



EFFECT OF HERDSMEN-FARMERS CONFLICT ON LIVELIHOOD ASSETS OF FARMING COMMUNITIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Conflict threatens the livelihood assets of farming communities, especially the very poor farmers because it directly affects their primary livelihood activity. Thus, this paper aims to assess the effects of farmers-herdsmen conflicts on livelihood assets of farming communities in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design and 150 respondents were purposively selected from the three most affected farming communities in Benue state. Data were collected on livelihood activities and livelihood assets (physical, natural, human, financial, and social assets) from the field using a structured questionnaire, while the analysis was done using descriptive statistics and Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The study revealed that the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have forced farmers out of their farming communities with resultant short and long-term effects on food production and supply. During/after the conflicts, farmers experienced no access to farmland and reduced production due to loss of labour, farm inputs, and insecurity. The livelihood activity mostly affected by the conflict in the area is farming activities. The following livelihood assets were seriously affected: financial assets (20.51% of variance), natural assets (15.16% of variance), physical assets (12.17% of variance), human assets (8.64% of variance), and social assets (7.63% of variance). As a result of the loss of key livelihood assets, many households changed their primary livelihood activity. The study concludes that conflict between farmers and herdsmen has a serious effect on the livelihood assets of farming households in the area. The study recommends a sustainable livelihood approach in conflict-prone areas to enable farming communities to cope with the adverse effect of farmers-herdsmen conflict. Also, ranches should be established to encourage herdsmen to adopt modern ways of cattle rearing and breeding.

Key words: Conflict, Livelihood, Farming Communities, Herdsmen, Farmers.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict threatens the livelihood assets of farming communities, especially the very poor farmers because it directly affects their primary livelihood activity. The recurrent conflict between farmers and herdsmen make household's sources of income for both herdsmen and farmers vulnerable over time. As Okoro, (1) put it, struggle for survival and protection of economic livelihood (including, farmlands, crops, and cattle) appears to precipitate the conflict between herdsmen and farmers across many communities in Nigeria. The conflicts not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved, they also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of their primary livelihood activity which is agricultural/pastoral production. Displacement of both user groups as a result of attacks from herdsmen and reprisal attacks from farmers deny farmers access to farmlands which has jeopardized the sustainability of household income and food supply.

Some livelihood assets such as farmland, knowledge, and tools become redundant, influencing sustainable livelihood strategies and ways of utilizing livelihood assets (2). Amidst such eventualities, affected farming communities' assets become underutilized which threatens the economic prosperity and survival of the inhabitants of the region. Also critically affecting the community and household ability to cope with conflicts related stresses and shocks (3)

Pressure on livelihood systems due to competition between sedentary farming and pastoralists are integral to the underlying causes of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Benue state. The resultant increase in competition for arable land has oftentimes led to the serious manifestation of hostilities and social friction among the two user-groups in many parts of Nigeria. The conflicts have not only heightened the level of insecurity but have also demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the food crisis in Nigeria and other affected countries due to loss of farmer lives, animals, crops, and valuable properties (4). Violent conflicts between crop farmers

and herdsman have, for a long time, been a common feature of economic livelihood strategy in the region with consequences on human and animal lives, properties, peaceful coexistence, and orderliness in the region. Since the escalation of the conflict in Nigeria in 2014, Benue is the worst-hit state (5). According to Premium Times (6), more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016 in Benue state, while livelihoods have been devastated most visibly as a result of the systemic destruction of livelihood associated with direct asset-stripping and forced displacement. The livelihood strategies of all groups, including farmers and herdsman, are usually affected during/after conflict. Many of the grievances on different sides and underlying causes of conflict, involve livelihood issues (land tenure, access to water, pasture, access to markets, and economic opportunities, development of human capital). During the conflict, farmers' households and indeed the state's food security seems threatened. Therefore, an emphasis on livelihoods is central to any lasting solutions to the conflict (7). The need to strengthen livelihoods has been recognized as being very necessary for conflict resolution efforts (3). Developing a conflict resolution mechanism targeted at minimizing the damage to livelihoods assets from farmers-herdsman conflict is to this end a necessary strategy.

Livelihood in this context includes all forms of economic generation and employment such as agriculture, small businesses, and trade activities that support the health and wellbeing of the people (9). It comprises means by which households obtain and maintain access to the resources necessary to ensure immediate and long-term survival. These essential resources can be categorized into physical, natural, human, financial, social, and political (7). Households used these assets to support their livelihood strategies and their well-being.

