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Farmers-herders' conflict and goal two (2) of the sustainable development goals in Benue State

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Abstract

This study offers an analysis of the linkage between farmers-herders' conflict and the goal two of the sustainable development goal in Benue State of Nigeria. The sustainable development goal which is a global movement addresses a number of issues one of which is zero hunger. However, the farmers-herders' conflict has increasingly made the actualization of zero hunger difficult. With the use of secondary sources of data, this paper examines the negative experiences of farmers-herder's conflict in Benue State and the challenges of coping with the conflict despite the existence of an anti-open grazing law. Theory of Eco-violence was adopted as the theory underpinning this study. This study which was content analyzed argued that food security is a critical aspect of society and all hands must be on deck to wrestle with whatever constitutes a threat to it. This study found that the goal two of the sustainable development goal, which centers on zero hunger, has not been achieved due to the lingering killings of farmers despite government's response in the area of promulgating an anti-open grazing law in the State. The study also found that the effects of the conflict to lives and livelihood are enormous. The recommendations proffered by this study includes the adoption of a pragmatic, proactive and collaborative approach by government at all levels and the governed in the fight between farmers and herders as this will help to achieve a long-lasting reconciliatory solution between the two main parties involved in the conflict.

Keywords: Farmers-herders' conflict; Sustainable Development Goal (SDG); Zero hunger; Agricultural development

1. Introduction

Farmers and herders' conflict is a common phenomenon experienced in many parts of Nigeria and especially States in the North central region. This conflict between farmers and herders constitutes a threat to food security which consequently hinders the attainment of sustainable development goal two. The sustainable development goal two is based on ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition as well as promoting sustainable agriculture. Hunger, which arises due to inability to afford or access good food, can be described as a pandemic that has led to the death of many people particularly in developing countries. According to a report by the United Nations [1], about 2.37 billion people are without food or unable to eat a healthy balanced diet on a regular basis. Unfortunately, this predicament causes nutritional deficiencies such as anemia, stunted growth, malnutrition and even the untimely death of some. A society with the above description is one that is food insecure.

Achieving food security goes beyond the eradication of hunger. Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020, an increase of almost 320 million from 2019. Such levels indicate that people are unable to eat a healthy, balanced diet on a regular basis, or that they run out of food and, at

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worst, go a day or days without eating. The highest levels of food insecurity were found in sub-Saharan Africa (66.2 per cent) [1].

Lately, Benue State of Nigeria has been experiencing food deficit, thanks to reasons such as the conflict between farmers and herders. In Nigeria, this conflict has caused a downturn in the agricultural sector in a dynamic world where there are moves by many countries to ensure the attainment of sustainable development in virtually every sphere of human endeavor. Onwunyi and Anekwe [2] opine that, the Fulani herdsmen and farmers' clashes in Benue State negatively affects food production due to the prevalent fear of crop farmers who are usually uncertain of their future and whose lives are always in danger. Several factors account for farmers-herders' conflict. One of such is climate change, which leads to the struggle for economic survival by both groups and generally affects the lives of citizens [3, 4].

Government and the people have a contractual relationship that defines their roles and purpose in the State. The people are expected to give up their rights and be law abiding while government is vested with the power and responsibility of protecting lives and property as well as guaranteeing the welfare and economic prosperity of the people and the State at large. The inability of government to live up to its responsibility oftentimes erodes the confidence of the people and equally makes some of them apathetic. Some political and even religious leaders have become sentimental and political with the issues surrounding the farmers-herders' conflict. Some citizens feel helpless and disappointed in government's failure to protect them. Alhassan [5] opine that, failure of the police and courts to resolve the farmers-herders' conflict has contributed to the frequency of the clashes exacerbating chronic insecurity and encouraging the conflicting groups to take responsibility for their own security by trying to defend themselves, which is a threat to the sustainability of the federation. Some political office holders have been accused of living in denial and playing double-standard with the conflict between farmers and herders. For instance, it has been alleged that the President of the federal republic of Nigeria, Mohammed Buhari, has upheld the Fulani people as his first constituency, placing their interest over and above the interest of other Nigerians particularly farmers.

