



Understanding Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts In Nigeria's Benue Valley: nature, causes, and impacts

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Abstract

The longstanding conflict between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria has escalated in both intensity and scope, with the Benue Valley emerging as a major flashpoint. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a robust empirical assessment of the nature and consequences of the conflict in the region. Findings reveal that the conflict manifests in forms ranging from verbal altercations to premeditated attacks and violent reprisals, with a consistent trend toward increased violence. The impacts are profound and far-reaching—massive loss of lives and property, widespread food insecurity and inflation, a surge in internally displaced persons (IDPs) and out-of-school children, escalating insecurity, tenure disputes, crop destruction, and limited access to grazing resources. To address these challenges, the study strongly recommends the establishment of ranches and grazing reserves, promotion of sustainable agricultural and pastoral practices, revival of participatory conflict resolution mechanisms, and implementation of large-scale afforestation and reforestation programs under active government supervision.

Keywords: Eco-Violence, Farmer-Pastoralists, Conflict, Benue-Valley, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Benue Valley, located in the heart of Nigeria, is a region renowned for its rich cultural heritage and agricultural productivity. However, in recent years, this once-peaceful region has been plagued by recurring conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. These conflicts have not only disrupted the activities of the communities but also had far-reaching consequences on the economic and environmental landscape of the region. The farmer-pastoralist conflicts in the Benue Valley are a complex phenomenon with deep historical, cultural, and economic roots (Tar, 2017; Igbafe, 2015). The region's fertile soil and abundant water resources make it an attractive destination for both farmers and pastoralists, leading to competition for scarce resources. The main natural factor linked to the conflict is climate change which influences pastoralists activities in Nigeria due to expansive desertification, drought and unchecked deforestation, this has made the pastoralists to naturally seek greener pasture further south (Lenshie et al., 2021; Idowu, 2018). This forced migration has changed the trend of the traditional seasonal migration amongst the current nomadic pastoralists as they now move into the Benue Valley with the intention to settle, the region itself, which is part of the extensive middle belt region is the heart of the savannah (Asueni & Godknows, 2019). The fact that the Savannah zones of Nigeria have abundance of grasses and forages and also the absence of the deadly cattle disease, like Trypanosomiasis make the zone conducive for rearing cattle (Ibrahim et al., 2014).

As the pastoralists migrate into the region, they often come into conflict with the local farmers as they compete for the same resource especially as the grazing routes have been encroached upon owing to pressures from the demands for food production which continues to build up as the human population increases, this is also in addition to the local politics, changing land use policies and introduction of anti-open grazing laws etc (Adigun, 2019; Akerjiir, 2018; Adeoye, 2017; Aliyu, 2015; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Ofem & Bassey, 2014). The conflict is therefore, exacerbated by demographic changes and politics, creating a perfect storm of tensions and violence the region has witnessed in over a decade.

Despite the nature of the violence the conflict has assumed in recent years within the Benue Valley, it received relatively little attention from policymakers. This conflict has also had devastating impacts and constituted severe threats to the means of survival and livelihoods of both the farmers and pastoralists. Dimelu, Salifu, Chah and Enwelu (2017) stressed that this conflict is a formidable challenge to economic development, a threat to food security and sustainable livelihood of the agrarian communities. Existing studies have also focused mainly on States within region as well as the causes of the conflicts, neglecting the other complex factors like the forms of the conflicts. This article aims to bridge this gap by examining the nature and impact of farmer-pastoralist conflicts in the Benue Valley. The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- i. To assess the nature of the farmer-pastoralists conflicts in the region.
- ii. To examine the specific impacts of farmer-pastoralists conflict in the Benue Valley

Through a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the nature of the violence involved in this conflict, this article seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play. By shedding more light on the impacts of the conflicts within the region and its capacity to stir ethnic and religious tension, this article hopes to inform the development of sustainable solutions to promote peace and prosperity in the region. The study explores the eco-violence theory and the theory of structural violence to explain the complex factors interplaying in the conflict.

The Benue Valley is a microcosm of the broader challenges facing Nigeria and the African continent, where competition for resources, climate change, and political instability are increasingly contributing to social tensions and violence. By examining the specific context of the Benue Valley, this article hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of the complex relationships between environment, economy, and society, and to inform policies and strategies to promote peace, stability, and sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Study Area:

The Benue Valley region which is centrally located in Nigeria and part of the Niger-Benue Trough, is an extensive area bordering the river Benue where it derives its name. It is considered to have originated as an aulacogen on the Precambrian

shield because of the separation of the African and American plates in early Cretaceous times (Ogungbesan & Akaegbobi, 2011). The Benue Valley is located between longitude 6° 38' and 10°53' East of the Greenwich meridian and from latitude 6° 31' and 9° 26' North of the equator, covering Benue States and parts of Kogi, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau (Figure 1).

