JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 2, Issue 4, No. 1 / December 2024
https://www.jopd.com.ng

THE IMPACT OF FARMER-HEDER RELATIONSHIPS ON INSECURITY AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The contemporary Nigeria like most African states is challenged with problems associated with farmer/herder crisis that have affected her food security negatively. A state is secured when the aggregate of the people organized under it has the ability to produce and sustain reasonable food supply and reserves needed for the welfare of the citizens. However, the conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria have over the years disrupt agricultural production, displaced communities, destroy crops and livestock, and leads to the breakdown of food supply chains. The paper examined the impact of farmer-herder relationship on insecurity and food production on Nigeria's national security. The paper relied on secondary sources of data analysis and argued that frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers and the activities of Boko Haram, Banditry, Kidnappings for ransom, displacement, burning down of farm produce and weak presence of state security and strategic system has exacerbated severe food crisis in the country most especially in the agricultural driven areas. It recommends that government should enhance agriculture and human security.

Key words: farmer, Herder, Insecurity, Food production, food crisis**.**

Introduction

Nigeria, currently is the most populous black nation in Africa and the 7th most populous globally. Its population is 217,436 196 million with 110, 104, 841 males representing 50.6% of the population whereas 107, 331, 404 are females representing 49.4% of the population, it has an estimated annual birth rate of 4, 334, 116 representing 21, 351 births daily (Countrymeters, 2022).

Farmer-herder conflicts in Africa have received heightened attention in recent years in the media, academic circles and policy-making contexts, with attendant concerns about the increasing and intensifying levels of conflicts between groups (Flintan, 2021). Farmer-herder conflicts are mostly local, sporadic and low intensity, without direct involvement of governments and government security forces (Abba, 2018).

However, International Organizations have described farmer-herder conflicts using strong, sometimes alarmist language, giving the issue a heightened sense of urgency and threats to global food security. The African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security stated that 'conflicts between herders and farmers on the continent take more lives than terrorism' (AU, 2018). The humanitarian situation in Africa continues on an upward trajectory, with 40 million people living in forced displacement, and Africa also accounts for a significant fraction of the world's food insecured with approximately 146 million people in 35 countries across Africa faced acute food insecurity in 2023 African Union Report, (2023).

The relationship between herders and farmers in Nigeria over farmland and pasture is a serious struggle and escalating conflict amounting to huge casualties and raising tensions particularly in the nation's most produced North Central and North West. Drought, desertification and the collapsed of Ruga system in the north have forced pastoralist herdsmen to seek grazing lands further south and middle belt resulting in competition over scarce resources and clashes with settled farmers, United Nations Development Programmes UNDP, United Nations Human Refugee Agency UNHCR, and Food and Agriculture FAO, Reports (2022). The consequences include a significant loss of lives and livelihoods, disruption of food production, unfettered proliferation of small arms and light weapons, mass displacement of people and a severe undermining of internal security.

Over the years, North Central particularly Benue State and Plateau State was regarded as a core in terms of agricultural production with high food sufficiency, it was on that note that Benue State was tag the 'food basket of the nation' but regrettably, crop production continues to decline which automatically become a threat to food security (Canice and Yunana, 2022). Benue State, frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the farming areas of the state have resulted in the destruction of live and farmlands. According to (Vanguard, 2024) no fewer than 60,000 lives lost in farmers/herders clashes in the North Central alone.

Insecurity has worsened across the country, particularly in the form of terrorism, banditry, and armed conflicts displaces farmers and prevents them from cultivating crops or raising livestock. Key agricultural regions, such as the Middle Belt and Northeastern Nigeria, have been severely affected by attacks from groups like Boko Haram and armed herdsmen, leading to reduced food production according to (Doris Dokua Sasu, 2024) Boko Haram alone has caused over 38,000 deaths of farmers and herders in the Northeastern States (Statista, 2024). Furthermore, insecurity leads to the displacement of millions of people, as seen in the Northeastern, North Central and North Western Nigeria. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) often rely on humanitarian aid for food, straining resources and further exacerbating food insecurity. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) that Nigeria recorded 1,134,828 the highest internally displaced persons in the continent.