In Benue State of Nigeria, farming is witnessing a loss of attraction owing to the fact that attacks on farmers is becoming a discouraging factor coupled with the fact that some of the farmers are hibernating against their wish in internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. As a matter of fact, there is a gradual decline of farming activities in Benue State, like many other States where farmers and herders' conflict is being experienced. Some farmers, for fear of losing their lives, are opting for alternative means of survival. On the flip side, some other farmers who are still interested in farming cannot do so as they are living unstable and unsettled lives in internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. Consequently, this conflict has a lot of socio-economic and even political implications which are more disadvantageous than advantageous.

With the appellation of 'food basket of the nation', which Benue State of Nigeria is known by, it is believed that citizens of Benue State will be experiencing zero hunger. Unfortunately, this belief is an illusion and unrealizable especially with the consistent experience of conflicts between farmers and herders even after the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law, 2017. A lot of citizens in Benue State are confronted with food deprivation. As a matter of fact, zero hunger is unattainable in any society where farmers are denied the opportunity of safe and peaceful farming due to unresolved issues that often transpire between them (the farmers) and herders leading to frequent conflicts. Suffice to say, herders are often being accused of unleashing terror on the lives and livelihood of farmers. On the other hand, farmers are equally not exonerated as they are sometimes being accused by Fulani herders of either attacking or rustling their cattle.

The farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State of Nigeria has left quite a number of devastating impacts which requires urgent attention. One of the effects of the farmers-herders' conflict is its negative consequence on food production and this is inimical to the attainment of sustainable development goal two. It is disturbing to see that food insufficiency is being experienced in Benue State and this could spell doom in a number of ways including the rapid acceleration of crime as hunger has the tendency to negatively control some persons and make them put up irrational and negative habits such as stealing, prostituting and so on, all in a bid to survive. The conflict has caused a lot of things to fall apart and when things fall apart, the centre cannot hold. The farmers and herders' conflict which has contributed to the shortage of food has equally increased the level of inflation in the prices of food, causing an increase in the number of hungry people. A lot of indigent and impoverished families can barely feed well, not because they are fasting from food but as a result of lack of wherewithal or finances to get decent and nutritious meals because of the high cost of food.

The crux of this paper is to examine the farmers-herders' conflict and sustainable development goal in Benue State with particular emphasis on goal two (zero hunger). It is interesting to note that there is a plethora of study in this area however, not many studies have linked the farmers-herders' conflict with sustainable development goal two (zero hunger) with reference to Benue State. Be that as it may, current thinking, particularly in the light of the Benue State

experience since the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law, 2017 seems to focus on how to totally end the farmers-herders' conflict and other related issues and how to improve agricultural production in Benue State.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

1.1.1. Farmers-Herder's Conflict

Le Meur and Hochet [6] posited that farmers-herders' conflicts basically involves State, non-State as well as institutional actors in a complex manner, thus extending beyond just farmers and herders. To Okoli [7, p. 26] "Historical trends of herdsmen militancy in Nigeria show that the phenomenon has progressively metamorphosed from rudimentary communal skirmishes to organized armed confrontation in its apparent dynamics of degeneration". Scarcity and depletion of natural resources are some of the reasons behind the farmers-herders' conflict. Grossman and Helpman [8, p. 42] argued that, "economic policy-makers face the difficult question of how best to promote rapid, sustainable economic growth in the face of depletable stocks of irreproducible natural resources".

Lately, agriculture has not been thriving as expected in Benue State. One of the reasons is because of the conflict between farmers and herders. The herders often invade farmlands destroying farmers' crops in the process. The herders on their part have often accused farmers and other locals of rustling and attacking their cattle. These reasons and many others eventually stir up conflicts between farmers and herders with many adverse consequences including a drop in agricultural production.

1.1.2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Elliot [9] argued that sustainable development refers to maintaining development over time. The sustainable development goal "is a universal commitment, undertaken by developed and developing countries alike, in the framework of a strengthened global partnership that takes account of the means of implementation to achieve this change, the prevention of natural disasters, and climate change mitigation and adaptation" [10, p. 7]. Sustainable development which is increasingly becoming 'hard to avoid' has currency well beyond international organizations and heads of state. [11]. "The quest to eradicate poverty and hunger as well as attain food security is an issue of global concern which is why it was indicated as part of the objectives in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which both convey global development agenda" [12, p. 36].

The Sustainable Development Goals, which includes 17 Goals and 169 targets, sets out an ambitious vision for all-round sustainable development with an integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions [10].

