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The Menace of Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen Crisis: A Case Study of Selected Communities in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria, 2012-2022

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Abstract

This study examines the menace of farmers–Fulani herders conflict and its implications for socioeconomic development in selected communities of Agatu Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, between 2012 and 2022. The study focuses on eight communities: Egba, Ayila, Oweto, Okokolo, Ekwo, Abogbe, Elo and Enogaje. It investigates the causes of the conflict, its effects on agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods, the role of conflict-management institutions, and the relationship between persistent violence and alleged land encroachment. The study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 500 respondents, comprising 250 crop farmers and 250 Fulani herders, selected through multistage sampling, alongside focus group discussions. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including t-tests, were employed to analyse the data at the 0.05 significance level. The theoretical framework integrates Environmental Scarcity Theory and Frustration–Aggression Theory to explain how competition over farmland, grazing routes and water resources, combined with unresolved grievances and inadequate institutional responses, may intensify hostility and retaliatory violence. Findings indicate that farmers–herders conflict significantly affects socioeconomic development and agricultural productivity. The results also suggest that conflict-management institutions help address the crisis, although persistent insecurity and public distrust remain major challenges. Furthermore, persistent fighting in Agatu Local Government Area is significant to land grabbing. The study concludes that sustainable development in Agatu requires effective security provision, transparent land administration, accessible dispute-resolution mechanisms and peaceful coexistence. It recommends strengthening community-based mediation, enforcing lawful land-use agreements, promoting modern livestock management, and supporting affected households in restoring agricultural production and sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords: Crop farmers*, Crises, Fulani herders, Security institutions, Food security and Fighting.*

Introduction

The conflict between herders and farmers seriously threatens Nigeria's security. It is considered one of the major threats to the nation's socio-economic activities. The conflicts have a deleterious impact not only on national security and income but also consistently threaten the very sources of livelihood of both farmers and herders. Fasona and Omajola (2005) said the crises between the two groups have accounted for about 35% of conflict cases reported in Nigerian newspapers. Moreover, the herders-farmers conflict has remained the predominant environmental resource conflict in Nigeria. Recent studies have further demonstrated that the persistent conflict between farmers and herders has undermined food security, disrupted agricultural production, and weakened community security in affected rural communities across Nigeria (Ogungbenro et al., 2024; Ogungbenro et al., 2025). The causes of farmers-herdsmen conflicts are often not far-fetched. However, there appears to be no consensus between the two groups on the causes of their conflict. According to De Haan (2002), the destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation equipment and infrastructure) by the cattle herders themselves are the main direct causes of conflicts cited by the farmers, whereas the burning of rangelands and *fadama* and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the cattle herders. He went on to point out another cause of farmers-herdsmen conflict as the increasing rate of cattle theft, which is often accompanied by violence. These conflicts have posed serious threats to the means of survival and livelihoods of both farmers and pastoralists, as well as to what both groups are working to protect. The conflicts (though provocative) over access rights to farmland and cattle routes have become ubiquitous and seem to defy solution (Abbas, 2009). However, Coser (2000) has noted that the inevitability of conflict over scarce resources is here considered the bane of struggles over the inestimable value of land and its resources, pitting claims to ownership against claims to its status as a common resource. This position is reinforced by findings from Ogungbenro et al. (2025), who argue that increasing competition for land and other productive resources remains a major driver of recurring farmer-herder conflicts and their attendant implications for community security.

Literature Review

Colonial policies were also seen as the cause of the historical rivalry between farmers and herders in some parts of Africa. Adamu (2007) also observed that colonial policies in Katsina State have led to the seizure of vast tracts of farmland and turned them into native authority forest reserves. The immediate impact was that it led herders and farmers to compete for land that had shrunk due to colonial forest policy. The intensity of competition led to conflict between the groups. Similar findings were reported by Gbadeyan et al. (2025), who observed that competition over scarce resources and unresolved grievances often contribute to the outbreak and escalation of communal conflicts in Nigerian communities. Negligence by both groups was also seen as a cause of the conflicts. For instance, Yahaya (2008) observed that cattle herders often left many cattle in the care of children who did not consider the consequences if farm produce were destroyed. The farmers also left their harvested crops unprotected on their farms. In contrast, others with poor yields intentionally left their crops unharvested for cattle to graze on, so they could claim substantial compensation.