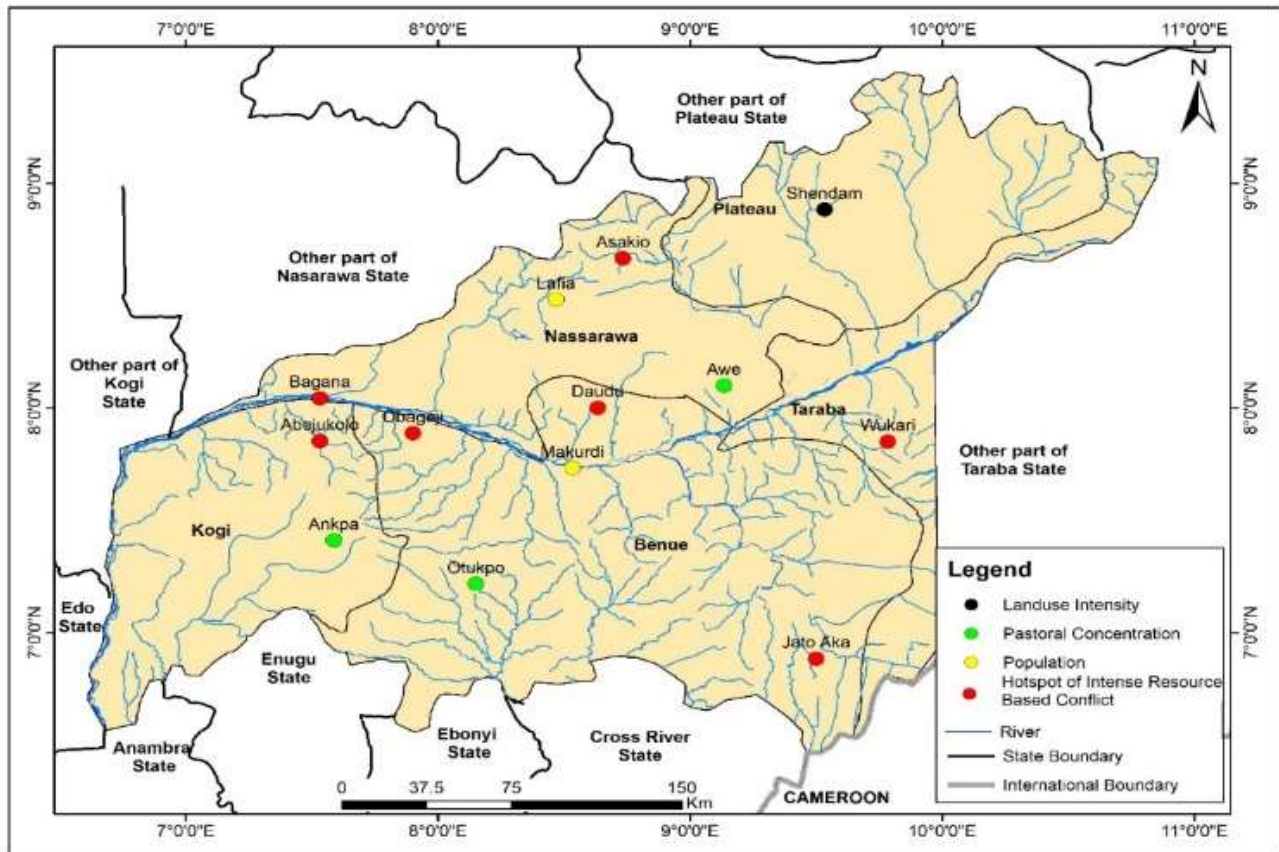


Figure 1: Map of the Benue Valley showing sample areas

It is bordered in the west by the river Niger; Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Cross river states in the south; The Republic of Cameroun in the southeast, Taraba States in the west; Nasarawa and Plateau States in the North. The climate of the region is of mild tropical continental with two distinct seasons (i.e. tropical wet and dry) with the designation Aw in the Koppens and Geiger climate classification. The dry season starts from late November to March and the wet season prevails from April to October. The wet season is characterized by the tropical maritime air mass which brings rainfall and wet conditions to the region. It has a steaming hot atmospheric condition with temperatures generally over 300c, as warm air drains down the valley and

remains stagnant with little wind and reduced precipitation in the absence of major highlands to intercept the rain-bearing winds (Mage & Tyubee, 2017). The Benue Valley region is an extensive lowland area generally below 300 metres and drained by the river Benue and its major tributaries; river Katsina-Ala and river Gongola (Britannica.com, 2011).

Agriculture is a major means of livelihood in the region, but fishing activities are common among the Jukuns, Alagos, Agatus and other tribes along the riverine areas. Commercial fishing activities are carried out in the river Benue and its major tributaries where different freshwater fish species

are caught and sold. Okoli and Atelhe (2014) asserted that, the conflict over resources in this area is mainly due to the major economic activity of the people, the farmers who are the majority have continued to expand the cultivated areas and edging out the pastoralists; with the limited access to utilize the land and water resources, the pastoralists fight back resulting in the fiercest of ways.