Sustainable livelihood can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future. Many researchers are advocating for a sustainable livelihood approach as the strategy for disaster and conflict-prone areas to ensure immediate and long term survival (9; 10). However, according to Ashley (11), sustainable livelihoods thinking has also been criticized for underplaying the importance of one or more critical factors including vulnerability, gender, and market. Sustainable livelihood framework presented in its simplest form (see Fig. 1), views people as operating in the context of vulnerability. Within this context, they have access to certain livelihood assets or poverty-reducing attributes. They derive their meaning and values from the prevailing assets. Lack of access to certain livelihood assets would increase vulnerability, defenselessness, and insecurity. It ultimately increases the external dimension of risks, shocks, and stress such as negative income shocks, diseases, and natural hazards (12) to which an individual or household is subjected.

According to Unruh (13), dynamics in land asset access during the farmers-herdsman conflict in farming communities can come about with, (i) dislocation; (ii) displaced persons' claims in destination locations; (iii) victory or loss of particular sides in the conflict and the rural inhabitants connected to these sides; (iv) land losses and gains connected with opportunistic activities

of individuals and groups intending to take advantage of the vulnerable post-conflict environment and the lack of functioning state institutions to pursue economic, religious, or identity-based land taking; or what can be perceived of as re-taking of lands. In Nigeria and Benue state, in particular, displaced persons were denied access to their ancestral land culminating in pressure on available land in their destination locations (5). Various strategies such as the creation of peace committees comprising of actors from both farming communities, pastoralists group, and other stakeholders were derived to facilitate the post-conflict taking, or occupying of land and property that were tied to the character of the conflict; particularly involving perceived, actual, or accused guilt concerning participation in the conflict.

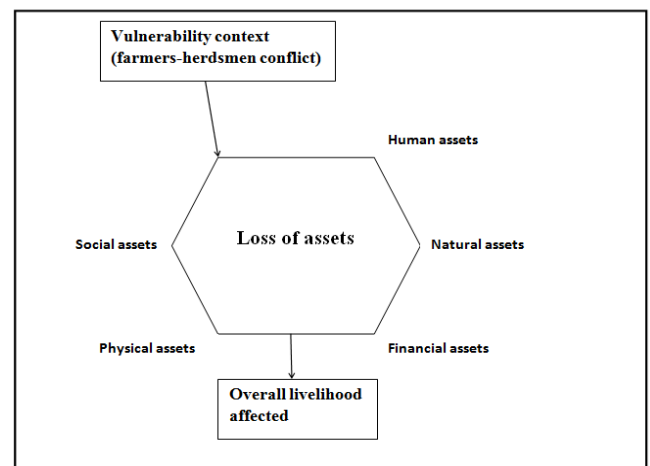


Fig. 1: Sustainability livelihood framework (Modified from Ashraf, Iftikhar, Shahbaz, Khan, and Luqman, (9))

Human assets in terms of educational acquisition, labour supply, and awareness of formal and customary tenure structures (rights, laws, norms, authority structures, procedures) can be particularly hard hit by resource use conflict between farmers-herdsman conflict scenarios. Conflicts affect educational facilities, labour supply, value system and self-confidence of farming communities in Benue state.

Social disruption after farmers and herdsman conflict can serve to delay, degrade, and rework social assets, as attempts to resolve recurrent disputes, government missteps concerning how farming communities are treated in the context of handling the conflict by relevant stakeholders can lead to the abandonment of connections, networks, and forms of trust and exchange that support livelihood strategies (14). In aggregate social assets for farming communities after a conflict can be in a state of flux, and weakened overall, with the predictability of low social connection, trust, and reciprocity. Affected farmers sphere of social connections may diminish due to conflict, and post-conflict difficulties in maintaining a wide network, noting what purpose of the connection is associated with the retention of social assets.