Abubakar (2012) identified another cause of the conflicts as the lack of sensitisation among people to the application of the Land Use Act of 1978. One of the policies (Nationalisation policy) states that land in Nigeria shall be available to all Nigerians in any state, local government, or district of their choice for residential, agricultural, grazing, commercial, or industrial purposes, irrespective of their state of origin, ethnic background, religious and political affiliation. Unfortunately, Southerners had sworn never to allow the implementation of the Land Use Act of 1978 or any grazing reserve arrangement for Fulani herdsmen in the southern part of Nigeria, for history not to repeat itself. This concern is rooted in perceptions of historical Fulani migration and expansion, as well as contemporary fears of recurring farmer-herder conflicts. Their encroachment on farmland, involvement in violent confrontations resulting in the loss of farmers' lives, sexual violence against women, and killing of innocent children are often interpreted as deliberate strategies to intimidate local populations. Consequently, these actions create an environment of fear that deters host communities from enforcing tenancy agreements or seeking redress, particularly when herders' cattle damage communal agricultural fields.

The Benue State Governor had also joined his counterparts from Southern Nigeria in resisting open grazing and the establishment of grazing reserves. One of the major government efforts to address the persistent conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State was the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017. The law was introduced to prohibit open grazing and promote ranch-based livestock production to protect farmlands, reduce crop destruction, and prevent violent confrontations between farmers and pastoralists. The legislation represented an attempt by the Benue State Government to address the security, agricultural, and livelihood challenges associated with recurring farmer-herder conflicts. The Governor stated that "Benue people are ready to die rather than submit to the cattle open grazing agenda" (Punch Newspaper, 2021).

Gusa et al. (2022), in their analysis of the legislation, observed that the law had achieved some measure of success in reducing clashes between farmers and herders. However, they also identified implementation challenges, including resistance to enforcement and inadequate provisions for livestock identification and traceability. These limitations suggest that legislation alone may not be sufficient to resolve conflicts without effective enforcement, institutional cooperation, and practical support for the transition to modern livestock management. Furthermore, the law's effectiveness has remained contested. While some farmers have viewed it as a necessary measure to protect agricultural livelihoods, some pastoralists have perceived it as a threat to their traditional livelihoods. Research by Gbadeyan et al. (2025) highlights how differing perceptions of conflict-management measures among affected groups can influence intergroup relations and the overall effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions. These competing perspectives demonstrate the importance of inclusive consultation, public sensitisation, and constructive dialogue between farmers, herders, and government authorities. In this regard, Yusuf and Fagbadebo (2026) emphasised that sustainable peacebuilding requires the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, including women and community-based actors, in conflict prevention, mediation, and reconciliation processes.

As the state cannot regulate the coexistence of its citizens in the harmonious sharing of contested resources, the herders and farmers have resolved to struggle among themselves, with no retreat and no surrender, for the survival of the fittest. The failure of the state, for example, to resolve the settler-indigene identity question and the inherent struggles over resources can be adduced as having brought dangerous economic and political dimensions into the Fulani cattle herders-farmers conflict. The government's failure to address herders' attacks decisively has several implications for Nigerian citizens' development. The fact that herders now carry sophisticated ammunition with which they kill and maim perceived opponents at will constitutes a grave danger to national security and development. This is because security personnel, including the police, have not been able to withstand weapon-wielding herders' boldness and firepower. The fact that herders have killed police officers, abducted elder politicians, burnt churches, and killed priests and worshippers is an indication that the Nigerian Government has failed and cannot guarantee the safety of either foreign or local investors. Yusuf and Fagbadebo (2025) similarly argued that weaknesses in governance systems, poor policy implementation, and institutional shortcomings often undermine the state's capacity to respond effectively to security challenges and violent conflicts.

The incessant attacks and reprisal attacks between herders and farmers in different parts of Benue State have resulted in numerous socio-economic problems. The destruction of crops and, in some cases, retaliation by farmers through the killing of livestock owned by herders have always resulted in loss of lives and property. This has hampered overall food production, with attendant consequences such as increased poverty, hunger, disease, and malnutrition. It also creates fear of food insecurity and stunted economic growth and development in the country. Cotula et al. (2004) argued that conflicts between farmers and herders have not only heightened insecurity but also have a high potential to exacerbate food crises in Nigeria due to the loss of farmers' lives, livestock, crops, and valuable property. Nyong and Fiki (2005) also pointed out that resource-related conflicts are responsible for over 12 per cent of the decline in per capita food production in sub-Saharan Africa.