Data Collection

Population: The population for the study is farmers and pastoralist as well as traditional leaders, heads of security agencies and the staff of Ministries and Departments of Agriculture

Tools: The data was obtained from respondents within the region, using questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII). The questionnaire was administered to the pastoralists and farmers based on their level of involvement in the crisis, in addition, focus group discussion was also sourced from them, while the key informant interviews was conducted for traditional leaders, heads of security agencies and the staff of Ministries and Departments of Agriculture in each of the states in the region.

Sampling: Population sampling techniques were multi-stage sampling that combined purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods. These techniques were chosen to due to the sensitivity of the information required and being best suited for hard-to-reach, information rich population.

Thirteen (13) study sites were purposively sampled along the Benue Valley cutting across the five states. To ensure inclusive selection of the diverse variability and adequate coverage of the landscape complexities in the study area, four (4) criteria were used; Hotspots of intense resource-based conflict, population density, landuse intensity and pastoral concentration (Figure 1). The hotspots are the areas the conflicts have been most frequent and fierce based on security reports, the pastoral concentrations are the locations where either grazing reserves exist or where the pastoralist have sought refuge, the landuse intensity are areas where both pastoralists and farmers co-exist while the population density areas are locations especially in urban areas that have high and diverse population.

Procedures: For the FGD, the first stage involved four Local Government Areas chosen based on the frequency of conflict occurrence; Awe in Nasarawa States, Guma, Agatu and Kwande in Benue States. At the second stage, one village/town (farming communities) from each of the four selected Local Government Areas, were further selected. These villages/towns are: Baure and Awe town in Awe LGA, Daudu in Guma LGA, Obagaji in Agatu LGA and Jato Aka in Kwande LGA (Table 1). Five FGDs were carried out. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling techniques.

The population of the FGD is hereby summarized in Table 1

Table 1: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Sample of the Study

S/n	Variable	Town	State	Population
1.	Pastoralist	Baure Grazing reserve in Awe L.G.A	Nasarawa	10
2.	Pastoralist	Awe town in Awe L.G.A	Nasarawa	8
3.	Farmers	Camp 5, Daudu in Guma L.G.A	Benue	8
4.	Farmers	Obagaji town, in Agatu L.G.A	Benue	8
5.	Farmers	Tse-Daudu (Jato Aka) in Kwande L.G.A	Benue	8
Total				42

A total 42 persons was used for the FGD

For the questionnaire, it is made up of two sections. The first section is concerned with the personal information and characteristics of the respondents, while the second section is made up of questions on the nature and impacts of the conflict in the Benue Valley. Questions were very comprehensive and

contained both open and close-ended questions. The population for the questionnaire are pastoralists and farmers who were purposively sampled based on their level of involvement in the crisis and the location for the administration of the questionnaire were purposively sampled on the

basis of the following; hotbed of resource based conflict such as Bagana and Abejukolo in Kogi State, Asakio in Nasarawa State, Jato Aka in Benue State and Wukari in Taraba State; landuse intensity such as Shendam in Plateau State; pastoral concentrations such as Ankpa in Kogi State, Baure in Nasarawa State, Otukpo in Benue State and population density such as Makurdi in Benue State and Lafia in Nasarawa State (Figure 1).

The administration of the questionnaire was done using the Open Data Kit (ODK), the questions were uploaded while the research assistants were grant

access to administer using their mobile device and eventually submit completed questionnaires. A total of 300 persons were selected using a combination of purposive and snowballing sampling from each of the five state with 150 of them pastoralist and 150 farmers bringing the total population of pastoralists used for the study to 750 and farmers, 750. Therefore, total population that the questionnaire was administered to in the study are 1500 (Table 2). The research assistants administered the questionnaire to each respondents and uploaded them on the field and all 1500 questionnaires were submitted.

Table 2: Questionnaire Sample of the Study

S/n	Variable	Town	State	Population
1	Pastoralist	Bagana and Ankpa	Kogi	150
		Makurdi and Otukpo	Benue	150
		Baure in Awe	Nasarawa	150
		Wukari	Taraba	150
		Shendam	Plateau	150
2	Farmers	Abejukolo	Kogi	150
		Makurdi, Otukpo and Jato Aka	Benue	150
		Lafia and Asakio	Nasarawa	150
		Wukari	Taraba	150
		Shendam	Plateau	150
	Total			1500

The population of other stakeholders such as traditional rulers, and security personnel (which were either officers of the Nigerian Police Force, Civil Defence or DSS), and the Ministry of

Agriculture which formed the participants for the Key Informant Interview (KII) were purposively selected. The total population of people interviewed in the study area was 20 (Table 3).

