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Assessment of factors responsible for farmers-herders conflict in Benue state north central, Nigeria

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Abstract

Beyond the aggravating effects of climate change on both sedentary agrarian farming communities and the pastoral herders, are other man made factors, which could be seen in the persistent occurrence of farmers-herders conflicts in Benue State and across various parts of Nigeria, thus a clog in the wheel of progress to national development and cohesion. It was against this background that this study engaged conflict theory to examine the factors responsible for farmers-herders conflict in Benue State. The study employed Taro Yamane sampling technique on administered five-Likert scale questionnaire. Findings from study on the factors responsible for farmers-herders conflict reveals that encroachment on farm lands and crop destruction by cattle stands at (71.1%), Unemployment and poverty (62.9%), Communication barrier/Mutual distrust (64.2%), inadequate grazing reserves/Blockage of grazing routes (68.4%), Raping/Kidnapping of women (59.4%), Land ownership tussle/ Indigenization (51.6%), Cattle rustling/Theft (26.6%) and Contamination of river bodies by cattle (71.9%). The deduction therefore is that majority of the respondents emphatically agreed with all the factors mentioned above as the major causes of the conflict in Benue and Nigeria in general. However, the opinions of most respondents out rightly rejected cattle rustling as a major cause of the conflict in the study area. The study recommends that the establishment of modern functional cattle ranches will significantly address the issues of grazing routes blockage and encroachment on farm lands/crop destruction which will drastically reduce or completely eliminate farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria. This study also recommends the urgent implementation of the National Young Farmers Scheme' aimed engaging modern methods of farming by engaging 1,000 farmers from each of the 774 Local Government. That Federal government should evolve genuine and workable national strategies of disarming the armed killer herdsman parading farming communities in Benue with sophisticated weapons of Ak47 to commit carnage, and rape against farming communities.

Keywords: Conflict Theory; Grazing Route Blockage; Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict; Mutual Mistrust

1. Introduction

Nigeria as a sovereign geographical entity has in recent times been faced with several internal security challenges including farmers-herders conflict which is growing in leaps and sophistication with resultant destruction of hundreds of lives and properties worth millions of naira in States like Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Kogi, Kaduna and Nasarawa State (Mahdi, 2018). These social conflicts between these two groups (farmers and herders) who were mutual neighbors in the past have equally led to outright destructions of farms, farm produce, loss of innocent children and women, loss of livestock, and displacement of many from their homes. The mutual neighborhood was based on the symbolic relationship of farmers' crops (remnants) providing feeds to nomads' animals and animals supplying excreta as manure for crop production.

Interestingly, This implies that crop production and animal husbandry being the two main branches of agriculture depend on each other both positively and negatively since animals can destroy crops and environment (land, water, air)

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if not properly controlled thus constituting the origin of conflicts between farmers and herders (Osolafia, 2021; Cee-Henning & Harvey, 2014). Literature have associated farmers-herders conflicts to environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources; which accounts for Nigeria's growth rate of 3.2% per year (National Population Commission, 2012). Climate change as seen in desertification, drought, inadequate rainfall, has affected availability of grasses for animals in the far north and such scarcity further impact negatively pastoralists' social status and economic demand as population increases. This trigger aggressive competition for scarce resources stirring up conflicts with local farmers (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

The revolutionization of agriculture through use of tractors, herbicides and fertilizers have empowered farmers to engage in large scale agricultural schemes that narrow grazing routes/reserves thus, making it extremely difficult for the herders to move freely with their herds from one location to another without veering into farms and destroying crops which often triggers violent conflicts between farmers and herders (Iro, 2010). This leaves herders stranded as they no longer find where to pass with their herds let alone where to stay. More so, cattle pathways (Burtalis) close to cities have been taken over by houses, filling stations and farming activities thus leaving pastoralists with difficult challenges of moving their herds from one point to another (Abbas, 2012). This angers the pastoralists to fight aggressively with farmers for land use and allowing cows to compete with motorists on tarred roads as their pathways around towns, cities and highways.

Conflict of culture, ethnocentric and religious intolerance, decline in social cohesion, blockage of waterholes by farmers/fishermen, crop damage by pastoralists, attacks on farmers and counter attacks against the herdsmen have been identified as some of the causes of farmers-herders conflicts (Irabor, 2023; Abbas, 2012; Bello, 2013; Umar, 2002; and Audu, 2014). The farmers-herders conflicts are also possibly caused by breakdown of law and order, side taking by local leaders involved in dispute resolution and allocation of grazing lands as government layouts without compensation to pastoralists (Rasak, 2011).