Similarly, it is estimated that more than 65 per cent of the Nigerian population is food insecure (Osagie, 2013). This is because the two traditional farming groups (crop producers and cattle herders) that contribute immensely to the country's food security are in constant conflict, thereby threatening sustainable agricultural production. Also, a report by the global humanitarian organisation Mercy Corps (2016) found that Nigeria is losing at least $14 billion in potential revenue annually due to the ongoing conflict between farmers and herders across the country's North-Central region. The cattle herders, or Fulani pastoralists, own over 90% of the nation's livestock and account for about 3.2% of Nigeria's GDP (Julius, 2012; Bello, 2013). Moreover, an estimated 1.3 million cows are slaughtered annually to provide a portion of the meat for Nigeria's population of about 170 million people. Nigeria's cattle provide about 30% of national meat consumption and are therefore a critical part of assuring food security (Adeleke et al., 2016).

There is no doubt that pastoralists are economically important to Nigeria. Hence, the conflict between pastoralists and farmers requires a lasting solution to maintain and enhance the contributions of both agricultural sectors. Conflicts between farmers and herders have spread to all six geopolitical zones of the country. However, they are mostly concentrated in the North-Central zone (Benue and Plateau States), a pattern that has attracted considerable research attention. It is disheartening that researchers have not shone sufficient searchlight on the menace of the farmers and Fulani herders crisis and its implications for the development of these eight villages: Egba, Ayila, Oweto, Okokolo, Ekwo, Abogbe, Elo, and Enogaje, even though these communities were displaced and were at the centre of the crisis in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State within the ten years of 2012-2022. The choice of this period was informed by the fact that the conflict intensified during this time and the selected villages were at the centre of the crisis. Therefore, this has created a gap in the existing knowledge that this study intends to fill. Also, because the conflicts between the two groups persist in the area, there is a need to investigate the causes and effects of farmers-herdsmen conflict on development, with the hope that the study's findings will help provide a lasting solution to this perennial conflict. It is also hoped that the study will assist in achieving peaceful coexistence, food security, and sustainable livelihoods in the study area and Benue State at large.

Theoretical Framework

The Environmental Scarcity Theory and the Frustration-Aggression Theory will be applied in this study. Thomas Homer-Dixon is a proponent of Environmental Scarcity Theory, which posits that environmental scarcity can lead to violent conflict. Such conflicts range from local environmental degradation to ethnic clashes, civil strife (insurgencies), scarcity-induced wars stemming from the loss of livelihoods, and the negligent behaviour of the state and the elite class (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Supporting the environment-and-conflict argument, Brunborg and Urdal (2005) argued that demographic factors may cause conflict, with high population pressure straining scarce resources such as arable land and freshwater, thereby increasing the likelihood of violent conflict. Environmental scarcity has "a variety of critical social effects, including declining food production, general economic stagnation or decline, displacement of populations, and the disruption of institutions and traditional social relations among people and groups" (Homer-Dixon, 1999). In his contribution, Benjaminsen (2008) contends that scarcity is perceived to be intensifying rapidly in many marginal environments, largely due to ongoing environmental degradation driven primarily by increasing population growth. Accordingly, Environmental Scarcity Theory has three major dimensions: supply-induced scarcity, demand-induced scarcity, and structural scarcity (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Supply-induced scarcity emerges when resources are reduced and degraded faster than they are replenished. Demand-induced scarcity arises from population growth relative to the availability of livelihood resources. In contrast, structural scarcity results from unequal access to resources, with resources concentrated in the hands of a few while others experience severe shortages (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Environmental scarcity in this context refers to the limited availability of grazing land, farmland, and water resources. Such scarcity generates severe social pressures that may stimulate communal conflicts, insurgencies, ethnic confrontations, and social unrest (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Supporting this argument, Awotayo and Yusuf (2025) observed that competition over scarce resources and the proliferation of arms often interact to intensify insecurity and violent conflicts across vulnerable communities. Their study emphasised the need for sustainable conflict-management and disarmament strategies to reduce violence associated with resource-based disputes.