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are as follows:

- No poverty
- Zero hunger
- Good health and well-being
- Quality education
- Gender equality
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Affordable and clean energy
- Decent work and economic growth
- Industry, Innovation and infrastructure
- Reduced inequalities
- Sustainable cities and communities
- Responsible consumption and production
- Climate action
- Life below water
- Life on land
- Peace, Justice and strong institutions
- Partnership for the goals.

A critical look at the sustainable development goals reveals that virtually everything about the comfort and well-being of human existence is summarized in the 17 sustainable development goals. However, for the purpose of this study, the

emphasis will basically be on issues related to goal number two, which is, “zero hunger” and which can also be linked to food security.

1.1.3. Food Security

Food security is a situation where majority of a country’s population have access to food in adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times [13]. Food is a necessity for human living as it is invaluable and inalienable. Virtually every living thing depends on one thing or the other as food for their sustenance and survival. Plants need water and sunlight to survive, humans and animals also depend on food for survival. Consequently, food security means that people, even the poorest members of the population, have the ability of getting, growing or buying their food, that is, they can have access to food with ease [4].

There are several factors responsible for food insecurity in Benue State. However, one of these is the farmers and herders’ conflict. In other words, man’s actions and inactions to a large extent contribute to the food insecurity being experienced in Benue State. Azu [14, p. 105] stated that, “It is imperative to note that most of the factors responsible for food shortage in Nigeria are caused by man”. Suffice to say the continuous attack on farmers is a recipe for disaster in the agricultural sector and by extension, a deeper experience of food crisis.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the theory of Eco-violence traceable to Homer-Dixon [15] as its guide. Homer-Dixon articulated some important relationships between depletion in the ecosystem and conflict. Eco-violence is violence triggered by the degradation or pressure on earth’s resources which results in scarcity. Jimoh [16, p. 276] citing Miller stated that, environmental degradation refers to the downward trend in the environmental resources such that their level of use in the human societies equally decreases at an increasing rate. Environmental degradation often disrupts the socio-economic life of the human population who are immediately dependent on natural resources for sustenance [17].

According to Homer-Dixon [15, p. 30], decreases in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and unequal resource access act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population. This can reduce economic productivity, both 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. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts.

However, disagreeing with the position that scarcity triggers the conflict, Indra de Soysa [18] argued that relative abundance of renewable resources and not scarcity, leads to violence causing a reduction in economic, human, and institutional development. In other words, the abundance of mineral resources is associated with higher levels of conflict and lower levels of human and institutional development.

Furthermore, going by the postulation of Homer-Dixon [15], the depletion or pressure on renewable resources causes a clash of interest. Anifowose and Enemuo [19] argued that scarce resources often trigger a struggle. Odoh and Chilaka [20] opined that Nigeria, just like other countries, is also confronted with climate change hazards which affects how humans access certain vital resources for their survival and also disrupts the normal functioning of the ecosystem.

The relevance of the theory of eco-violence, in relation to this study, is seen in the analysis of climatic conditions and other factors being a trigger of the farmers-herders’ conflict which consequently impedes robust food production. Consequently, the desire to attain zero hunger cannot be guaranteed in any area where farmers-herders’ conflict is experienced. Put differently, the challenges of eco-violence is not only in the area of farmers-herders’ conflict but also negatively affects food production and increases hunger and starvation.

1.2.1. Literature Review

Lots of scholarly works exist on the effects of farmers-herders’ conflict. However, not much has been done to explain the link between the farmers-herders’ conflict and the achievement of goal two of sustainable development goal. This study examined the effects of the farmers-herders’ conflict on sustainable development goal two in Benue State especially with regards to the attainment of food security in the State.

Generally, some scholarly works reviewed showed that there are factors that militate against the attainment of food security in many places especially countries in Africa. A notable factor identified by some scholars whose works were reviewed is the issue of conflict especially as it concerns farmers and herders.

Nwozor, Olanrewaju and Ake [21] in a study on national insecurity and the challenges of food security in Nigeria evaluated Nigeria's quest to achieve food security against the backdrop of national insecurity. The interconnection between national insecurity and food production preceding the actualization of food security was examined in the study. These scholars identified conflict as impediment to food production. Also, Ajibefun [22] observed some socio-economic effects suffered because of the conflict between farmers and herders. They include a drop in output and income of farmers/nomads, scarcity and inflation in the cost of agricultural products, displacement of farmers and loss of human lives etc.