Additionally, allegations of some few farmers secretly selling some portions of their farm lands to Fulani herdsmen without the knowledge and consent of other local farmers who have adjourning farms/farmlands to the ones sold to the herdsmen often spark up conflict when community elders and youths unite to reject and deny the herdsmen access to graze on the portions purchased by them (Jibo, 2014; Ngbea & Ngbea, 2019). Other farmers who did not sell their farmlands often complain bitterly that their crops are being destroyed by cattle. Out of frustration, the Fulani herdsmen often deploy with arrogance and impunity terror tactics on the local farmers such that their victims are traumatized in such a way that they do not wish to return to their homes after fleeing. This was confirmed by interview carried out among victims living in various refugee camps across Benue State such as Gwer-West, Guma, Tarka, Ukum, Agatu and Logo (Ngbea & Ngbea, 2019; Abdulbarkindo & Alupsen, 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Frame work

2.1.1. Farmers

Generally speaking, farming is a broad term that entails both crop cultivation and livestock rearing (mixed farming) for the purpose of selves' consumption or selling to other users (Ngbea & Ngbea, 2019). However, some farmers may choose to engage in field crop production only while others may carry out only livestock rearing. Specifically, for the purpose of this study, the farmers under consideration are those sedentary farmers found in various communities across Benue State engaging primarily in crop production as their main businesses. These categories of farmers use local crude implements to produce goods in small quantities just enough to feed themselves and their families and sometimes have little extra to sell for income earning. Therefore, these set of farmers are majorly indigenous people practicing subsistence farming across the length and breadth of the State. Farmers who cultivate large hectares of land using modern machines to produce large quantity of goods for human consumptions and raw materials for industrial use are called large scale or commercial farmers (Mahdi, 2018).

2.1.2. Herdsmen

Herdsmen are also farmers but in the context of this study, herdsmen are people who engage in livestock rearing only and are primarily of Fulani origin. Put differently, they are group of people who keep and take care of herds of animals such as cattle, goats, sheep etc. (Mahdi, 2018). Herdsmen are constantly on the move to feed their animals throughout the season and value nothing more than their animals. The constant movement of the herdsmen is usually in search of green pastures to feed the herds. These set of herdsmen who are in constant random movement from one location to

another with no permanent place of abode are known as nomadic herdsmen while those who engage in transhumance migration and return to their camps/homes are known as semi-nomadic herdsmen. Both nomadic and semi-nomadic herdsmen in Nigeria are Fulani herdsmen who see their herds as their symbol of identity and social status in the Fulani culture.

2.1.3. Conflict

This refers to pursuit of incompatible interests, goals, limited or scarce resources between two or more individuals or groups in which one party is always making constant efforts to prevent the other from attaining the same goals (Mahdi, 2018). On the other hand, Oyebo (2013) defined conflict as a disagreement between individuals or groups. Similarly, conflict entails a confrontational stance among individuals or groups in a society who perceive themselves as enemies over limited resources therefore exerting maximum forces in order to subdue each other which in the process often result in violent outcome leading to fighting, killing and destruction. Conflict can result in good or bad outcome. When the outcome of a conflict scenario is positive, it is referred to as functional or constructive conflict but when it produces a negative outcome, it is regarded as a dysfunctional conflict (Osolafia, 2021). From the foregoing, it can be seen that the phenomenon of conflict can produce varying manifestations and outcomes depending on the approaches and perceptions of the parties in conflict.

2.2. Empirical Review

Adama et al. (2022) investigated the nexus between infrastructure decay and food security in Nigeria. The study decomposed infrastructure decay into security infrastructure decay and agricultural extension infrastructure decay. The study engaged exploratory research design using content analysis of publicly available archive documents. Results that emanate from the study submitted that security infrastructure deficit triggers tension between sedentary farmers and pastoral herders thereby endangering food production. The study is a Nigeria study on inadequacy of security infrastructure while this study captures other factors aggravating farmers herders conflict using Benue Data.