Table 3: Key Informant Interview (KII) Sample of the Study

Table 6: Key Informant Interview (KII) Sample of the Study					
1	Traditional Rulers	Abejukolo	Kogi	1	Local Government Councils
		Ankpa	Kogi	1	
		Jato Aka	Benue	1	
		Otukpo	Benue	1	
		Asakio	Nasarawa	1	
		Awe	Nasarawa	1	
		Wukari	Taraba	2	
		Shendam	Plateau	2	
2	Security Agents	Abejukolo	Kogi	1	Security agencies
		Makurdi	Benue	1	
		Lafia	Nasarawa	1	
		Wukari	Taraba	1	
		Shendam	Plateau	1	
3	Ministry/Department of Agriculture Staff	Abejukolo	Kogi	1	State Ministries
		Makurdi	Benue	1	
		Lafia	Nasarawa	1	
		Wukari	Taraba	1	
		Shendam	Plateau	1	
Total			20		

The data collection was carried out within a period of five months from September 2020 to January 2021. Adequate arrangement was made for research assistants, who are fluent in the local language of the participants and English language. The research assistants were also trained using both the checklist and the question guide before going to the field.

Analysis

Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of the IBM SPSS statistical software version 20. The quantitative data was analyzed using percentages and presented in the form of graphs and tables, while a Word cloud was used to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the FGDs and KII. In the word cloud, the size of each word indicates its frequency or importance.

Ethical Consideration

Interaction with participants was done after prior appointment and approval from their respective associations, ministries and agencies. In addition, individual participants gave their consent, questions were not forced and the respects for the rights, belief and customs of the various communities was observed. In addition, adequate care was taken in preparing and administering of the questionnaire as well as conducting the focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

RESULTS

The Nature of the Farmer-Pastoralists Conflict

The results on nature of the farmer-pastoralists conflict in the region is presented here under the forms and extent of violence.

The Form of the Farmer-Pastoralists Conflict

The resource use conflict in the Benue Valley though widespread within the region, assumes different forms, it is imperative to assess these forms with a view to understanding how this conflict occurs. Result presented in Table 4 shows that both farmers and pastoralists have different views on the forms the conflict assumes, 42.9% of the pastoralists identified straying cattle grazing on crops. This is not viewed as consequential for the farmers as only 8.8% of them identify with it. The farmers place coordinated planned attacks on their communities by pastoralists in a higher order of the forms of the conflict with 41.2% of them attributed this. This is not unexpected as within the region, the farmers are generally the sedentary group while pastoralists are mostly nomadic, making them move at will and therefore less prone to attacks. The farmers also placed a higher premium on clashes between them and the pastoralists; this view is held by 29.4% of the farmers. On the pastoralist preference of the forms is cattle rustling, 33.3% of them, pointed this out, this has affected the economy of the pastoralists and caused some of them to move away from troubled spots.

Table 4: The forms of the conflict

Farmers		Pastoralists	
Forms	Percentage	Forms	Percentage
Direct clashes between pastoralists and farmers	29.4	Cattle rustling	33.3
Coordinated planned attacks by pastoralists on farming communities	41.2	Straying cattle graze on crops	42.9
Destruction of properties and killing of people	14.7	Burning of our houses	14.3
Pastoralists leading their cattle to graze crops on farms	8.8	Poisoning of grasses and streams	9.5
Rape, kidnapping and banditry	5.9	Total	100
Total	100		

Source: Field Survey, 2020

In support of the view of the coordinated planned attacks, a farmer FGD participant in Tse Daudu, Jato Aka, said ‘the attacks are well planned by the fulanis and unexpected on our side’. while a farmer

FGD participant in Obagaji, recounting the form of the attack, added that,

“They use militia from Mali, even the Benue state government have alluded to this information. The

Fulani have brothers in many parts of West Africa, the ones helping them to carry out these killings are the foreign ones from Mali, they are hired for these purpose. They come on Saturdays and Sundays early as 5 am when people are asleep, they shoot at people irrespective of age and burn down houses along their paths, up till now, we cannot return to some of our villages. On Sunday, when people have gone to church, they take their cattle to the farms to feed on the crops”.

Another participant in the same FGD added that:

“They no longer come to Agatu with their women unlike before, only men and the boys, meaning that they are ready to fight at any time”. and was concluded by another participant: “Before attacks was only on Sundays making us to be wary of Sundays but they have now changed their strategy, they can attack at any time”.

A KII participant in Abejukolo in agreement to perspective of coordinated attacks by pastoralists added that:

“Sometimes, the herdsmen arm bush farmers and kill them. They also come to those places I have mentioned to shoot sporadically. They use knapsack sprayers with petroleum inside them to set houses on fire and people trying to run out of those houses are gunned down or cut down using machetes”.

