

Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Food Security in North-central Nigeria

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Abstract— This study is aimed at exploring the nexus between farmer-herder conflicts and food security in North-central Nigeria. Of all the major drivers of food insecurity in the world, conflict ranks topmost. In the last decade, farmer-herder conflicts have become one of the defining conflicts in Nigeria with North-Central Nigeria as its hotbed. As a region with about the most significant agricultural prospect in the country, it becomes imperative to study the nexus between the conflict it is engulfed in and the agricultural prospects the region has. The objectives of the study included to: analyse the existing reality of food (in)security in North Central Nigeria; highlight the trajectory of food (in)security in North Central Nigeria over the last two decades and into the coming decade; establish the nexus between the farmer-herder conflicts and food insecurity in North Central Nigeria and determine how this affects the food and livestock value chains; and develop a framework for conflict mitigation and food security for the future. The area of the study covers Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Niger states in North-central Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative) approaches for the purpose of triangulation. While a thematic approach and analysis of storylines would be used for the qualitative part of the study, an ex post facto research design would be adopted for the quantitative aspect. The findings showed that there is a logical and necessary connection between the conflicts and food insecurity in the area of study. In fact, the more the crises, the greater the chances of food insecurity. The study made recommendations for mitigation of crises to forestall further deepening of food insecurity in the area of study and Nigeria, in general.

Keywords: Conflict, Farmer-Herder, Food, Insecurity, North-central.

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INTRODUCTION

Policymakers in Nigeria grapple with so many uncertainties from multiple directions, which make the prioritization of necessary interventions a daunting task. One of such uncertainties is the current food security situation in the country as a consequence of violent clashes among farmers and herders. The farmer-herder conflict with its far-reaching impact is driven by transhumance and competition over shrinking natural resources, exacerbated by a combination of factors such as climate change, drought, desertification, and growth in human and livestock population. The protracted nature of the clashes has adversely affected both tenure and food securities in northcentral Nigeria, especially in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Niger states (the hub of food production in the country). Aside its extensive impact on food and nutrition security, it is estimated that Nigeria loses about USD 14 billion (N5.04 trillion) annually to the farmers-herders' skirmishes.

This includes general losses in revenue as well as destruction of infrastructure such as homes, schools, religious houses, and health centres. The conflict has exterminated tens of thousands and displaced millions from both their homes and farms, thereby affecting the gross per capita food production in northcentral Nigeria. The United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has projected that the food insecurity situation in Nigeria's conflict affected States risks turning into famine by 2050). This prediction is not unfounded because the roads to the graveyards are busier than roads to the farms. The conflict has not only displaced millions of the farming population, but some of the nondisplaced refrain from also going to farms for fear of being attacked. Thus, the phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and fear of attack reduce agricultural productivity thereby making food insecurity or, as have been predicted by the FAO, famine a highly plausible reality. Therefore, the research questions for this study are: what is the current reality of food (in)security in northcentral Nigeria? What was the situation in the past one or two decades, what is it currently and what would it be in the next decade? In other words, how are the food and livestock value chains affected by the farmer-herder clashes? Contrary to claims by other researchers, this study will attempt to establish whether there is a connection between the farmer-herder crises and food insecurity by undertaking a robust analysis of food production activities in the study area to denote the current trajectory, which are essential to formulate and prioritize policy actions for the future. It will develop a framework on how governments, policymakers and all stakeholders can frontally confront this and many other factors retarding Nigeria's self-sufficiency in food in order to avert the looming famine.

The relations between sedentary farming communities and herders in Nigeria have, historically, been harmonious – farmers often leave crop residues on their farms for cattle to feed on, while the cattle in turn fertilize the land with dungs. However, this symbiotic relationship has taken a negative spiral in the wake of human and livestock population explosion, which puts considerable pressure on natural resources,

particularly land and water, thereby leading to violent clashes between farmers and pastoralists with wanton destruction of lives and properties. The conflict is driven by transhumance and competition over natural resources, and exacerbated by a combination of drought, desertification, climate change, expansion of farmlands, etc. This phenomenon, which was occasional in the past, has escalated in intensity and frequency over the last decade, especially in the northcentral and northwest regions of Nigeria. Studies have shown that the conflict claimed more lives in 2016 than the Boko Haram insurgency with at least 800 people killed in southern Kaduna alone and 1,269 in Benue state. In 2018, the crisis claimed six times the number of people murdered by Boko Haram (International Crisis Group 2018). Notwithstanding, government's response to the crisis at both the federal and state levels has been abysmal. Its failure or unwillingness to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of the attacks has incentivized impunity, resulting in an infinite circle of reprisal attacks.