Apenda [23] assessed the impact of farmers-herder's conflict on food security in Benue State. Using a survey design, 320 farmers were selected from the population affected by the conflict as the sample for the study. Consequently, findings from the study revealed that so many human lives were lost with the destruction of farm lands, residential buildings and schools leading to food insecurity as well as human capital losses.

On his part, Udosen [24] carried out a study on farmers-herders' crisis and food security in Nigeria with a focus on the causes and implications. The study also agreed that the incessant crises between herdsman and farmers in Nigeria, has claimed so many lives and property, and displaced so many, with attendant socio-economic consequences on sustainable development of the nation.

With the arguments of the authors whose works were reviewed, not much was done to examine the linkage between the farmers-herders' conflict and achievement of the goal two (zero hunger) of sustainable development goal in agrarian Benue State, Nigeria, which is the gap this study aims to bridge.

2. Material and methods

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The study adopted the secondary source of data collection. Secondary sources such as books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, internet materials from reliable sources, official newsletter from government were used in this study.

Also, content analysis was adopted as the method of analysis to interpret and analyze the farmers-herders' conflict and goal two of the sustainable development goal with reference to the Benue State experience. The content analysis included an overview of the farmers-herders' conflict in Benue State with a highlight of some incidences of attacks on farmers in the State. Again, this study analyzed food production in Benue State, pointing out some of the challenges affecting agricultural development as well as some of the implications of the farmers-herders' conflict and the goal two of the sustainable development goal one of which is increased hunger.

2.1. An Overview of the Farmers/Herders Conflict in Benue State

Farmers are indispensable in every society and their role in agricultural development cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, the Fulani herders are also very important for the role they play. Alhasan [5, p. 129] acknowledged this when he stated that; "the contribution of the Fulani to the local food chain and national food security cannot be overstressed".

Farmers and herders in Benue State have at some point had cordial and cooperative relationship. However, there has been rising tension between the two groups. The conflict between farmers and herders is an unfortunate one that has frustrated the smooth running of agricultural activities in Benue State. In fact, "the conflict between farmers and herdsman is occasioned by the grazing activities of herdsman who through their grazing, navigate the landscape in search of food for their cattle" [3, p. 174]. Both herders and farmers are guilty of partaking in the conflict in one way or the other though it has been argued that farmers suffer the most as they are more on the receiving end of the conflict [5].

Herders are smaller in number when compared to the number of farmers in Benue State but their activities have far reaching consequences that are felt by many. Allegations abound, that some herders move about unhindered with sophisticated weapons with which they attack. Ogbole [25, p. 66] corroborated this fact as he argued that, "The current sets of Fulani who bear AK47 assault rifles are as strange as they come. Many Nigerians wonder what has become of the stick-bearing Fulani who were friendly with their host communities and obeyed the rules of the places they have to rear their cattle".

As the relationship between farmers and herders grew sour, a climate of violence also began to grow with unprecedented wreckage recorded in many parts of Benue State. In 2016, as many as 1,269 people were killed in Benue

State, with the invasion of at least 14 out of the 23 LGAs [26]. In his argument, Olakunle [27] opined that herders often encroached on farmlands indiscriminately, and farmers in turn try to resist the destruction of their farmlands and crops by herdsmen which often triggers violent clashes between the two sides. The Benue State secretary of Myetti Allah once argued that provocative cow rustling is suffered by herders. This consequently results in the conflict and loss of lives of many innocent people in the communities.

Table 1 below highlights a few examples out of many attacks on local farmers and other citizens of Benue State.

Table 1 Some incidents of farmers-herders' conflict in Benue State.