Mahdi (2018) in his study, investigated the re-occurring farmers/herders conflict in Adamawa State. The study maintained that the systematic failure of government as noticed in incessant farmer/herder conflict in Adamawa communities is connected to the collapse of the security system. Study submitted that security is usually deployed after the clashes have taken place as there are no proactive measures such as proper equipping of police/other security agencies with operational tools to respond to distress calls and absence of intelligence gathering on early warning signs to avert occurrence of such violent conflicts. Additionally, the inadequate training and lack of continuous retraining of security agents tend to affect security agencies ability to perform credibly in managing serious societal conflicts in the country like the farmers-herders conflict. The study also held that farmers-herders conflict is caused by erosion of cattle routes and grazing reserves due to increased farming activities or cultivation of crops by farmers on grazing routes, expansion of development on grazing reserve areas by individuals and government policies tend to deplete the availability of green lands for animal grazing thus forcing herders to stray into peoples' farms with their herds in search for greed pastures which often spark up conflicts. The farmers on the other hand have also accused the herders of consciously and deliberately deploying their herds into their farms to eat up crops and killing any farmer who attempts to fight or resist them from grazing on their farms. The study further attributed the causes of farmers-herders conflict to inadequate or complete absence of basic social amenities, dysfunctional law enforcement system and erosion of traditional conflict management mechanism.

Similarly, Ega and Erhabor (2009) reported that the major factors responsible for farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria are firstly, the obstruction of resource access rights whereby traditional access rights to grazing pastures and water resources along grazing routes are being encroached on by farmers. This has become more severe on traditional trek routes which the farmers now see as preferred favorite sites for cultivation of crops and other farming activities due to the high concentration of annual manures from trekking herds thus increasing the fertility of the soil in these areas than other places. Secondly, within the fadama areas, the situation is worsened by the divided and criss-crossing nature of different crop farms which makes it extremely difficult for prevention of animals from straying into crop farms. The study maintained that the poor management of the existing grazing reserves has brought about significant reduction in availability of livestock feed resources particularly in Northern States where the introduction of high value crops like onions and tomatoes produce almost no crop residues for livestock feeding.

Additionally, Ngbea and Ngbea (2018) pointed out that the farmers-herders conflict in Benue State and Nigeria in general is linked to the selfish conduct of some traditional rulers who secretly collect money from Fulani herdsmen with intention of allowing herdsmen to graze within their domains without the consent and knowledge of other farmers with adjoining farms. These arrangements are often met with stiff rejection from other farmers and youths in the communities which stirs up herdsmen's violent attacks on the farmers due to frustration and feeling of denial to have

access to resources (land and water). The study also added that the farmers-herders conflict is caused by desert encroachment in the far north which is fast creeping towards the middle and southern parts. Desertification is apparent beyond Bauchi going towards far north, which reduced availability of fresh grasses for the animals thus, forcing the herdsmen to migrate with their herds towards the middlebelt regions. The transhumance movement often ignites conflict with local farmers as cattle stray into people's farms and eats up crops and other stored farm products. The study further identified porosity of Nigerian borders as the cause of farmers-herders conflict which allows many foreign herdsmen from other countries like Mali, Chad and Niger to find their way into the country and causing mayhem on the local farmers at the slightest provocations since they can hardly speak English, Tiv, Idoma or Hausa being the major languages spoken in the region.

Furthermore, Aluaigba (2008) stressed indigenization factor as a major cause of farmers-herders conflict, as the invasion of Benue State by Muslim Fulani herdsmen from the perspective of citizenship ideology. The study maintained that in many public discourse in recent times, questions have been raised on the subject of citizenship in Nigeria particularly regarding the issue of discrimination against fellow Nigerians who live in places where they or their fore fathers were not born. Therefore, the old and unsettled question of Indigene-Settlers rivalry over socio-economic and environmental resources is said to be revived by the arrival of Hausa-Fulani Muslim Herdsmen. Like many other African countries, Nigeria has been blamed severally for its inability to unite and accommodate various ethnic groups that exist in the country on the basis of equity, justice and fair treatment. Unfortunately, Nigeria's post colonial policies instead of cementing have rather further divided the various groups thereby worsening and widening in recent times the existing quarrels between its varied groups thus triggering violent conflicts as currently being manifested in form of farmers-herders conflicts in Benue and other parts of the country.