A young farmer FGD participant in Daudu, Guma LGA itemized some of the forms of the attacks when he said:

“They kill our families, burn down our buildings, destroy our crops, rape our women on the farm and sometimes kill them and if they see pregnant women, they will tear their stomach open and butcher the baby”

While a farmer FGD participant in Tse Daudu in Jato Aka, adds that

“The fulanis hide inside the bush to attack and kill us”.

A pastoralist FGD participant in Baure Grazing reserve in Awe LGA identified another form of the conflict when she said that

“The conflict involves verbal dispute, use of arms and eventually leads to killings”.

Another participant in the same FGD stressed that

“Aside cattle rustling, our people are in danger of been beaten by the farm owners”.

A participant in the pastoralist FGD in Awe town identified “Kidnapping and banditry”.

As forms of attacks in this conflict. A KII participant in Wukari added that

“Poisoning of streams and grasses with the intention to kill our cows when they drink water from the stream or graze on the grasses”.

A KII participant in Asakio attesting to the killing of people and burning of houses as forms of conflict said:

“The one in 2016 was very violent, we heard pastoralists were coming to attack but we thought it was a joke until in the night they came. They killed many people and burned down houses, I lost several relatives in that attack, I was lucky to have escaped. Now, what happens is not really violent again but farmers always report of pastoralist cattle eating their crops”.

The conflict obviously has varied forms it occurs, such as direct clashes between farmers and pastoralists, coordinated planned attacks especially by the pastoralists leading to the burning down of houses and death of people, poisoning of grasses and streams by farmers, cattle grazing on crops, raping of women on the farm.

The Extent of Violence in the Farmer-Pastoralists Conflicts

To further understand what is happening in the region especially with respect to the farmers-pastoralist conflict, an assessment of the nature of it was done to ascertain the level of violence involved.

The farmers and pastoralists share different views on some aspects of the level of violence involved in the conflict (Figure 3). Majority of the farmers (42.0%) view the nature of the conflict as always violent, this may be so as they are mostly at the receiving end of clashes between both groups with more casualties recorded, however, only 18.0% of

pastoralist admits that the conflict is always violent. On the other hand, 54% of pastoralist view the nature of the conflict as non-violent, only 26.0% of the farmers share this view. However, both resource users seem to agree that the conflict is

sometimes violent with 20% of each supporting this position.

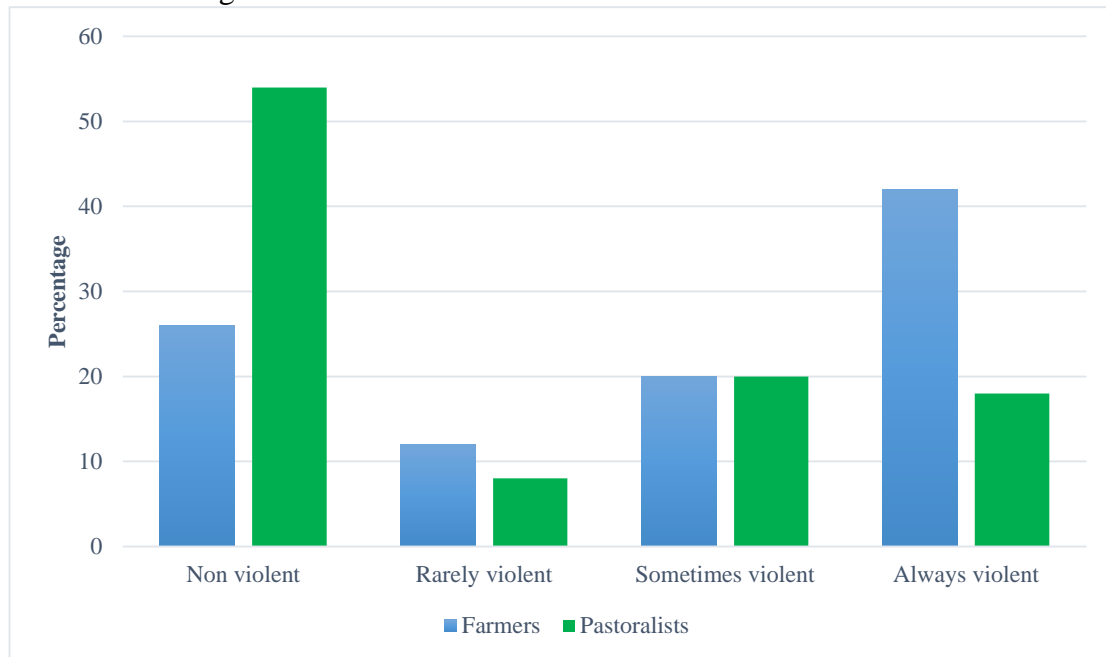


Figure 3: Extent of the Violence Involved in the Conflict

The FGDs and expert interviews conducted also brought out some dimensions of the nature of the conflict. In Obagaji, a farmer FGD participant said ‘it is usually violent’, this is corroborated by a young farmer FGD participant in Daudu, when he said:

“It is a very violent conflict with use of high level ammunition, sometimes I wonder why the conflict because; I have something, you have yours, keep yours and allow me to farm in peace, must they also want ours”.

