communities, it was an invasion that displaced a significant portion of the population, disrupted food production, and drove up prices.

South-South

Ofuoku and Osife (2009) posited that over 40 million Naira worth of farm produce is usually lost each year due to herder invasions in the South-south region of Nigeria, especially in Delta and Edo states. However, the clashes between these two groups in the South-south remained a critical impediment to the survival of the rural communities and have forced many to abandon farming for other, less risky occupations like okada Aliyu (2015), cited in Perpetua et'al (2018).

South-West

The South-west consists of Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, and Ogun states. The zone is not spared from the menace of farmers-herders conflict, due to its green vegetation, which often attracts migrant Fulanis with their cattle from the faraway North-west and North-east regions, in particular. The laws of the six South-west states supported the establishment of the Amotekun Corps on 9 January 2020 in Oyo State, Ibadan, as the first regional security corps. They further enact anti-open grazing laws and the outright restriction of underage herders as a

result of the incessant attacks and killing of farmers and the regular kidnapping of innocent people in South-west Bankole (2021, cited in Deborah, 2023). In the same vein, the reality behind the abduction of a prominent Yoruba man, Falae, former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and Olufunke Olakurin, whom herders in Ondo state killed, has enabled the governments of the six South-west states to work together to safeguard their territory. At a point, on 25 January 2021, the Governors of the South-West met with the leaders of the Fulani herders, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) in Akure, Ondo state, where the herders were instructed to vacate the forest reserves to checkmate security threats emanating from farmers-herders conflict in relation to the killings and kidnappings in the area. The atrocities of these herders are also posing a significant risk to food security, not only in the South-west but in Nigeria at large.

However, successive governments in Nigeria, past and present, have made several attempts to tackle the problem of farmers/herders. Such attempts include the establishment of the Grazing Reserves in the 1940s and 1950s solely in Northern Nigeria; the recent Grazing Reserve Commission Bills of 2012 and 2016; the cattle colonies, and the Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA). Additionally, there was the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) (Teniola, 2021; Agbedo, 2021 in Idagu et al., 2021).

Summary and Conclusion

The study broadly investigated the conflict between farmers/herders in Nigeria from 2010 to 2023. The study further argued that Eco-violent theory and its dynamics constitute a distinctive school of thought that relates closely to farmers/herders' conflict and is sufficiently precise in this discourse. Based on the study's analysis, farmers and herders' conflict is conceptualised in terms of economic, social, ecological, and political variables. However, the conflict is premised on competition over the depleting natural resources. Competition and domination are prominent where vegetation is greener, such as in the middle belt, the south west, and the south east. The catastrophic activities of herders have forced farmers to abandon their productive bases, leading to a decrease in food production and higher food prices as supply is affected.

Though the Nigerian government has continued to experiment with several strategies to curtail or end the conflict between farmers/herders, with little success due to wrong approaches, this has caused a series of opposition to every government attempt by some regions in the country, the recent opposition to RUGA was strong in the middle belt, south-east, and south-west. The farmers/herders conflict has become a growing policy concern in Nigeria, threatening food security, as evidenced by the conflict during the period of this study.

We conclude that the conflict between farmers/herders in Nigeria has impeded food production in the most affected states. In other words, the cultivation of crops and the rearing of livestock are linked to the availability of land as a basic natural resource; thus, when conflict affects land availability, it creates a food scarcity scenario, thereby weakening the country's economy.

Recommendations.

In today's contentious land issues, where the challenges are enormous, particularly between the farmers and herders in Nigeria, the study made the following recommendations:

1. The study recommends demarcation of grazing reserves for herders along their grazing tracks across Nigeria.
2. The government should enforce the land regulations to cover farming, grazing, and Mining by aligning with traditional leaders in finding a sustainable solution.
3. The government should encourage sedentary grazing through ranching to regulate the movement of cattle.

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