Irabor, B. I. (2023) engaged eco-violence theory to investigate herders-farmers crisis and food security in Benue State which is reputed as food Basket of the Nation and a major theatre for herders-farmers violent conflicts, through which loss of lives, livestock and properties have been lost between the sedentary farming community and the pastoral herdsmen. The study deployed desktop research design; by reviewing publicly available archive documents. Results from the study submitted that the blatant inability of government to regulated transhumance mobility grossly trigger herders farmers conflict thereby affecting productivity of both farmers which could be seen endangering food security of Benue State. The study was done in Benue state using qualitative review while this study employs both qualitative and quantitative methodology.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1. Conflict Theory

The theoretical framework adopted in explaining farmers-herders conflict and the factors responsible for the conflict in Benue State is Conflict Theory. Conflict theory is commonly associated with the German Philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) who argued that inherent in human society is competition over limited or scarce resources. Marx propounded this theory based on a dialectical materialist account of history in which he noted that capitalism like previous socioeconomic systems would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction. Marx propounded this theory bearing in mind class division in which he saw society as being made up of two classes, the bourgeoisie (the capitalists/ruling class) and the proletariat (the working class) who must compete for social, political and material resources for survival. Marx and Engels (1948) described conflict theory as a social conflict theory which is concerned with contradictions in interest and conflict over scarce resources between groups/individuals as a foundation of a social society. Conflict theory examines any social phenomenon through the lens that there is a natural human instinct towards conflict hence conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human society.

The theory explains how unequal distribution of resources leads to conflict between those who possess and control valuable resources on the one side and those who seek to partake or increase their share of these resources on the other hand. The theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power rather than by consensus and conformity. According to the theory, those with wealth and power will try to hold on to it by any means possible mainly by suppressing the poor and powerless. Put differently, this simply implies that those in possession of wealth and resources will jealously guard, protect and hoard those resources while those without will do all they can to obtain them (Turner et al., 1998).

Applying the theory to the farmers-herders situation, the local farmers in Benue State who own lands (forest and fresh water) bequeathed to them through inheritance as settled groups would do everything humanly possible to protect, guard and hold onto their lands for farming and other desired activities while the nomadic Fulani herdsmen who are known to move from place to place with no permanent place of abode will fight with their last strength to secure unhindered access to the lands and waterways for the purposes of grazing with their cattle. As a result of this stiff

competition between the two resources users, conflict always breaks out between farmers and herders in Benue State and other parts of the country in general. This implies that those in possession of wealth and resources will jealously guard, protect and hoard these resources while those without will do what they can to obtain them.

3. Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study comprised of residents selected from the three most affected Local Government Areas in the State namely Logo, Guma and Agatu Local Government Areas. The Population of the study areas is 476,259 from where the sample size of 399 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane (1973) sample size formula. Purposive Sampling technique was adopted which is a non-probability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which one will be most useful or gives better representation. The study thus considered farmers, security personnel, Fulani herdsmen, businessmen, village heads and local government officials as relevant respondents.

However, only 380 questionnaires were retrieved. Data used were collected from primary sources (questionnaires). Simple descriptive statistics such as table, frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data generated. Five point Likert Scale rating was used to rate responses options which are Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly Disagreed (SD), Disagreed (D) and Undecided (UD) with respective design values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1. The responses of Strongly Agreed and Agreed are merged to be Agreed while the ones of Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed are merged to be Disagreed. In order to obtain the decision mean, the mean of the responses were computed using the formula below:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{n}$$

Where

X = Variables,

n = number of sample and

\sum = Summation sign

\bar{X} = Mean

$$\bar{X} = \frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5} = 3$$

Hence

Thus, the decision mean is 3.0. This implies that mean scores greater than 3 were considered as agreed while those less than 3 were considered disagreed.

4. Results and Discussion

It is revealed from table 1 that the respondents accepted all the variables with mean values greater than the decision mean of 3.0 as the major causes of farmers-herders conflict in Benue State except cattle rustling which has a mean value of 2.6 that is less than the decision mean.

Item 1 on table 1 requested the respondents' opinions on whether encroachment on farm lands and crop destruction by cattle cause farmers-herders conflict in Benue State, North Central Nigeria. From the responses, 50.0% of the respondents strongly agreed that farm lands encroachment and crop destruction by cattle causes farmers-herders crisis, 21.1% of the respondents agreed with the opinion, 14.2% strongly disagreed while 14.7% of the respondents disagreed. No one was undecided on the opinion. From the study conducted, some of the herdsmen agreed that crops/farms are destroyed due to increase in the number of their herds which are taken out to graze on the fields. The farmers are accused of intentionally leaving their harvests in the farms unprotected while those with poor yields do deliberately leave the same in the farms to be grazed by cattle in order to sue for full compensation.