A KII participant in Makurdi expressed his own opinion on the extent of the conflict as follows;

“Sometimes it is extremely violent, entire generations wiped out, communities displaced, livelihood disrupted, bread winners left with permanent disabilities and made to become dependent”.

From the above, it’s clear that the nature of the conflict varies from non-violence on one extreme to always violent on another extreme, these variations differ based on locations within the region as some locations cannot even be assessed because of their volatility.

Impact of the Conflict on the Region

This resource based conflict led to mostly loss of lives and properties, displacement of people, increased food prices and destruction of lands among both resource users (Figure 4).

The farmers and pastoralists agree that the most devastating aspect of this conflict is the loss of lives, livelihood and properties with 33.7% of farmers and 42.6% of the pastoralists identifying with it; another area of high impact in the region as observed by them is the displacement of people and creation of IDP’s which is represented 26.3% of farmers and 21.4% of pastoralists. Increasing price of food items and poverty is also an area these resource users identify with in terms of the impact of the conflict with 18.9% of farmers and 10.6% of the pastoralists in support of it. The pastoralist identified two areas of impacts, increased hatred amongst resource users (8.5%) and difficulty in getting fodder (4.3%) which the farmers did not indicate.

The FGD’s and interviews conducted corroborated the impacts identified by the farmers and pastoralists as well as raised other impacts.

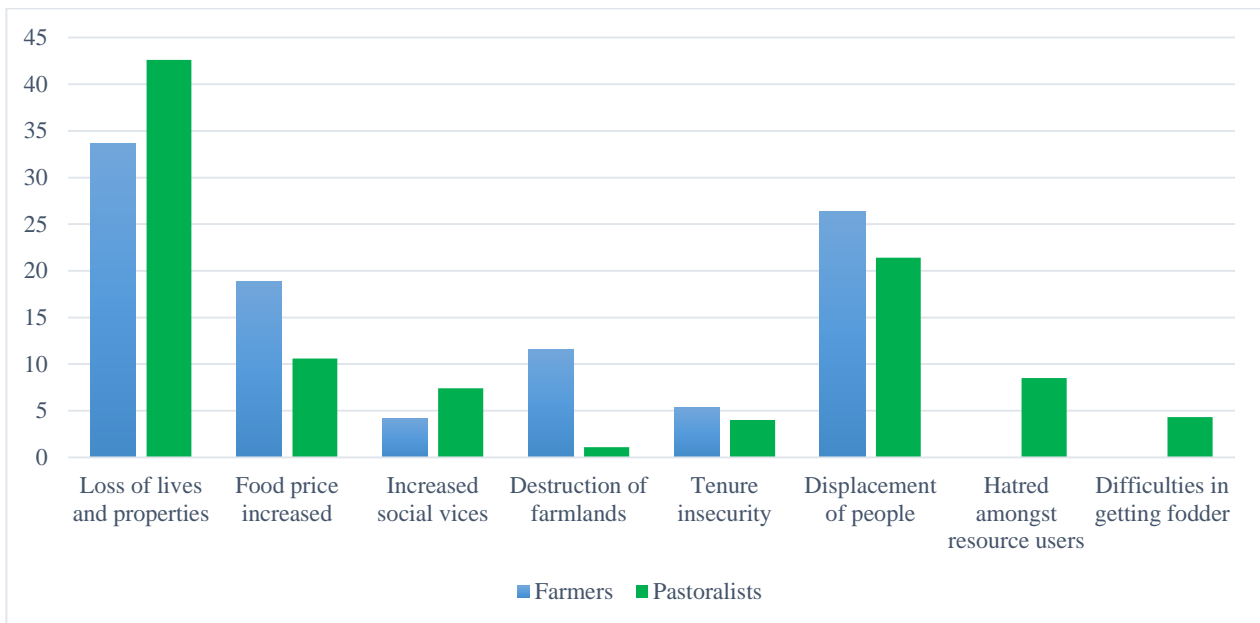


Figure 4: Impacts of the Conflict



Figure 5: Word Cloud of the Impact of the Resource Use Conflict on the Benue Valley Region
Source: Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews

(a) Loss of lives and properties

One obvious impact of violent conflicts such as the type being witnessed in the Benue Valley region is loss of lives and properties, this impact was raised by a KII participant in Wukari who said:

“Death of people- there has been massive loss of lives, just the as a country, we do not value lives, we try to use religion and ethnic explanations to

rationalize killings. Is this not why we are so backwards as a nation?”

Another KII participant in Awe added that

“we have lost several of our people in Benue States because of this conflict, in some cases, an entire family is wiped out, it’s just senseless”.