Physical assets such as farmlands, shelter and roads are usually the worst-hit during and post-conflict. The status of transport infrastructure during and after farmers and herdsman conflicts (due to destruction, neglect, or as off-

limits due to vulnerability of the areas to conflict) and its effects on the marketing of agricultural produce, can affect the amount of land put under production during conflict and recovery (13). As well, there are significant connections with the placement of specific forms of physical assets (infrastructure, water, shelter, and farm tools) that combine with security and fertile land, to result in either displacement of users of these physical assets or forced migration for economic reasons, and the subsequent land abandonment.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Study Area

Benue state, with a land area of 30,955sq kilometre is located between Latitudes 6°25' and 8°08'N, and Longitude 7°47' and 10°00'E, on the eastern side of the middle belt of Nigeria. It is surrounded by five states, namely: Nassarawa to the North, Taraba to the Northeast, Cross River to the South, Enugu to the South-west and Kogi to the west. There is also short international boundary between the state and the republic of Cameroun along Nigeria's southeast border (Fig. 2). The dominant dwellers in Benue State are the Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, Abakpa, jukun, Nyifon, Akweya. The Tiv are the major ethnic group, they occupy about 14 local government areas with the Etulo and Jukun, however, Idoma, Igede Akweya, Nyifon occupy the remaining nine local government areas, while other migrants like the Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and some other minor tribes in Nigeria leave among them.

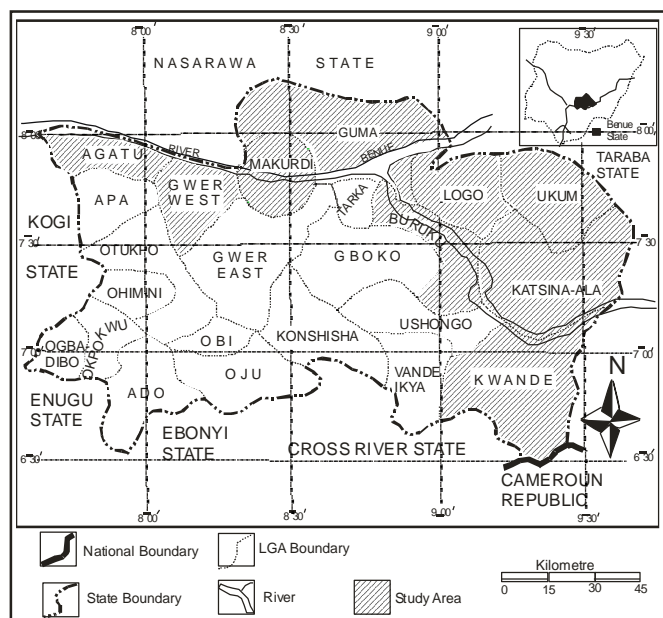


Fig. 2: Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict affected areas in Benue State [Source: Ministry of Lands and Survey, Makurdi]

Methods

The study population comprises of displaced farmers in the study area in the most affected local government areas which include: Agatu, Gwer-West, Makurdi, Guma, Buruku, Logo, Ukum, Katsina-Ala and Kwande. The data needs here include the following: Impact of herdsmen and farmers conflict on livelihood assets (natural, physical, social, human and financial assets). Purposive

sampling technique was used to select displaced households living in IDP camps and households living with relatives in secured urban centres in the area. A sample size of 150 respondents comprising of farmers was selected for the study. A structured questionnaire was administered in three Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps within affected areas or close to conflict-prone areas. Data collected from the respondents were coded and summarized using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20 software. The analytical tools that were used for data analysis are descriptive statistics which were employed to have a summary description of the data that was collected. This involves the use of central tendencies such as percentages, frequencies distribution and means. Also, a data reduction technique was utilized to ascertain the level and dimension of the impact of the conflict on the identified livelihood assets.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographics

The study analyzed the socio-demographic characteristics of affected farming communities in Benue, Nigeria considering specific variables such as age, sex, marital status, educational attainment and household size.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	Items	Frequency	%
Age of Respondents			
1	1 – 20years	6	4.0
2	21 – 40years	71	47.3
3	41 – 60years	57	38.0
4	61 – 80years	9	6.0
5	80years and above	7	4.7
Marital Status			
1	Single	12	8.0
2	Married	104	69.3
3	Divorced/ Separated	33	22.0
4	Widow/widower	1	0.7
Educational Attainment			
1	Non-formal	53	35.3
2	Primary	64	42.7
3	Secondary	26	17.3
4	Tertiary	7	4.7
Household size			
1	1-5	4	2.7
2	6-10	45	30.0
3	11-15	76	50.7
4	16- 20	8	5.3
	21- 25	17	11.3
	Total	150	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2020

Table 1 shows that 47.2% of the respondents are within the age group of 21-40years, which means that the active age is the dominant population in affected farming communities in the areas. Marriage status shows that 69.3% of the victims are married with an average household size of 11-15 persons represented by 50.7% of the respondents. The level of education of the victims

indicated that majority of the respondents represented by 42.7% have secondary education, while 35.3% have no formal education,

Period of carrying out primary livelihood activity

Members of the affected farming communities have been carrying out farming activities as their primary livelihood strategy. Information in Figure 2 shows that the majority of the affected members of the farming communities have practiced their primary livelihood activity which is farming for between 20 and 40years representing 34.7% of the respondents in the area.