The lingering nature of these clashes has adversely affected both tenure and food securities. The United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has projected that the food insecurity situation in Nigeria's conflict affected States risks turning into famine by 2050 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2021). This prediction is not far-fetched because the roads to the graveyards are busier than those to the farms. The conflicts have not just displaced tens of thousands of the farming population in the northcentral region of Nigeria, it has prevented the nondisplaced from going to farms for fear of being attacked. Thus, the issues of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and fear of attack reduce access to land for agricultural productions. Other factors militating against tenure security include urbanization, desertification and other climatic conditions. Due to decreased farming activities in the area of study, it is naturally expected that there would be food insecurity. How precarious is this situation in reality? In other words, what is the current food (in)security condition in Nigeria, especially in northcentral Nigeria? What was it in the past few decades and what would it be in the next? This research undertakes to answer these questions by giving a detailed analysis of the farmer-herder crisis and its implication for food insecurity in the nation. It shall unearth how the conflict negatively affects all four variables of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability, as well as how it increases the uncertainty about satisfying future food and nutritional needs of the people.

PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES

Of all the major drivers of food insecurity in the world, conflict ranks topmost. According to the 2021 'State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World', conflict is "the leading cause of global food crises". Increases in the frequency and complexity of conflicts in the last decade have led many countries to the brink of famine (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2021: 3). This world outlook is particularly true of the northcentral region of Nigeria, which has become a hotbed for violent clashes, especially among farmers and herders. Such conflicts negatively affect almost every

aspect of a food system, from production, harvesting, processing and transport to input, supply, financing, marketing and consumption (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2021: xviii). The farmer-herder conflicts have displaced millions of the farming population, thereby leading to very low farming activities in the study area. The consequence of the non-engagement of displaced population in productive agricultural activities means that there would be a deficiency in the overall food production. But what is the magnitude of this shortfall?

The justification for this research stems from the fact that, although studies abound regarding the farmer-herder conflict in general (Awotokun, Nwozor and Olanrewaju 2020; Aderinto and Achem 2019; International Crisis Group 2017, 2018; Sule 2020), none of this extant research is geared towards an aggregate analysis of the food crisis in northcentral Nigeria with Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Niger states as case studies. The few that examine food insecurity as a consequence of the farmer-herder violence did so by investigating individual states, thus making the possibility of having a holistic glance at the food (in)security situation in northcentral Nigeria very blurry. For instance, studies by Solomon (2021) and Oruonye, Ahmed and Fatima (2020) separately examined the nexus between the farmers-herdsmen conflict and food security, but their focus was on Taraba state in the northeast. Research that investigated this nexus within the northcentral region include Tanko (2021) and Jooji (2020), both focusing on Benue state; the latter concentrating on just the Agatu Local Government area of the state. This clearly shows that there is a paucity of research on the farmer-herder conflict and food security nexus with a central concentration on northcentral Nigeria.

Another justification for this study arises from the disagreement among scholars about whether, in reality, the farmer-herder conflict leads to food insecurity. Authors like Idowu (2021), Thomson (2018) and Ezea (2018) maintain that there is a necessary connection between farmer-herder conflict and food (in)security. In fact, the Benue State Commissioner for Agriculture and Natural Resources, James Anbua, posits that the herdsmen attack negatively affects food security in the state as it “has seen its food production ratio decrease by 45 percent” with farms abandoned and large quantities of foodstuffs set ablaze by herdsmen or used as cattle feed (see Ezea 2018: 15; Thomson 2018: 2). Other thinkers argue to the contrary. For them, the farmer-herder conflict has no substantial impact on food security. In a study carried out in Benue state, Alao et al (2019: 38) argue that, contrary to general perception, there is no significant relationship between farmer-herder conflict and food production in Benue State and Nigeria as a whole. They concluded that food insecurity in Nigeria was caused by factors other than the farmer-herder violence, such as dwindling budgetary allocation and population growth. Amidst these conflicting positions, this research, therefore, seeks to unearth the true realities about the current food situation in Nigeria, particularly in the northcentral region. It shall determine the impact of the farmer-herder conflict on food (in)security in northcentral Nigeria by analysing what the situation was in the past few decades, what

it is now and would probably be in the next decades. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. analyse the existing reality of food (in)security in North Central Nigeria.
2. highlight the trajectory of food (in)security in North Central Nigeria over the last two decades and into the coming decade.
3. establish the nexus between the farmer-herder conflicts and food insecurity in North Central Nigeria and determine how this affects the food and livestock value chains.
4. develop a framework for conflict mitigation and food security for the future.