(b) Distrust amongst resource users

A natural consequence of conflict is a broken relationship between the warring parties, it is therefore not a surprise that there is an increased case of hatred and distrust amongst farmers and pastoralists in the region as a result of this conflict. A farmer FGD participant in Obagaji identified this area of impacts of the conflict on the relationship between the two resource users:

“It negatively affected our relationship with Fulani unlike before when Agatu accommodated them, we related with them better than all tribes with this part of the country but now, all that has changed, in protest against the killing of our people by Fulani’s, 80% of Agatu no longer eat beef and drink cow milk, it’s blood meat and drink”.

This feeling is mutual as the pastoralist also feel the same as highlighted by a female FGD participant in Awe

“the way our people were chased out of Benue States is really offensive and has made us suspicious of Tiv farmers because we feel they are the ones against us”.

(c) Increasing food insecurity and inflation

The two actors in this conflict are major stakeholders in the agriculture and food production sector of the country. The conflict has kept farmers away from their farms and limited the areas available for pastoralists to graze their cattle, this has had adverse economic effects on farming communities and pastoralists. A participant among the pastoralists from the FGD identified this amongst others impacts to be insecurity, rising cost of food items in the market. A pastoralists FGD participant in Awe town on the impact of the conflict noted that

“reduced food production and poor quality cows”

while a farmer FGD participant in Tse Daudu in Jato Aka, concluded that, there is no food due to the fact that the pastoralists have destroyed our crops, the land is not sufficient because pastoralists have claimed part of our land, some of our people across the river are displaced.

(d) Increasing cases of IDP’s

The menace of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP’s) is one of the emerging issues of the

conflicts in Nigeria. A young male FGD participant in Daudu, identified the issues of IDP’s as a result of the conflict:

“It’s not good and they are destroying our farm produce, you can see for yourself that we are displaced to this place in an IDP camp, the poverty and hunger is something else, we do not feel safe even within the camp. They have never attacked this camp but they had attacked others before”.

A KII participant adding to the issue of IDP’s said:

“It’s not only farmers that are displaced, several pastoralist families were displaced too even before the enactment of the anti-open grazing law, it’s just that the law multiplied the figures of those of us that were displaced and are struggling to cope with their lives in new locations”.

The farmers and pastoralists face internal displacement and poverty as some farmers lose their lands and some pastoralists are forced to migrate to other regions because of local hostilities in their own communities. Some displaced farmers live in temporary camps and some live with relatives in other farmer communities.

(e) Increasing cases of out of school children

One consequence of this conflict that is closely linked to the issues of IDP’s are the increasing cases of out of school children. A KII participant in Wukari lamented the impact of the conflict on educational development said increased cases of out of school children is one issue, for me this is as terrible as killing of people because these uneducated children who have already witnessed violence will be the problem of the next generation, an adult farmer FGD participant in Obagaji, in agreement with the impact on education said “It retarded educational development, no school activities were going on for some time”. A young farmer FGD participant in Daudu added that, “our education is affected, even though people volunteer to teach the little children in the camp, those in higher institution had to drop out because of lack of money to pursue their education”.

(f) Rising insecurity and other social vices

Insecurity is naturally associated with conflicts and a violent conflict where thousands of people have lost their lives such as this, rising insecurity is not a

surprise. A pastoralist FGD participant in Baure Grazing reserve noted that

“the conflict has negative impacts, pastoralists closer to river Benue are not safe”.

A KII participant in Shendam highlighted how the conflict has further created more security challenges for the country,

“many people have lost their livelihood and with such high number of unemployed people, increased social vices will naturally occur, and that is why crime rate has gone up with kidnapping and cattle rustling on the rise”.

This position is also supported a KII participant in Lafia who said,

“kidnapping is on the rise because as things became difficult, we have seen many of these resource users taking arms and changing trade”.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings on the forms of the conflict are corroborated by Adeoye (2017), Ofem and Bassey (2014), Okeke (2014), Dimelu, Salifu and Igbokwe (2016), they also identified; deliberate overgrazing of farmlands by cattle, contamination of streams and the harassment of farmers which sometimes resulted to rape, disregard for traditional authority, cattle theft or rustling and killing of cattle that stray into farmland, deliberate planned attacks on farmers and their property, burning of houses, burning of farm produce in storage, blocking of water point.

On the nature of the conflict, the findings are in line with those of Nwankwo (2023), Gursory (2020), Amnesty International (2018), International Crises Group (2017), who all attested that the conflict is extremely violent in Benue State and have killed more people than the attacks of the terrorist group, Boko Haram in recent years. Amnesty International particularly reported that the years between 2016 and 2018 were extremely very violent with 312 incidents of attacks and reprisal attacks.