Table 1 Causes of Farmers-Herders Conflict in Benue State, North Central Nigeria

S/N	Causes of farmers-herders conflict	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Strongly Disagreed	Disagreed	Undecided	Mean	Std Dev	Remarks
1	Encroachment on farm lands and crop destruction by cattle	190 (50.0%)	80 (21.1%)	54 (14.2%)	56 (14.7%)	-	4.1	3.7	Agreed
2	Unemployment & Poverty	138 (36.3%)	101 (26.6%)	31 (8.2%)	40 (10.5%)	70 (18.4%)	3.5	3.3	Agreed
3	Communication barrier/mutual distrust	160 (42.1%)	84 (22.1%)	22 (5.8%)	50 (13.2%)	61 (16.1%)	3.6	3.4	Agreed
4	Inadequate grazing reserves/blockage of grazing routes	152 (40.0%)	70 (18.4%)	33 (8.7%)	65 (17.1%)	60 (15.8%)	3.5	3.3	Agreed
5	Raping/Kidnapping of women	162 (42.6%)	64 (16.8%)	50 (13.2%)	51 (13.4%)	53 (13.9%)	3.6	3.4	Agreed
6	Land ownership tussle/Indigenization	107 (28.2%)	89 (23.4%)	60 (20.0%)	63 (16.6%)	61 (16.1%)	3.3	3.1	Agreed
7	Cattle rustling /theft	50 (13.2%)	51 (13.4%)	90 (23.7%)	68 (17.9%)	121 (31.8%)	2.6	2.4	Rejected
8	Contamination of river bodies by cattle	153 (40.3%)	120 (31.6%)	51 (13.4%)	56 (14.7%)	-	4.0	3.6	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Item 2 sought for respondents' opinion on whether unemployment and poverty cause farmers-herders conflict in Benue State. The response shows that 36.3% of the respondents strongly agreed with the opinion, 26.6% agreed, 8.2% strongly disagreed, 10.5% disagreed while 18.4% remained undecided. Whenever there are disputes between farmers and herders, it is the poor unemployed youths in these rural areas that are mobilized to fight. If these youths are gainfully employed with their minds occupied with pay jobs, they will not make themselves available as willing tools for such violent confrontations. More so, because of lack of adequate job opportunities, the youths who have taken to farming often get frustrated when their farms/crops are destroyed by cattle thus; often vent their anger or express their frustrations via violent confrontations with the herders.

Item 3 solicited the opinions of respondents to ascertain if communication barrier/mutual distrust is the cause of farmers-herders conflict in Benue State. The opinion of the respondents shows that 42.1% strongly agreed, 22.1% agreed, 5.8% strongly disagreed, 13.2% disagreed while 16.1% were undecided. The respondents with the highest percentage of strongly agreed (38.3%) indicates that communication barrier is one of the causes of farmers-herders conflict in the study area since Fulani herdsmen neither speak nor understand any of the predominant languages (Idoma and English) being spoken in the study communities. The farmers accused herdsmen of feigning non-understanding and speaking of English language even though the farmers believe that the herders do comprehend very well anything that is communicated to them in English language. This makes it extremely difficult for farmers to have smooth dialogue/interactions with the herdsmen whenever there are issues to be addressed.

In response to Item 4 that sought for respondents' opinions on whether inadequate grazing reserves/blockage of grazing routes is responsible for farmers-herders conflict in the study area, 40.0% of the respondents strongly agreed with the opinion, 18.4% agreed, 8.7% strongly disagreed, 17.1% disagreed while 15.8% were undecided. The herders accused farmers of taking over grazing routes mapped out by the colonial masters across northern regions with farming, building of filling stations, town and cities which makes it very difficult for the herdsmen to move with their herds freely from one location to another.

On item 5 which required the respondents to give their opinions on whether kidnapping/raping of women in the study area causes farmers-herders conflict, 42.6% strongly agreed with the opinion, 16.8% agreed, 13.2% strongly disagreed, 13.4% disagreed while 13.9% were undecided. Majority of the respondents clearly agreed with the opinion of

kidnapping/raping of women and girl children as one of the major causes of farmers-herders conflict in the study area. This is confirmed by the high percentages of 42.6% and 16.8% as strongly agreed and agreed respectively.