Banditry and kidnapping spread across the North West Nigeria, particularly Zamfara, Katsina and the emerging group called Lakurawa in Sokoto and Kebbi poses a severe threat to food security in the region and across the country. This crisis is driven by criminal groups that disrupt rural life and agriculture, frequent target farms, destroying crops, stealing produce and imposing protection taxes on farmers. According to SB-Morgen Intelligence (SBM Intelligence, 2024) investigation carried on the prevalence and effects of kidnappings showed that Nigeria records nearly 4,000 kidnapping cases with N5billion ($6.5million) ransom demanded just in one year. A report by a research firm SBM Intelligence, indicated that atleast, 3,620 people were kidnapped across Nigeria between July 2022 and June 2023.

More so, in early 2024, SBM found that no less than N139 million was paid as farm levies (including planting and harvesting) to bandits who demanded at least N224 million across the North between 2020 and 2023. In the same period leading up to June 2024, at least 1,356 farmers were killed across the country, with most of the killings occurring in the North. These illegal tolls have made it difficult for farmers to access their farms and added to the

mounting food insecurity. While security agents tackle security threats posed by bandits and terrorist groups, new terror organizations are springing up on a daily basis. The latest terrorist group in Nigeria, known as Lakurawa seems to be in firm control of Sokoto and Kebbi states, thus the group's activities are also impacting food security as many farmers in the axis have abandoned their farms or grazing areas for fear of being kidnapped and forced to pay a ransom (Kazeem Akintunde, 2024).

Unknown gunmen spread across South East, and kidnappings in the South West, South-South and across the entire country (Nextier, 2024). Emerging demand and payment of ransom or revenues to the bandits and the insurgents by the farmers/herders in order to gain access to their farmland and or grazing areas in the North east and North West further added to the woes of food production and food security. The United Nations predicts this year approximately 22 million of Nigerians will face food insecurity in 2023, and around 80-82 million are at risk of severe food insecurity by 2030 (UN, 2024). Food insecurity in Nigeria is currently at an alarming rate, necessitating immediate action. Chronic hunger, extreme poverty corruption, bad governance, conflicts reoccurrences, low level of purchasing power and high food prices have in recent months register greater majority of Nigerians cannot afford daily food and consequently the result was the August 1st , 2024 hunger protest that engulf almost all parts of the country. People suffering from extreme food insecurity would go for days without eating owing to a lack of money, high food prices or other resources (Sasu, 2022).

Nigeria's food production is projected, by 2026, to rise again up to $60 billion, up from $55 billion in 2021, Nigeria Food Industry Outlook (NFIO, ReportLinker, 2022-2026). In 2022, Nigeria produced 59.6 million tons of cassava (the largest producer in the world); 47.5 million tons of Yam (the largest producer in the world); 3.3 million tons of taro (the largest producer in the world); 2.6 million tons of cowpea (the largest producer in the world) its exports accounted for 2.67% of the N279.64 billion total agro-foods exports in 2023 and 40% of global ginger production, producing almost 523,000 metric tons annually (FAO, 2023). According to Food and Agriculture of the United Nations report (2021), Nigeria has 70.8 million hectares of agriculture land area with maize, cassava, guinea corn, yam, beans, millet and rice being the major crops. Nigeria's rice production rose from 3.7 million metric tons in 2017 to 4.0 million metric tons in 2018. Inspite of this, only 57% of the 6.7 million tons of rice consumed in Nigeria annually locally produced leading to a deficit of about 3 million metric tons. As for cassava, Nigeria produced 59 million tons in 2017 making it the world's largest producer approximately 20% of global production. All these economic potentials are enormous with high revenue yields from both domestic value and income but it has been drives away by insurgents and farmers/herders clashes in most producing states.