This assumption helps explain how farming communities that depend primarily on environmental resources, such as agricultural land and water bodies, struggle to maintain their livelihoods under conditions of scarcity. Thus, the herders-farmers conflict in the Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State can be seen as a conflict over natural resources, arising from disagreements over the management, ownership, allocation, use, and protection of land and related ecosystems. The increasing scarcity of renewable resources, coupled with grievances over their governance, reinforces existing tensions and contributes to the decision of affected groups to resort to violence. In this regard, competition for access to and control of land resources has contributed significantly to the outbreak of conflict between farmers and herders in the study area. The origin of the Frustration-Aggression Theory can be traced to the works of Dollard et al. (1939) and Zillmann (1979), who developed what later became known as the frustration-aggression hypothesis. According to them, the central proposition of the theory is that aggression often results from frustration, while aggressive behaviour usually stems from individuals' or groups' inability to attain desired goals. They defined aggression as any behaviour intended to cause harm, injury, or pain to another individual. According to Zillmann (1979), the major tenets of the theory are that frustration instigates behaviour that may be hostile or aggressive, and that hostile or aggressive behaviour frequently emerges from frustrating conditions. The theoretical significance of this theory lies in its ability to explain violent conflicts between farmers and herders.

Frustration-Aggression Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the farmers-herders conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. The conflict is characterised by several sources of frustration, including crop destruction, encroachment on grazing routes, competition over land and water resources, cattle theft, insecurity, displacement, and inadequate government intervention. The inability of either group to adequately protect its means of livelihood often generates resentment, hostility, and retaliatory behaviour. This perspective is reinforced by Yusuf et al. (2026), who argued that effective leadership and inclusive security governance are essential for managing conflicts and preventing the escalation of grievances into violence. Their study emphasised that unresolved frustrations, exclusion, and weak institutional responses often undermine

peacebuilding efforts and contribute to recurring conflicts within communities. The theory further explains how cycles of attack and retaliation create additional grievances that sustain violence over long periods. Consequently, Frustration-Aggression Theory helps explain not only the immediate triggers of conflict but also the persistence of hostilities between farmers and herders in the study area. The study therefore adopts a combined theoretical approach. Environmental Scarcity Theory explains the pressures associated with competition for scarce natural resources such as land and water. In contrast, Frustration-Aggression Theory explains how perceived deprivation, unresolved grievances, and institutional failures can produce hostility and violent responses. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining the causes and developmental consequences of the farmers-herders conflict in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State and for identifying interventions that can promote peaceful coexistence, agricultural productivity, and sustainable livelihoods.

Based on the aim and objectives of this study, the following hypotheses were tested:
H01: Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has no significant effect on socio-economic development in the study areas
H02: Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has no significant relationship with the crop farmers' and herders' productivity in the study areas
H03: Institutions involved in managing the conflicts have not contributed significantly to the management of Farmers and Fulani herders conflict in the study area
H04: Fulani herders' consistent fighting in Agatu Local Government Area is not significant to land grabbing.

Study Area and Methodology

This study was conducted in Agatu Local Government Area in Benue State. The Agatu people live on their ancestral lands in Benue State, Nigeria. Most people are subsistence farmers, growing yams, guinea corn, millet, groundnuts, and vegetables. It is important to note that many Agatu live along the Benue River in the Benue South Senatorial District, known as Zone C. They are also known as Idoma, the second-largest ethnic group in Benue after the Tiv people. Fishing is an important source of food. The Agatu Local Government Area was created in October 1996, with an area of 1,085 km2, and its headquarters is Obagaji. Its projected population, according to the National Population Commission in 2022 and the National Bureau of Statistics, is 166,900.

Research Design. This work adopted a mixed-methods approach with a simple survey research design, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.
Sample Size and Sampling Technique. Agatu Local Government Area has a total population of 166,900, according to the 2022 projection. A multistage sampling technique was used to select the study respondents. The first stage involves the purposive selection of eight (8) villages from the twenty-eight (28) total villages in the area, based on the frequency of conflict occurrences in the local government area. The villages selected are Egba, Ayila, Okokolo, Oweto, Ekwo, Abogbe, Elo, and Enogaje. In the final stage, a list of all household heads who experienced the conflicts was compiled with the help of the village heads. Thereafter, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select 250 crop farmers and 250 Fulani herders from the eight villages for enumeration. A focus group discussion (FGD) of 10 people was used to interact with the Farmers and Fulani herders separately to strike a balance.