S/N	Location	Year	Cause	Casualties	Sources
1	Communities in Agatu	2016	Unknown cause	Unspecified number killed	[7]
2	Communities in Guma and Logo L.G.A	January, 2018	Unknown cause	Over 20 people killed in addition to 50 killed earlier	[28]
3	Agatu	February, 2016	Unknown cause	over 500 locals killed and 7000 displaced	[29]
4	Logo LGA (Ngorukgan, Tse Chia, Deghkia and Nhumbe)	March, 2016	Unknown cause	eight residents killed	[29]
5	Yelawa, Guma L.G.A.	August, 2021	Unknown cause	8 people killed, including a mother and four kids.	[30]
6	Kwande and Gwer West	2022	Unknown cause	Over 20 people killed	[31]

The Fulani herders have often resisted plea and persuasions by some private and public bodies and individuals asking them to own ranches where they can confine their animals rather than moving through thick bushes both day and night in search of food for cattle. Their rejection of such harmless and more modern way of rearing cattle show that they do not value their lives and perhaps the lives and livelihood of others hence, the unlawful killings of farmers or whoever is opposed to the grazing of their cattle. The conflict between farmers and herders have exacerbated hunger in Benue State as there is a reduction in farming activities which is causing a decline in food production and which equally affects the economy negatively.

The intensity and multiplicity of the conflict compelled the Benue State government to enact the open grazing prohibition and ranching law in 2017. Many farmers in Benue State no longer enjoy the conducive environment needed for farming. It is pertinent to note that the law has not been able to effectively tackle the issues surrounding the conflict as the adamant Fulani herders have continued to strike and kill people in Benue State. The Governor of Benue State was quoted to have said, "If these killings by our enemies are to deter us from operating the Anti- Open Grazing Law in Benue that was legally processed, they have failed because we will not be cowed" [25]. The politicization of the conflict by some political office holders may have hindered the law from firmly putting a stop to these conflicts and killings. The president of the federal republic of Nigeria who is a Fulani man has been accused on several occasions of giving direct or indirect backing to the Fulani herdsmen thereby enabling them to be courageous in their attacks on farmers. The security operatives have equally been accused of not doing enough to handle the issues of the farmers and herders' conflict. In fact, some have argued that there are no sanctioning mechanisms in place to punish perpetrators to serve as deterrence and forestall reoccurrence of these killings. It is important to note that when people are not apprehended or sanctioned for any crime committed, a repeat of that crime is inevitable.

2.2. Food Production in Benue State

The agricultural sector is an important aspect of every society, deserving a robust attention from both the leaders and the led for optimal result of food production. Certain funds are usually being allocated by the federal government for agricultural development yearly [32]. Food security or insecurity in any society is largely a reflection of the viability or otherwise of the agricultural sector and the agricultural policies on ground. As a matter of fact, the agricultural sector is the engine room or livewire of human survival as food is very important to man.

In Benue State, majority of the farmers are predominantly small-holder farmers. The State has numerous agricultural potentials which have not been fully harnessed. In fact, farmers in Benue State have not fully enjoyed the benefits of getting adequate farming inputs from the government. As a coping strategy, the Benue State governor occasionally declares public holidays to afford farmers and farming civil servants the opportunity to attend to their farms and thereby increase food production. However, recording success in the agricultural sector goes beyond mere declaration of work-free days for agricultural purposes. Importantly, farmers need incentives, inputs and the right environment to achieve remarkable success in agricultural output.

Some youths (educated and uneducated) in Benue State are in a hot-chase for white collar jobs which account for why there are cases of continuous migration from rural areas (where there is availability of lands for agricultural purposes) to urban areas (where arable lands are scarce or limited). A good number of able-bodied youths from Benue State live in cities like Abuja, Lagos, and Port-Harcourt etc. all in search for greener pastures. Apart from opting for white collar jobs because of the belief that it is more lucrative and honorable in nature than farming, the conflict between farmers and herders which has a good number of negative effects is a major discouraging factor inhibiting Benue State youths. Most of them are reluctant engaging in farming for fear of dying young as a result of the frequent attacks by Fulani herders. The media is often awash with reports of frequent attacks mostly on farmers; consequently, most of the youths, hearing and seeing all these, are unwilling to engage in farming activities for fear of risking their lives.

In their opinion, Ojo and Adebayo [33] posited that though Nigeria is probably better in terms of food production than some other countries, it is yet, one of the food-deficient countries in Africa. Benue State is not exempted from this narrative of food deficiency despite being known as the food basket of the nation. Although there is engagement of agricultural activities in the State, it is however not substantial enough to eradicate hunger and starvation as citizens still suffer food shortage or high cost of food items. In Benue State, there are lots of families who cannot afford three square meals as they lack the wherewithal to afford it. Some who have food to eat rarely have balanced diet (meals) and end up eating foods that are lacking in nutrients.