Item 6 sought the opinions of the respondents on whether landownership tussle/indigenization causes farmers-herders conflict in the study area. 28.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the opinion, 23.4% Agreed, 20.0% strongly disagreed, 16.6% disagreed and 16.6% were undecided. Majority of the respondents did agree with the opinion in which the local farmers believe that they are the indigenes of the area and by inheritance they own the lands, therefore, they have natural rights to decide the purpose (farming) for which the lands should be used for and by who. They therefore tend to resist any attempt by herders to deprive them of using the lands as desired. The herders on the other hand, believe that lands are free gifts of nature which are owned by God and that every living citizen should have equal and unhindered access to them hence such tussles for land ownership often result in violent conflicts between the parties.

The questionnaire's item 7 solicited the respondents' opinion on whether cattle rustling is responsible for farmers-herders conflict in the study area. From the responses, 13.2% of the respondents strongly agreed, 13.4% agreed, 23.7% strongly disagreed, 17.9% disagreed while 31.8% were undecided. Majority of the respondents emphatically did not agree with the opinion as the major cause of the conflict in the area. The farmers refuted the herders' accusation against them on killing cows in the forest and transporting same to markets in town to sell for economic gains. The farmers maintained that it is not possible for unarmed farmers to dispossess the herdsmen of their herds when the herders are always moving about with their herds with sophisticated weapons like AK 47 which they farmers said they do not have.

On item 8, the respondents' opinions were sought to ascertain if contamination of river bodies by the cattle is a cause of farmers-herders conflict in the area. From the responses, 40.3% strongly agreed with the opinion, 31.6% agreed, 13.4% strongly disagreed and 14.7% disagreed while no one was undecided. It was confirmed that contamination of river bodies by cattle was one of the major causes of the conflict in the area. The villagers were aggrieved with the herdsmen because the rivers in the farming communities constitute the major sources of drinking water in the communities so the farmers are usually not happy when the herdsmen go with their cattle to the same rivers to drink and in the process pollute the rivers with cattle feces and saliva. The farmers also complained that they share the same rivers with the cattle when they go to their farms and get usually frustrated each time the animal go ahead of them and mess the rivers with their hoofs as well as defecating in the rivers thus preventing the farmers from drinking or bathing in the rivers.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study on the major causes of farmer-herders conflict in the study area are as follows; Encroachment on farm lands and crop destruction by cattle (71.1%), Unemployment and poverty (62.9%), Communication barrier/Mutual distrust (64.2%), inadequate grazing reserves/Blockage of grazing routes (68.4%), Raping/Kidnapping of women (59.4%), Land ownership tussle/Indigenization (51.6%), Cattle rustling/Theft (26.6%) and Contamination of river bodies by cattle (71.9%)

On the issue of cattle rustling/theft, the study however, revealed that it is not a major factor that causes frequent and persistent farmers-herders conflict in the State. The farmers maintained that in the first instance they are not armed and therefore, it is practically impossible for them to dispossess the herders of their herds when the herders are always moving around with sophisticated weapons like AK47 as they graze from one location to another. This is corroborated with the low response of 26.6% from the respondents who agreed with cattle rustling as a factor, 41.6% disagreed while 31.8% were undecided.

Based on the findings revealed by the study on the factors responsible for farmers-herders conflict in Benue and by extension Nigeria, the following are recommended:

- A comprehensive policy framework should be developed through consultative process with the stakeholders that will guarantee punishment, immediate payment of fines and compensations to victims in order to serve as deterrent to defaulters which will help to address the issues of crop/farm destructions, kidnapping/raping of women and cattle rustling. This policy should be escalated to take national standard.
- The States and Federal Government of Nigeria should urgently prioritised the implementation of the proposed scheme tagged 'National Young Farmers Scheme' aimed at ensuring that government agencies involved in agriculture streamline their priorities in the inclusion of youths in driving modern methods of farming by engaging 1,000 farmers from each of the 774 Local Government Areas thereby creating 774,000 direct employments annually and should be emulated by the State Governments.

- Governments at State and Federal Levels jettison remote sentiments in the interest of national peace/security and ban open grazing immediately, by enacting and enforcing Anti-Open Grazing Law. While implementation of modern and functional cattle ranches in Benue State and other strategic locations across the six geo-political zones in order to address the problem of farmlands encroachment, inadequate grazing reserves and blockage of grazing routes.
- Government particularly at Federal level needs to come up with genuine and workable national strategies of disarming the armed killer herdsmen who are illegally carrying and using sophisticated weapons like Ak47 to commit carnage against the unarmed farmers and other citizens at the slightest provocations.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

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Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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