Research Instrument. Four null hypotheses were developed to guide the investigation and accomplish the study's goal. It was decided to use a descriptive survey study approach to gather information to accurately and impartially explain the current situation. At the 0.05 significance level, all research hypotheses in the study were tested. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) were the response options adopted.

Method of Data Analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed for data analysis. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. A t-test was used to test the study's hypotheses.

Results

Hypothesis 1

H0: Farmers and Fulani herders conflict has no significant effect on the socio-economic development in the study areas

VARIABLES	N	$\overline{X}$	St.D	Df	Alpha level	t-tab	t-cal	Decision
AGREED	4	350.75	16.86	6	0.05	2.45	16.90	Reject null hypothesis
DISAGREED	4	149.25						

Author's Computation, 2024

Where: N = No. of Items; X = Mean; St.D = standard Deviation; df = Degree of Freedom; t-tab = tabulated value; t-cal = calculated value.

From the above table, the means are 350.75 and 148.25 for the agreed and disagreed responses, respectively. The standard deviation is 16.86. The calculated t-test is 16.90, while the tabulated t-test is 2.45. Since the calculated t-test (16.90) is greater than the tabulated t-test (2.45), we therefore reject the null hypothesis, which states that Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has no significant effect on the socio-economic development in the area and **accept** the alternative hypothesis that says that Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has a significant effect on the socio-economic development in the study areas

Hypothesis 2

H0: Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has no significant relationship with the crops farmers' and herders' productivity

VARIABLES	N	$\overline{X}$	St.D	Df	Alpha level	t-tab	t-cal	Decision
AGREED	6	298.5	24.01	10	0.05	2.23	7.00	Reject the null hypothesis
DISAGREED	6	201.5						

Author's Computation, 2025

Where: N = No. of Items; X = Mean; St.D = standard Deviation; df = Degree of Freedom; t-tab = tabulated value; t-cal = calculated value.

From the above table, the means are 298.5 and 201.5 for the agreed and disagreed responses, respectively. The standard deviation is 24.01. The calculated t-test is 7.00, while the tabulated t-test is 2.23. Since the calculated t-test (7.00) is greater than the tabulated t-test (2.23), we therefore reject the null hypothesis, which states that Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has no significant relationship with the crops farmers' and herders productivity and accept the alternative hypothesis that states that Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict has a significant relationship with the crops farmers' and herders' productivity in the study areas.

Hypothesis 3

H0: Institutions involved in managing the conflicts have not contributed significantly to the management of Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict in the study areas.

VARIABLES	N	$\overline{X}$	St.D	Df	Alpha level	t-tab	t-cal	Decision
AGREED	6	305	38.46	10	0.05	2.23	4.95	Reject null hypothesis
DISAGREED	6	195						

Author's Computation, 2025

Where: N = No. of Items; X = Mean; St.D = standard Deviation; df = Degree of Freedom; t-tab = tabulated value; t-cal = calculated value.

From the table above, the means are 305 and 195 for the agreed and disagreed responses, respectively. The standard deviation is 38.46. The calculated t-test is 4.95, while the tabulated t-test is 2.23. Since the calculated t-test (4.95) is greater than the tabulated t-test (2.23), we therefore reject the null hypothesis, which states that Institutions involved in managing the conflicts have not contributed significantly to the management of Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict in the study area and accept the alternative hypothesis that states that institutions involved in managing the conflicts have contributed significantly to the management of Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen conflict in the study area.

Hypothesis 4

H0. Fulani herders' consistent fighting in Agatu Local Government Area is not significant to land grabbing.

VARIABLES	N	$\overline{X}$	St.D	Df	Alpha level	t-tab	t-cal	Decision
AGREED	4	313.25	51.10	6	0.05	2.45	3.50	Reject the null hypothesis
DISAGREED	4	186.75						

Author's Computation, 2025

Where: N = No. of Items; X = Mean; St.D = standard Deviation; df = Degree of Freedom; t-tab = tabulated value; t-cal = calculated value.