According to African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA, 2021) Benue state for example which is the conflict riddle state, is the largest producer of soya beans, cassava, mangoes and oranges in Nigeria, second largest producer of yams and third largest producer of rice. So also, Borno, Niger, Plateau, Katsina, Gombe, Bauchi, Kogi, Kaduna, Oyo and Taraba are the largest maize producing states which account for nearly two-third (64%) of maize produced in the country . But, the reverse is the case, According to United State Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2023), maize import into Nigeria doubled from 0.5 MMT to about 1 MMT between October 2019 and October 2020. In Q3 2020 alone, Nigeria imported about 26.6 billion worth of maize from Argentina, China, USA and Brazil following the scarcity of maize that emerged as a result of production shortfall because of the growing insecurity in the country especially in the maize producing states and unfavorable climatic change such as drought (AfCFTA, 2021).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Farmer: A farmer is a person who runs and works on a farm. Some farmers raise a variety of food crops, while others keep dairy cows and sell their milk. Farmers work in some aspect of agriculture, growing vegetables, grains, or fruit; or raising animals for milk, eggs, or meat (Vocabulary.com). Farmers are also responsible for the management of farms, ranches, greenhouses, nurseries, and other agricultural producing enterprises. Depending on the type of farm, farmers are involved in planting, cultivating, completing post-harvest activities, overseeing other labours, and directing farm workers. Thus, farmers are critical to the existence of human civilization and make significant contributions to the country's socio-economic progress and well-being (Nafeez, 2024; Abba, 2018)). Therefore, farmers are people who engage in agricultural activities such as farming with the primary objective of producing food and other cash crops either for subsistence consumption or for public consumption. In Nigeria, they are located in all the six geo-political zones.

Herder: According to Cambridge dictionary conceptualized a herder as a man who takes care of a large group of animals of the same or different type. It is also refers to a person who takes care of herds of cattle or flocks of sheep especially in an open field. A herder therefore implies a breeder, or a custodian of cattle or flocks of sheep (Abba, 2018). Herder are more often than not people from the Fulani ethnic group of the western Savanna. In this case extracts are domiciled in Northern Nigeria. Importantly, although often overlooked, meat, milk, eggs, and other animal products, including fish and other seafood's, will play an important role in achieving food security and source of income to both individuals/herders and government as a result of its global demand.

Insecurity: The word insecurity has myriads of connotations. It signifies danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety and or basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. Achumba, Ighomeroho, Akpor (2013) defines insecurity from two perspectives. Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly, insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also lack basic necessities of life like healthy and nutritious food for them to survive and developed as human beings.

Food Production: Food is something that both animals and humans consume for survival. It is essentially derived from various plants and animals but before consumption, by humans, they are processed. Thus, food production is the process of transforming raw ingredients into edible food products. These converted food products can either be used for home cooking directly or by the food processing industries. However, most of the products that we consume are sourced from plants and animals. The products consist of grains, cereals, pulses, honey, milk, fruits, and vegetables, eggs, meat, and many more. Thus, the process of food production can be segregated into a number of stages and each of them is very important. In the farm its start from the cleaning, plaguing, planting, weeding, harvesting, while in the food processing industry, the process starts with primary steps of cleaning, segregation, and ends when the food is packed and marketed (UN, 2013).

Food Insecurity: According to FOA (2013) food insecurity is a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amount of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. It may be caused by the unavailability of food, insufficient purchasing power, inappropriate distribution or inadequate use of food at the household level.

Food Crisis: According to Lee (2012), food crisis exists when situations abruptly threatens food security as a result of shortages. Also, food crisis refers to food scarcity in a society on a large scale arising from a number of factors such as failure in crop production as well as policies by government; which results in malnutrition, hunger and starvation of a group of individual, usually the vulnerable masses.

Theoretical Framework

The main proponents of this theory are Leaning, Arie and Baldwin (1990). However, the use of human security as a theory in the social sciences can be traced back to the pre-cold war, cold war and post-cold war (Menon, 2007). The fundamental objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfillment (Alkire, 2003). Human security is deliberately proactive and people centered; it recognizes that people and their communities are fatally threatened by events well beyond their control; a financial crisis, a violent conflict, HIV/AIDS, a terrorist attack, food crisis, water shortage, famine, drought, and farmer/herder clashes etc. Many threats are far more destructive if they come as a surprise. The damage of animals, food harvest and deaths of farmers/herders can be avoided by providing strategic intervention by the government and its agencies, early warning system can reduce the effect of famine and food insecurity. Yet many of these preparations require threats to be acknowledged, before they occur or at the very least as they occur. The human security approach urges institutions to offer protection which is institutionalized, not episodic; responsive, not rigid; preventive, not reactive.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design combined with observational techniques. The data collection relied primarily on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, reports from international donor's agencies, Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reports, and institutional publications.

Research Design

The descriptive survey design was chosen to explore and document the farmer-herder relationship and its implications for food production and security in Nigeria.
Observations were utilized to complement secondary data by capturing recurring patterns and themes.