Some of the staple foods produced in Benue State include rice, yams, cassava, groundnut, maize etc. However, getting accurate record of food production is sometimes challenging. Ujoh, Igbawua, and Paul [34] argued that poor statistics and record-keeping from local farmers makes it difficult for the size of area under rice cultivation to be accurately ascertained.

Table 2 Land Area and Production Output of some types of Food in Benue State

Products (crops)	Land Area ('000) Ha (2019)	Land Area ('000) Ha (2020)	% Change	Production ('000) MT (2019)	Production ('000) MT (2020)	% Change	Yield (Ton/Ha) (2019)	Yield (Ton/Ha) (2020)
Rice	274.78	271.70	-1.12	537.42	506.68	-5.72	1.96	1.86
Maize	157.16	161.11	2.52	391.61	379.17	-3.18	2.49	2.35
Sorghum	193.03	192.13	-0.47	198.09	195.40	-1.36	1.03	1.02
Cowpea	150.86	140.24	-7.04	129.87	133.46	2.76	0.86	0.95
Yams	192.94	195.88	1.52	2653.42	2881.66	8.60	13.75	14.71
Cassava	423.32	402.34	-4.96	3862.41	3678.17	-4.77	9.12	9.14
Ginger	12.00	10.47	-12.72	66.50	65.95	-0.82	5.54	6.30
Coco yam	29.05	29.54	1.68	126.61	126.48	-0.10	4.36	4.28

Source: [35]

Table 2 above shows that food production in Benue State is not witnessing an appreciable increase that can guarantee food security and tackle the challenges of hunger. For instance, looking at the years 2019 and 2020, the analysis of the table above shows that in the year 2020, foods like rice, maize, sorghum, cowpea, cassava and ginger witnessed a drop in production when juxtaposed with the quantity produced the year before, 2019. This drop is majorly attributed to the attacks on farmers by herders and other factors. However yam and cocoyam witnessed a slight increase in production in 2020 when compared with the output of 2019. It is imperative to note here that the farmers-herders' conflict is prevalent in many communities in Benue State though some communities enjoy relative peace hence they witness

minimal herders' attacks making it possible for them to carry out farming activities. Places like Katsina-Ala L.G.A., Gboko LGA, Konshisha LGA., Vandekya LGA etc. are notable for yam and cocoyam production and fortunately suffer less attack which accounts for the slight increase in their production as shown on the table above. However, it is important to state that a steady, progressive and impressive increase in the production of food in all the communities in Benue State is imperative to guarantee food security and end the pangs of hunger.

2.3. Implications of the Farmers-Herders' Conflict on SDG 2 in Benue State

To say that the farmers-herders' conflict, with attacks mostly coming from the Fulani insurgents has greatly threatened food security in Benue State is to state the obvious. The frequent clashes between farmers and herders prompted the Benue State government under the leadership of Governor Samuel Ortom to enact the Open grazing prohibition and ranching establishment law in 2017. The existence of the open grazing prohibition law has not completely put a stop to the on-going killings related to the struggle over land related matters in Benue State. The law was expected to not only end the conflict between farmers and herders but also boost agricultural production. It is however noteworthy that politicization has been the bane of inter-governmental synergy concerning resolution of the farmers-herder's conflict. The Benue State government had on several interviews alleged that he is being prevented from meeting with the President and that the President has failed to intervene and ameliorate the plight of local farmers. These allegations suggest that there is no collaborative relationship between the Federal and Benue State government to unite and defend the Benue people against every form of unjust attack that consequently affects food production. Increased food production that will guarantee the attainment of zero hunger remains impossible if there is no end to the farmers-herder's conflict in Benue State. The importance of synergy, collective brainstorming and pragmatic actions in resolving the lingering conflict cannot be overemphasized.

Another effect of the farmers-herder's conflict in Nigeria and particularly Benue State is food shortage. Conflict interrupts farming activities and increases food insecurity. As a matter of fact, the activities of Boko Haram sect and herdsmen heighten food insecurity as an alarming degree of mayhem; loss and displacement of millions of people from their domains are often experienced. A people experiencing food insecurity are also faced with reduction in the intake of food nutrients; increased rates of mental health problems and depression, chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and insomnia, etc. [14]. Food is important as it ensures the preservation and continuity of life. The farmers and herders' conflict is gradually killing the desire for farming in Benue State. Subsequently, this conflict negatively affects the food chain supply in Benue State and beyond.