From the table above, the means are 313.25 and 186.75 for the agreed and disagreed responses, respectively. The standard deviation is 51.10. The calculated t-test is 3.50, while the tabulated t-test is 2.45. Since the calculated t-test (3.50) is greater than the tabulated t-test (2.45), we therefore reject the null hypothesis, which states that Fulani herders conflict in Agatu Local Government Area is not significant to land grabbing and accept the alternative hypothesis that states that Fulani herders conflict in Agatu Local Government Area is significant to land grabbing

4. Discussion of the findings

The conflict between farmers and Fulani herders has a significant effect on socio-economic development in the study area.

The results of the first hypothesis show a significant effect on socio-economic development in the Agatu Local Government Area.

According to Moritz (2010), it is a formidable challenge to economic development, a threat to food security, and a threat to the sustainable livelihoods of both herders and agrarian communities. Herder-farmer conflicts not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved, but also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production in West Africa and, invariably, the sustainability of rural communities' livelihoods. "Many sachet water factories, guest houses, and Automobile spare part shops have relocated because of these incessant crises between Fulani and us Herders" (FGD, in Ayila Villages, 2025).

The conflict between farmers and Fulani herders is significantly related to the productivity of farmers and herders in the study areas.

The result of the second hypothesis shows that the conflict between farmers and Fulani herders has a significant effect on crop farmers' and herders' productivity. This is supported by Mercy Corps (2016), which found that Nigeria is losing at least $14 billion in potential revenue annually due to the ongoing conflict between farmers and herders across the country's North-Central region. This is because the two traditional farming

groups (crop producers and cattle herders) that contribute immensely to the country's food security are in constant conflict, thereby threatening sustainable agricultural production.

> Since the beginning of these crises between us and our Host community, our wives and children have not been bold enough to hawk (wara) for sales because we are still sceptical of our safety. Many of our cows have been poisoned. (FGD, with herders' leader in Enogaje and Oweto Villages, 2025).
> Farming is our only source of livelihood, but our safety on the farm is no longer guaranteed; we can no longer feed ourselves, let alone contribute to Nigeria's food security (FGD, farmers' leader in Enogaje and Oweto Villages, 2025).

Institutions involved in managing conflicts have contributed significantly to resolving the conflict between farmers and Fulani herders in the study area

The results of the third hypothesis show that the institutions involved in managing the conflict between the farmers and Fulani herders contributed significantly to conflict resolution. According to the Centre for Peace, Diplomatic and Development Studies (CPDDS, 2012), the study found that the Nigerian police have been very active in managing conflicts. However, the problem with the police is that the force lacks the capacity to guarantee security due to inadequate logistics, particularly mobility, which would have enhanced their ability to respond to crises effectively and efficiently. The study also found that local, state, and federal governments have responded to conflicts in the study areas over the last few years. However, the narratives also show that, in general, the population had lost faith in the security forces, the police, and the judiciary, citing corruption and material greed as having distanced these institutions from the general populace. As far as dispute resolution was concerned, the vulnerable and the less privileged preferred to take their cases to alternative dispute resolution rather than to the police or the judiciary.

> The Nigeria Police and security agencies were seriously trying their best in managing the crisis before now, until we have a Fulani man as Nigeria's President. Security institutions are perceived to be politicised; it seems we are at the mercy of Fulani herders. We have decided to fight for our survival because we, the host community, are perceived as neglected. Even when we give the security agencies intelligence information on Fulani Herders' intention to attack us, they seem to be relaxed and expect the worst to come upon us. (FGD, farmers' leader in Ekwo and Abogbe Villages, 2025).

The consistent fighting by Fulani herders in Agatu Local Government Area is significant to land grabbing

Recent studies conducted by Basil (2015) and Ekpeyemi (2016) have shown that serious conflict erupts between Fulani herders and farmers, leading to loss of life, valuable property, and destruction of vast expanses of arable agricultural farmlands, thereby posing a serious threat to food security since farmers, for fear of attack, could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. At the same time, herders took over the abandoned farms to feed their cattle.