Method of Data Collection

The study focused on qualitative data, gathered from a variety of secondary sources:
Inclusion Criteria: Data sources related to farmer-herder interactions, food production, food security and conflict dynamics in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. This includes journals articles, international reports, and news publications.
Exclusion Criteria: Reports or data that were geographically irrelevant, lacked empirical evidences, or focused solely on international agricultural issues unrelated to Nigeria.

Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and described thematically. This involved identifying and categorizing recurring issues, patterns and relationships within the data, such as:

i. the impacts of insecurity on food production
ii. factors exacerbating farmer-herder conflicts
iii. Socio-economic and governance related challenges contributing to food insecurity.

By thematically organizing the data, the study sought to highlight the key issues affecting the farmer-herder relationship and its broader implications for food production and national security.

Results and Discussion

The data collected were qualitatively described in general terms and thematically by identifying the common issues that reoccur, a simple frequency tables was used to summarise all the incidences occur between farmer and herder in recent years.

The study reveals the following discoveries and impacts as a result of recurring conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria:

i. Displacement of Farmers: continuous clashes have forced many farmers to abandon their farmlands, limiting agricultural activities.
ii. Livelihood Disruption: farmers and herders face economic instability due to the destruction of crops, livestock losses, and restricted access to grazing areas.
iii. Increased Insecurity: Banditry, Kidnappings, and destruction of farmland exacerbated the violence, further destabilizing rural communities.
iv. Weak Governance: A lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms and law enforcement has worsened the crisis.

Impacts on food security and production:

i. Reduced food productions, farmer's inability to cultivate crops and herders loss of livestock have led to significant declines in food supply.
ii. Rising food insecurity: Decreased agricultural output has caused food shortages, escalating hunger and malnutrition, especially in affected regions.
iii. Economic consequences: The agricultural sector, a key part of Nigeria's economy, is severely affected, contributing to poverty and inflation in food prices.
iv. Dependence on Imports: With local food production disrupted, reliance on imported food has increased, straining national resources.

Farmer and Herder Relationship in Nigeria

In West Africa, herders have a long history of migration. They often established relationships with sedentary farming populations they encounter. This interaction, while generally cooperative, had also been marked by competition over shared resources, including land, water, and pasture. Historically, the nature of the relationship between herders and farmers has been influenced by individual and communal differences, changes in pastoral and farming systems, and environmental challenges like the depletion of water sources and pasture. In more recent years, factors like climate change have exacerbated these challenges, leading to increased tensions between the two groups (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023). Although clashes have occurred, both groups have historically benefited from a symbiotic relationship characterized by the exchange of goods and services (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Historically, conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria were rare. During the pre-colonial era, these groups coexisted in a mutually beneficial relationship, exchanging resources like cattle manure for farm stubble, which contributed to increased agricultural food productivity. This relationship was maintained through structures such as the Ruga, a system where elected officials from the Fulani group managed grazing routes, selected grazing areas, and played a role in conflict resolution between herders and farmers (Ellwood, 1995). However, colonial rule brought changes that weakened these traditional systems. For example, colonial administrators introduced land policies that disrupted local land use arrangements and reduced the control herders had over grazing areas. These policies have weakened the symbiosis between the groups and contributed to environmental degradation and resource scarcity.

The post-colonial era, marked by rapid urbanization and increasing pressure on land resources, has seen a sharp rise in violent conflicts between herders and farmers. Herders have been forced to migrate to unfamiliar regions in search of pasture, which has led to clashes with farming communities. In addition to these anthropogenic factors, natural causes, particularly climate change, have also played a role. The decline in average rainfall in Africa's semi-arid regions since the 1970s has forced changes in land tenure systems and agricultural practices, further straining relationships between herders and farmers. In recent decades, violent clashes have become more frequent. For example, in the early 1990s, violent confrontations between farmers and herders occurred in communities like Muri, in former Gongola State (now Taraba), where local farmers resisted land appropriation for large-scale ranching. While these conflicts might appear to stem from long-standing ethnic and religious tensions, the relative peace between these groups in pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria suggests that contemporary factors, including the collapse of traditional systems and competition for resources, are largely to blame (Omilisu, 2016).