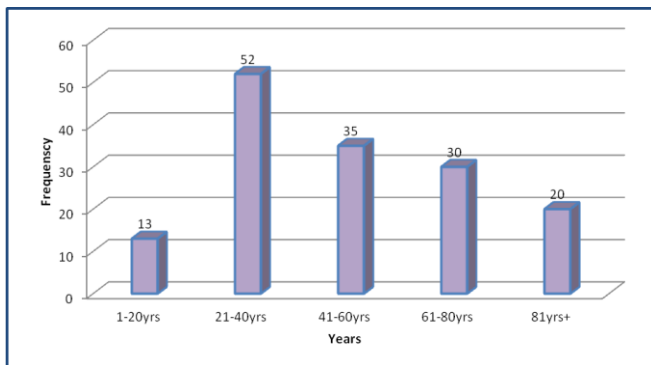


Fig. 3: Period of practicing primary livelihood activity

Impact of the conflict on livelihood activities

Conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have impacted livelihood activities in the area. As a result of the impact, many of the affected farming communities have lost key livelihood assets/capital due to the conflict. The information on Figure 3 shows that most of the farming household representing 40% lost key assets as a result of the conflict.

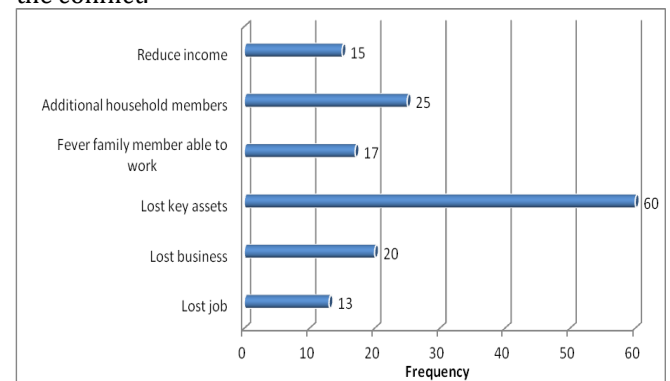


Fig. 4: Impact of the conflict on livelihood activities

Affected livelihood assets in the Area

The components of livelihood assets affected were evaluated using principal component analysis (PCA) to transform the variables into a new set of variables. The rotation was done using varimax and the critical level accepted was 1. Five (5) components of livelihood assets affected by farmers-herdsmen conflict was extracted which explained 64.1% of the total variance.

Table 2: Component Matrix of Affected livelihood Assets

Variables	Affected livelihood assets				
	1	2	3	4	5
Farmland	-0.057	-0.290	0.772	-0.077	-0.050
Shelter	0.131	0.252	0.564	0.190	0.029
Machinery	-0.361	-0.285	-0.297	0.284	-0.466
Farm Tools	-0.356	-0.207	0.595	-0.292	0.069
Roads	0.196	0.262	0.834	-0.192	0.240
Water sources	0.118	0.022	0.124	-0.001	0.172
Educational facilities	-0.031	-0.067	-0.388	0.914	0.077
Emotional capital (Self-confidence)	0.163	0.353	0.354	0.038	0.378
Relationship	0.118	0.022	0.124	0.914	0.172
Labour Supply	0.105	-0.507	0.302	0.688	0.179
Spiritual Capital	0.615	0.459	0.086	0.212	0.166
Family Connection/Relationship	0.285	0.411	-0.086	0.169	0.030
Social Order	0.047	-0.325	0.031	-0.135	0.738
Human Rights	0.162	-0.026	-0.156	-0.076	0.693
Cultural System	0.354	0.013	-0.283	-0.172	0.716
Access to land	0.153	0.762	-0.262	-0.232	-0.116
Arable crops	-0.136	0.772	0.124	0.196	-0.164
Crops matured for harvest	0.047	0.738	0.031	-0.135	-0.425
Tree Crops	0.086	0.074	-0.226	0.165	-0.151
Livestock	-0.011	0.551	-0.151	0.127	0.123
Farming	-0.025	0.016	0.652	0.054	-0.059
Non-Farming	0.735	-0.065	0.236	0.045	0.122
Employment	0.631	-0.005	-0.017	0.068	-0.075
Access to loan/credit	0.700	0.051	0.286	-0.030	0.091
Marketing	0.718	-0.114	-0.122	0.274	0.123
Eigenvalues	5.126	3.790	3.041	2.160	1.908
% variance	20.505	15.160	12.165	8.638	7.633
Cumulative %	20.505	35.665	47.829	56.468	64.100