> We often hear that our host community are railing accusations against us that Fulani herders want to claim their land. Most of the land we occupied was rented to us by the indigenes, sometimes for ten (10) years or more; how can they expect us to run and abandon the land we rented because of the crisis? Indigenous cattle farmers also hired most of us to look after their cattle, and the same indigenes gave us guns to protect their cattle. (FGD, herdsmen leader, in Agatu Local Government, 2025).

> Fulani herders have allegedly taken over our land and threatened us against returning to our farms. Some of those who rented land from us have also refused to pay the agreed rent and

> have begun constructing permanent structures on the land, contrary to the terms of our original agreement. As a result, we feel helpless and uncertain about how to protect our land and secure our livelihoods (FGD, herdsmen leader, in Agatu Local Government, 2025).

Conclusion

The Benue State Government has continued to emphasise the implementation of the legislation. In March 2024, the state government announced that security agencies should commence its full implementation (Benue State Government, 2024). Nevertheless, the persistence of farmer-herder tensions indicates the need to assess implementation outcomes rather than assume that the existence of the law has automatically produced lasting peace. In relation to the present study in Agatu Local Government Area, the law provides an important policy framework for examining government responses to farmers-herders conflict and their implications for socio-economic development. Sustainable conflict management requires more than legal prohibition. It requires consistent and impartial enforcement, accessible dispute-resolution mechanisms, community participation, support for appropriate livestock-management systems, and effective coordination among state and federal institutions. These measures can help address the underlying competition over land and water while promoting agricultural productivity, food security, and sustainable livelihoods in Agatu and other affected communities. This position aligns with Awotayo et al. (2024), who argued that effective security management in Nigeria requires preventive strategies, intelligence-driven interventions, institutional coordination, and community participation to address persistent security threats. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with socio-economic and peacebuilding initiatives remains essential for achieving lasting peace in Agatu Local Government Area and other conflict-prone communities.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen security and protect rural communities. The Federal and Benue State Governments should improve the mobility, intelligence-gathering, surveillance capacity, and emergency response mechanisms of security personnel in affected communities. Security agencies should investigate attacks impartially, protect farming and grazing activities, and ensure that individuals responsible for violence are prosecuted in accordance with the law. This recommendation is consistent with Awotayo et al. (2024), who emphasised the importance of proactive security strategies and improved intelligence gathering in combating security threats.
2. Promote modern livestock management. The government should encourage ranching and other regulated livestock-management systems through consultation with affected communities. Where grazing reserves are considered, their establishment should follow lawful procedures, environmental assessments, and meaningful consultation with landowners and host communities.
3. Establish effective conflict-resolution mechanisms. Community peace committees comprising farmers, herders, traditional rulers, local government representatives, women, youth, and security agencies should be established or strengthened. These committees should resolve disputes over crop damage, livestock theft, water access, and grazing routes before they escalate into violence.
4. Strengthen land administration and protect property rights. Relevant authorities should document land ownership, tenancy agreements, and lawful land-use arrangements. Disputes involving alleged land grabbing, unpaid rent, unauthorised construction, or threats against landowners should be resolved through impartial legal and administrative procedures.
5. Provide compensation for losses. A transparent compensation mechanism should be introduced for verified crop destruction, livestock losses, and property damage. Compensation assessments should be impartial, evidence-based, and accessible to both farmers and herders.
6. Restore agricultural productivity and displaced livelihoods. Government and development partners should provide affected households with agricultural inputs, improved seeds, livestock and veterinary services, access to credit, and rehabilitation support. Security should also be improved to enable displaced residents to return voluntarily and resume farming and other economic activities.
7. Promote peace education and early-warning systems. Community sensitisation programmes, intergroup dialogue, and rapid reporting mechanisms should be strengthened to reduce the spread of stereotypes

and rumours and to curb retaliatory attacks. Authorities should respond promptly to credible warnings of impending violence. As noted by Awotayo et al. (2024), early detection and prevention mechanisms are fundamental to reducing the occurrence and escalation of violent conflicts.

8. Improve institutional accountability. The police, judiciary, and local authorities should strengthen public trust through transparent investigations, timely prosecution of offenders, and accessible complaint procedures. Independent monitoring should assess the effectiveness of interventions. Strong institutions and accountable governance structures are essential for sustaining peace and ensuring that conflict-management measures achieve their intended outcomes (Awotayo et al., 2024).

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