The effects of the farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria are profound. Since 2016, more than 3,600 people have lost their lives, and over 62,000 individuals have been displaced in the Middle Belt region alone, where the conflict is most severe. The conflicts have also had significant economic repercussions, costing Nigeria an estimated $2.3 million, or 47% of its internally generated revenue (Assessment Capacities Project Thematic Report – ACAPS, 2017). Farmers and herders alike have suffered from reduced food productivity, with crop yields and cattle herds both in decline.

The following table presents the timeline of some of the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria:

Table 1: Farmers-Herders Conflicts in Nigeria (2015-2024)

S/N	Date	Location	Incident Details	Source
1	May 24, 2018	Yorro LGA, Taraba State	5 persons killed	This Day Live, 24th May, 2018
2	April 28, 2018	Onocha-Olona Village, Aniocha-North LGA, Delta	2 persons killed in Aniocha-Olona, 6 seriously injured in Ubulu-Uku	Daily Post, 30th April, 2018
3	April 24, 2018	St. Ignatius Quasi Parish UkporMbalom, Benue	2 catholic priests and 17 worshipers killed, 100 houses burnt down	Pulse.ng, 24th April, 2018
4	April 14 & 16, 2018	Nasarawa State	32 Tiv villagers killed, many displaced	Sun News Online, April 2018
5	April 12, 2018	Jandeikyula village, Wukari, Taraba State	25 persons killed, property worth millions destroyed	All Africa, 13th April, 2018
6	March 19, 2018	Agbenema, Omala LGA, Kogi State	Scores killed, houses burnt	YouTube
7	March 14, 2018	Ogane-Enugu and Ikende communities, Kogi State	25 persons killed, several houses burnt	New Telegraph Online, March 2018
8	March 12, 2018	EnyanwuIgwe, Izzi LGA, Ebonyi State	4 persons killed and properties destroyed	Public Eye, March 2018
9	March 8, 2018	Nzharuvo Village, Bassa, Plateau State	11 killed, 50 houses razed	Punch, 8th March, 2018
10	March 5, 2018	Okpokwu, Benue State	24 persons killed, many wounded, 20 missing	Premium Times, March 2018

11	March 3, 2018	Sardauna LGA, Taraba State	15 herdsmen killed	Sahara Reporters, March 2018
12	April 2016	Taraba State	Farm land dispute; between 15 and 44 people killed	[Ojelade, 2019]
13	January 2017	Ipiga, Ohimini LGA, Benue State	15 killed by herders	[Ojelade, 2019]
14	February 2018	Adamawa State	20 people killed by herders in attack on farmers	[Ojelade, 2019]
15	March 2018	Benue State	26 people killed as herders sack Benue village in fresh attack	[Ojelade, 2019]
16	February 11, 2019	UngwarBardi, Kajuru, Kaduna State	141 people killed, 65 missing	[Ojelade, 2019]
17	July 2020	DokaAvong, Southern Kaduna	At least 6 killed, hundreds displaced	[Ojelade, 2019]
18	August 5-6, 2020	ZangonKataf LGA, Kaduna State	At least 19 people killed	[Ojelade, 2019]
19	2015	Clashes over land resources	Jibia, Katsina	Usman, 2019
20	2017	Escalation of conflicts leading to armed banditry involving cattle rustling and kidnapping	Various locations in Katsina	BBC, 2020
21	2018	State-level conflict prevention and mitigation dialogue organized by Mercy Corps	Jibia, Batsari, Kankara, Danmusa LGAs	ThisDayLive, 2024
22	2019	Investigation of socio-ecological indices influencing farmer-herder conflicts	Northern Senatorial District, Kaduna	Usman, 2019
23	2020	Rustling of 200 cattle, more than 300 sheep and other livestock	Faskari LGA	Muhammad, 2020
24	2023	LG plans to establish grazing routes for conflict prevention	Batsari LGA, Katsina	GlobalTrackerNG, 2024
25	2024	Pledge for peace ahead of the farming season	Katsina State	DailyTrust, 2024

Source: Author's compilation, 2024

A number of efforts have been made by successive Nigerian governments to address the conflict. The Grazing Reserve Act of 1964, for example, sought to create designated

grazing areas and routes for livestock movement, but the program became defunct after the First Republic collapsed in 1966. More recent legislative efforts, such as the National Grazing Routes and Reserve Bill of 2012 and the National Grazing Reserve Bill of 2016, sought to re-establish grazing reserves but met with stiff opposition, especially from southern Nigeria, where there were fears of land seizures and ethnic domination. Similarly, the RUGA (Rural Grazing Area) initiative proposed by the Nigerian government in 2019, which aimed to settle herder families in designated areas with necessary amenities, was also rejected due to concerns about ethnic favoritism (Relief Web, 2018).