Furthermore, investors fear to invest where there is a threat to their returns on investment because of cases of insecurity. This kind of negative experiences smears the image of Nigeria as the country cannot be described as a peaceful country [36, 14].

Also, the dream of attaining zero hunger in Benue State is still a far cry from reality as a result of the farmers and herders' conflict. Global statistics of countries whose citizens suffer hunger has often given Nigeria a negative rating as many citizens are greatly being hit by the scourge of hunger and poverty. The farmers-herder's conflict is one of the main causes as food shortage means increased hunger. Agricultural development cannot witness tangible and meaningful increase and sustainability in the event of continuous farmers-herders' conflict.

3. Conclusion

Farmers-herders' conflict is unarguably an injurious conflict that has impeded agricultural development and escalated hunger in places where the conflict is being experienced. This impediment is conspicuous in the area of food production as it often constitutes a setback to farmers and farming activities. Benue State of Nigeria is the food basket of the nation but ironically have many of its citizens still suffering from hunger, starvation and malnutrition as it appears that the basket is not full enough to adequately feed citizens within the State and beyond. The disruption of food systems coupled with economic downturns caused by the farmers-herders' conflict have worsened the prevalence of hunger. It is no doubt that Benue State is blessed with abundant human and agricultural resources waiting to be fully harnessed for rapid economic development but has unfortunately failed to do so. Suffice to say, Benue State has a high expectation of being an agriculturally productive one and not merely a consuming one as it is endowed with numerous agricultural potentials. However, a robust agricultural production is impossible if the farmers-herder's conflict continues unabated. In fact, a lot still needs to be done to change the narrative.

The dream of attaining zero hunger will remain a mirage in Benue State if urgent collaborative measures are not taken to engender long-lasting peace between farmers and herders in Benue State and adopt appropriate mechanisms or measures that will step-up food production. Having farmers stay in the internally displaced people's camps is bad and

not in the best interest of accelerated food production. In fact, the zeal of farmers to continue with their farm work may continue to wax cold if they are not urgently re-instated back to their homes with the assurance of a safe and conducive environment for farming activities to continue and thrive impressively.

Recommendations

- Government at all levels must in the interest of the nation at large, synergize in tackling the conflict head-long without fear or favor so that the positive benefits of collaboration will be felt more in Benue State and beyond. Politicization and sentiments whatsoever is unnecessary, unproductive and retrogressive. It must be buried for the sake of ending the conflict and promoting all-round development, particularly the agricultural advancement of not just Benue State but Nigeria as a whole.
- The aim of the sustainable development goal two is that zero hunger should not be an exclusive right of the rich (elite) alone but enjoyed by all or almost everyone in the society. To this end, the government of Benue State and beyond must ensure they adopt radical approach that will make farming attractive again, introduce improved varieties of crops, boost production in every ramification and support the establishment of massive processing and preservation techniques. Public-private partnership is required to make remarkable success.
- Again, to achieve and maintain a sustained zero hunger in Benue State, deliberate and strategic planning is required to have a robust storage and processing system. Put differently, storage of farm produce must be prioritized as there are frequent cases of waste of perishable food. Benue State is unarguably fertile in the production of fruits such as mangoes, oranges and other juicy and nutritious fruits and food, many of which are eventually thrown away due to spoilage. Such economic losses can be avoided or greatly minimized if a good number of functioning processing companies are set up to do the needful.
- Depending on external sources (importation) for food do not only enslave the one who is dependent on another man's sweat but also drains the meager resources of such a dependent State and enrich the supplying State. Nigeria as a nation and Benue State in particular must therefore move from being a consuming State to a highly agriculturally productive one especially in this era of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) as there is availability of global and particularly African market opportunities to explore and exploit.
- Closely linked to the above is the need to also ensure that adequate infrastructural development is given its due attention. What this implies is that, there should be good transport system that will link rural and urban areas for prompt and effective movement of farm produce as this can help to minimize waste and unnecessary losses of agricultural produce. Also, power supply should be prioritized as this will assist with preservation of food as well as encourage processing of same.

Compliance with ethical standards

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There is no conflict of interest between the authors in respect of this manuscript.

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