From the rotated component matrix in Table 2, five (5) affected livelihood assets were extracted. The result of the analysis indicates that five (5) components of livelihood assets affected by conflict in the area were extracted which explain 64.1% of the total variance leaving 35.9 of the total variance unaccounted for by the components. These components include Financial, natural, physical, human and social assets affected by conflict in the area. The study confirms Ukamaka *et al* (1) findings on livelihood issues in herdsmen-farmers conflict in Kogi state, Nigeria, who reported that herdsmen-farmers conflict affects livelihood assets of farmers in affected areas. The magnitude of affected livelihood assets includes the following:

Financial Assets:

This component was seen as related to financial asset affected by farmers-herdsmen conflict. It is defined by the following variables which loaded high on: non-farm income, employment, access to loan/credit and marketing activities. The entire financial assets account for a total eigenvalue of 5.126 explaining 20.51% of variance.

Natural Assets:

This component is seen as related to natural assets affected by the conflict. Four variables have significant loadings. These variables include access to land, arable crops, crops matured for harvest and livestock affected. Natural assets account for 15.16% of the total variance and have an eigenvalue of 3.79.

Physical Assets:

This component is seen as related to physical assets affected by the conflict in the area. It is defined by the following variables which loaded high on: farmland, shelter, roads, farm tools and farming. This physical asset attribute contribute a total eigenvalue of 3.041 explaining 12.165% of the total variance.

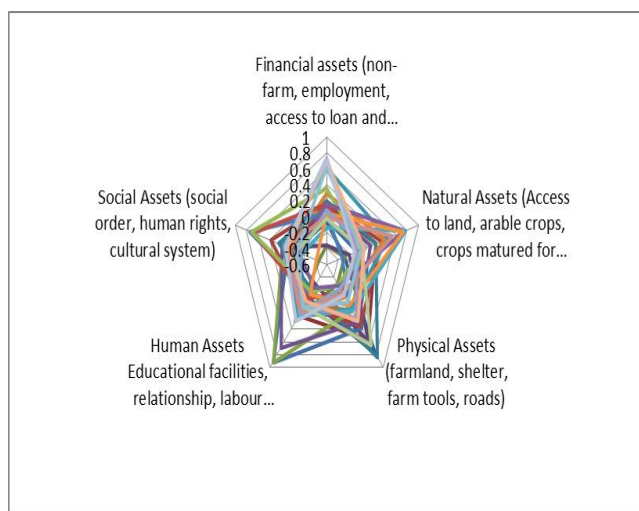


Fig. 5: Affected livelihood assets among farming communities in Benue State

Human Assets:

This component is related to human assets affected by farmers-herdsmen conflict in the area. It is defined by the following variables which loaded high on:

educational facilities, relationship and labour supply. These attributes contributed a total eigenvalue of 2.16 explaining 8.638% of the variance.

Social Assets:

This component was seen as related to social assets affected by farmers-herdsmen conflict. It is defined by the following variables which loaded high on: social order, human rights and cultural system. The entire social assets account for a total eigenvalue of 1.908 explaining 7.633% of variance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There is a strong indication that farmers-herdsmen conflict affects livelihood assets in affected farming communities in the study area. Framers-herdsmen conflict and livelihood strategy are inseparably linked to one another. Livelihoods destroyed by conflict are themselves fuelling or driving further conflict as people make livelihood adaptations in affected areas. These adaptations become part of a self-perpetuating livelihoods-conflict cycle, where such livelihood adaptations generate further polarization between land resource user groups. The shock or risk is not some externally-driven phenomenon; rather, it is embedded within livelihood diverse and increasingly competitive livelihood systems in the context of weak local governance of conflict in farming communities which largely revolves on livelihood issues. Conflicts are associated with livelihood pressure and competition between crop farmers and herdsmen, especially, interference on livelihood sources, and assets. Consequently, these impact on livelihood assets of crop farmers ranging from physical, natural, human, financial, to social assets is a major setback to farming communities in the region. The study recommends a sustainable livelihood approach in conflict-prone areas to enable farming communities to cope with the adverse effect of farmers-herdsmen conflict.

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