Insecurity, Food Production and National Security

Man survives only when he produces. One of the basic needs of life is food; it is a key prerequisite for the survival of all mankind (Otaha, 2013). However, food security has lingered in Nigeria mainly as a result of overdependence on the black gold "oil" which remained the mainstay of the Nigerian economy for years back. Food security is one of the pillars of UN Sustainable Development Goals. In Nigeria, the issue of food production is on the decrease despite the efforts of successive governments in initiating series of agricultural programmes and policies targeted on food security (Mary,Ndaghu, Turaki; 2024). Thus, the current crisis revealed flaws of decades of public policies in terms of inclusion and strategic management of farmers and herders clashes. It also revealed the inadequacy of national defence and security systems to the evolution of unconventional threats and criminal networks.

National security is intrinsically linked to human security and food security. Indeed, human securities at the epicenter of national security. Human security priotizes the security of the individual over that of the state, since there can be no state without its citizens. Louw and Lobbe (2017) have noted that human security primarily focuses on protecting the integral worth of people against insecurities by dealing with the circumstances that threaten the well-being and survival of the people. Thus, human security emphasizes the establishment and production of food and water security, economic and political security for the general population as critical mechanisms to achieve a more stable level of state security (Lanicci, 2017). However, there is a nuanced relationship between food production and violence that is any decrease in food production of a nation can be a source of grievances that motivate participation in protest and rebellions which undermines national security and defence just as witnessed recently in Nigeria the August 1st 2024 hunger protest. So acute and severe food insecurity has a dampening effect on conflict bahaviour, these events are increasingly being regarded as significant threats to social stability and peace by academics and policy makers (Bowa, 2011).

Insecurity as a core challenger of increased food production in Nigeria are intertwine and cyclical. Their understanding requires the intertwining of the history of several decades of alternating clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria, and fifteen years of unprecedented instability, and plural responses from States, partners and communities. However, analyses have concluded that conflicts are inevitable due to the scarce resources and the need to satisfy life of both human and animals. The frequent occurrence of conflicts, clashes between farmers and herders, repeated incidents of banditry, kidnappings, destruction of food harvests, climate change, and challenges in governance have significantly contributed to the continuous decline in food production in Nigeria. North Central and North West region were most of the country's food are coming from are major theatres of this insecurity, especially the farmer and herder conflicts. To recall a few incidences Vanguard (2024) reports that, in 2016 the suspected Fulani herders invaded the Agatu Local government area of Benue State and killed an estimated 500 persons. It further added on the eve of Christmas 2023, about 50 villages in Bokkos, Mangu and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas of Plateau State were visited with a crushing bloodbath by terrorist gunmen this attack lasted for

three days, and the houses numbering over 221, farmlands and several vehicles were also set ablaze. Thus, Vanguard noted that between 2017 and 2020, alone suspected Fulani attackers were reported to have carried out 654 attacks and killed 2539 Nigerians (Vanguard, 2024).

Furthermore, serial targeted mass killings have also continued in the North Central States, especially Benue and Plateau states, including in 2021 attack on Bassa Local Government Area that left 17 dead and the 2022 attack in Puka and Dinter Local Government which led to 7 persons dead. The conflict between herders (nomadic and semi-nomadic Fulani pastoralists) and Farmers (non-Fulani agrarian communities) has routinely occurred in Nigeria for over century. It has claimed more lives than terrorism in Africa and poses a great challenge to human safety and food production. Insecurity has threatened Food production in Nigeria largely due to the farmer-herder clashes, the contribution of agriculture to Nigeria's GDP dropped by 40% from US$113.64 billion in 2013 to US$78.45 billion in 2017 to US$60 billion in 2023 (NFIO, ReportLinker, 2022-2026). Meanwhile, at least 10,000 displaced persons from the several affected communities in the North Central are in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (Vanguard, 2024). This crisis has prevented many farmers and households from accessing their farmlands, leading to reduced food production, widespread malnutrition, poverty and a breakdown of law and order, further put a lot of Nigerians into sever food insecurity.