Regarding the impact of the conflict, loss of lives was identified by Gursory (2020), USAID (2019), and Amnesty International (2018). USAID reported that the conflict has claimed more than 7,000 lives in 5 years in Benue and Nasarawa States

alone while Amnesty International reported a death records of 3641 persons of which 22% of them killed in 2016, 21% in 2017 and 57% between January and October of 2018. According to the findings by George, Adelaja and Awokuse, (2021), Nnaji, Ratna and Renwick, (2020); Dary, James and Mohammed, (2017) and Sulaiman and Ja'afar-Furo, (2010), the conflict has limited the activities of pastoralists and farmers, and threatened their livelihoods, the available food items which are now produced by fewer people becomes more expensive.

On the incidences of the increasing cases of IDP's, Mbah, Iwuamadi, Udeoji, Eze, and Ezeibi (2021), Unah (2018) and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, 2020) agrees with the findings. Unah, (2018) added that 175,070 internally displaced persons are housed in nine camps across the state, of this number, 80,450 are children while MSF (2020), held that there are over 300,000 displaced with over 160,000 of them scattered across Benue States camped in schools and others makeshift structures. Ochube (2020), Unicef (2020), and Unah (2018) agrees with the findings on the increasing cases of out of school children. Unicef (2020) reported that there are about 10.5 million (52% of Nigerian children) out of school children in Nigeria, accounting for 20% of the world's out-of-school children - the highest in the world. The official record for out of school children in Plateau States where the farmer-pastoralists conflict reportedly intensified in 2002, is at least 750,000, most of these are unable to attend school because of the looming security threats, while in Benue States, the government estimates that some 102,000 children are out of school due to this conflict; responses to education in Agatu local government area of Benue States, one of the worst hit areas of this conflict in the region includes decrease in enrolment, absenteeism, poor turnout of teachers to schools during and after the crises, school infrastructural destruction, prolonged school closure, and set back to the educational advancement of the area (Ochube, 2020; Unah, 2018).

On rising insecurity, Omoyajowo et al., 2022; Bashir and Mustapaha, 2021; Abdulazeez, Ibrahim and Ibrahim, 2018; Bashir, 2017; Abbas, 2014; Adisa and Adekunle, 2014 agrees with the findings and that the farmer-pastoralists conflict is the original factor behind the increasing cases of

banditry and cattle rustling and has become a critical aspect of the conflict, although there are other factors responsible for this menace such as the economic benefits, however, the continuous conflicts between these resource users have made the youths readily available to carry out these acts. With many of the youths having nothing left to survive from, they are left with no option than to take up either cattle rustling or banditry as employment. As parts of these acts are also raping, kidnapping for ransom and raiding of communities which have further deepened the poverty level of both the farmers and the pastoralists.

From the forms and extent of violence as well as the resultant impacts, this conflict clearly reflects the assumptions of the Eco-violence theory which holds that competition over scarce ecological resources engenders violent conflicts. The ultimate causes of the conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in the Benue Valley of Nigeria rest on the degradation of resources and the increased competition for access and resources capture. The scarcity of land is due to the degradation and shrinking ecological space, human and cattle population explosion, and resource depletion (Ide, 2018; Abel, Brottrager, Cuaresma & Muttarak, 2019; Homer-Dixon, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The Benue Valley, a region renowned for its agricultural productivity and peaceful coexistence, has unfortunately become a hotbed of violent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. The frequency and intensity of these conflicts have disrupted the social fabrics as well as the economic and environmental landscape of the communities in the region. The conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of properties and farmlands, increased social vices and displacement of people, leading to a humanitarian crisis such as increased cases of out of school children and IDP's that requires urgent attention.

The impacts of farmer-pastoralist conflicts in the Benue Valley are multifaceted and devastating. The conflicts have led to a decline in agricultural productivity, reduced access to markets, increased food insecurity and inflation. Moreover, the conflicts have exacerbated distrust amongst the farming communities and the nomadic pastoralists leading to ethnic and religious tensions, threatening

the unity and stability of the region. It is imperative that policymakers, stakeholders, and communities come together to address the root causes of these conflicts and find sustainable solutions to mitigate their impacts.

To break the cycle of violence and promote peaceful coexistence amongst the farmers and pastoralists in the Benue Valley, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying issues driving the conflicts. These approaches include:

1. The need for the creation and development of ranches and grazing reserves for pastoralists by the government. This can be done in collaboration with traditional rulers, farming communities and the pastoralists themselves through their associations. In addition, pastoralist should implement sustainable grazing management such as rotational grazing to reduce land degradation.
2. Minimizing the menace of farm encroachment on grazing areas through enforcement. This can go hand in hand with public enlightenment on the need to respect government laws with respects to grazing reserves.
3. Farmers should adopt climate-resilient practices such as conservation agriculture, crop diversification and agroforestry.
4. A greater participation of indigenous resource user groups in policy formulation process relating to natural resource management and utilization should be encouraged. This will help to reduce cases of feelings of being sidelined in the policy formulation process.
5. The government, communities and individuals should embark on massive afforestation and reforestation programmes to help slow down the impact of climate change.

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