Similarly, Statista Research Department (2024) reports that livestock production as a source of food security in Nigeria contributes around 2.3 percent to the national GDP and around 10 percent to the agriculture value added. Estimates indicate that Nigeria's national herd comprises 18.4 million cattle, 43.4 million sheep, 76 million goats and 180 million poultry (FMARD, 2017). Meanwhile, the National Bureau of Statistics has revealed that Ebonyi, Jigawa and Benue states have the highest percentage of crop, livestock and poultry agricultural farming households, (NBS, 2024). But with the current insecurity situation the states especially Benue and Jigawa experienced significant decreases. Nigeria consumes about 1.5 million tons of chicken annually but produces only 30% locally, as a result of production deficit in the chicken market, Nigeria loses about N600 billion annually (the Guardian, 2017)

However, cattle rustling have become one of the major drivers of farmer/herder conflict in Nigeria. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) reported that Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) claimed that a total of 322 herders were killed while over 60,000 cows were rustled in 2013 in Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara states. Shehu et al. (2017) estimated that 1,798 cattle were rustled while 60 herdsmen were killed in Katsina state in 2017 alone and 168 deaths in Junuary 2018, Amnesty International (2018). Thus Nigeria is said to be losing an average of $13.7 billion annually to the farmer-herder conflict (Business Day, 2015). According to Global Initiative (2023) cattle rustling in Nigeria have evolved from a sustainable community practice into a significant illicit economy, delivering material profits to conflict actors and multiplying harms. Since 2011, the country has experienced a surge in the number of rustling incidents, resulting in thousands of deaths, loss of livelihoods, widespread destruction and displacement of people. This has had a debilitating impact on the country's food production. In Nigeria's North-West and North-Central regions, in particular, cattle rustling have contributed to growing instability by increasing levels of violent crime (Madueke, 2023). Cattle raid led to the reduction of income of the cattle owners which has adversely affected their socio-economic well-being and that of the country's national security. This is because herdsmen were forced to either sell or have their cattle forcefully confiscated by bandits. The government is reported to be losing billions of naira due to the menace, as a result of unremitted revenues and the illegal trade of rustled animals in the black market.

Conclusion

It appears from the above issues in security and developments that the vulnerability of food production in Nigeria has been built over time, due to the reoccurrence of farmers and herder's clashes and the emerging insecurity issues like banditry, kidnapping, burning of food harvest, tax imposition by bandits and cattle rustling. This has led to increased food insecurity and poverty, particularly in the agricultural regions of North Central and North West Nigeria. Governance gaps, weak state presence, weak national security strategy and the fragilities of state peace building mechanisms systems have exacerbated these issues, allowing criminal networks and informal systems to thrive. The absence of strong security frameworks has left many communities vulnerable. Food productions remain the backbone for the survival of every State and its citizens, the economic loss from these conflicts is substantial, with billions lost annually due to reduced agricultural output, cattle rustling, and the destruction of farmlands. The human toll includes mass displacement, loss of livelihoods, and diminished socio-economic well-being. While bad policies and environmental factors have contributed to the escalation of violence between farmers and herders, mitigating this conflict is essential for the well-being of the affected populations as well as for the stability and food production prosperity of the country as a whole.

Recommendations

Looking forward, a pragmatic approach is required to resolve the conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria. Human security must be giving utmost priority, our security forces must be proactive rather than reactive especially in farmers and herders conflict prone states, intelligence gathering and synergy between and amongst security forces are encourage. Engaging traditional rulers and local stakeholders in security and decisions making processes, these leaders often have better knowledge of local dynamics and can mediate conflicts effectively. Leaders in conflict-prone areas have expressed frustration with being excluded from decision-making processes, and involving them could lead to more effective solutions. Finally, Modernizing agricultural and livestock practices, Nigeria can foster peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers. As the demand for land intensifies due to population growth, traditional methods of farming and cattle herding have become unsustainable. Modernizing agricultural practices, such as the use of ranches for cattle herding, could reduce the need for herders to migrate in search of pasture and help mitigate conflicts over land.

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