LITERATURES

The Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria (SCAN), undertaken by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) in 2016, identified the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria as the single most widely spread peace and security threat in the country with the highest concentration of these conflicts occurring in the “Middle Belt” and adjacent states, particularly Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Taraba and Adamawa states (International Crisis Group 2017). The intensity of the clashes has claimed more lives than terrorist activities in the northeast of Nigeria. The International Crisis Group (2018) puts the death ratio at ‘six times the number of lives lost to Boko Haram insurgency’ since 2018. The crisis is exacerbated by urban transformation, drought, desertification and other climatic conditions, which have increasingly rendered tenure rights on agricultural lands uncertain. And where these rights are tenable, farming activities are disrupted by the grazing activities of herders, which result in violent conflicts and decreased agricultural activities due largely to the displacement of farming population.

The states most affected by these conflicts are Benue, Taraba, Plateau and Nasarawa States (Li 2018; Leme 2017; Jooji 2020). The conflicts have resulted in huge losses of human lives and destruction of properties worth billions of naira. Besides the loss of human lives, the crisis also has significant impact on the economy of the northcentral region. According to a 2015 report by Mercy Corps, states in the epicenter of the conflict – Benue, Plateau, Kaduna and Nasarawa – “could gain up to \$13.7 billion annually in total macroeconomic benefits if the conflict between herdsman and farmers was fully addressed” (cited in United Nations Peacebuilding 2019: 5).

Most authors agree that the conflict is caused and/or exacerbated by varying degrees and combinations of climatic changes (frequent droughts and desertification); population growth (expansion of human settlements and farmlands as well as increases in human and cattle growth and loss of grazing lands); crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling); political and ethnic strife (intensified by the proliferation of illicit firearms); and breakdown in traditional conflict management mechanisms over land and water disputes (Aderinto and Achem 2019; Baca 2015; International Crisis Group 2017, 2018; Sule 2020). To buttress this point, Haaga & Nom (2022), affirms that the movement of herdsman and subsequent clashes with farmers and host communities in recent times has heightened insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central region and by extension in other parts of the country; the driving force of the clashes is the

competition for available resources, especially grazing land. Of these factors, climate change and population explosion are the most potent drivers of the conflict. Deforestation is constantly eroding arable land in Nigeria. Between 1990 and 2015: the forest area decreased from 172 000 to 66 000 km² (World Bank WDI 2018). Similarly, Olagunju (2015) estimates that 64 percent of Nigerian land is at risk of desertification, affecting directly or indirectly about 64 million people. Also, while human population keeps surging exponentially, so too is cattle population. There are about 18.4 million heads of cattle in Nigeria that are predominantly managed in large herds by semi-sedentary and transhumant pastoralists (FAO 2019: 8). As farmers keep expanding and cultivating new land to meet increased demand from population growth and urbanization, existing cattle routes are encroached upon, thus leading to scarcity of grazing lands and, consequently, destruction of crops as a result of the grazing activities of pastoralists. Crop destruction negatively affects farmers, impacting on their food security and economic livelihoods. These factors are worsened by a dysfunctional legal regime that allows crime to go unpunished, thereby incentivizing both farmers and pastoralists to take matters into their own hands.

Since these conflicts displace a large number of the farming population, it is habitually expected that there would be food shortages and inflation of food prices due to decreased farming activities. According to the FAO (2021) global report on “Crop Prospects and Food Situation”, 12.8 million people in Nigeria are food insecure as a result of worsening conflict that is driving new population displacements, especially in the Northeast, Northwest and North Central. Thus, this research seeks to examine the precariousness of this food insecurity situation in Nigeria, especially in the northcentral region.

METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AREA

This study will be carried out in the northcentral region of Nigeria with Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Niger States as case studies:

i. Benue State

Benue State was created in 1976 from the former Benue-Plateau State. It is located in the Middle Belt of Nigeria and shares an international boundary with Cameroun on the South-East. Locally, it is bounded on the north by Nasarawa State, on the south by Cross River, Ebonyi, and Enugu States, on the east by Taraba State, and on the west by Kogi State. ‘Benue state has a landmass of 33,955 square kilometers and lies between Latitudes 6.5° and 8.5° North and Longitudes 7.47° N and 10 East’. The state is home to over four million people, majority of whom constitute the Tiv, Idoma and Igede ethnic groups. This population is predominantly Christian and farmers as agriculture is the mainstay of the Benue economy. Benue state consists of twenty-three Local Government Areas (LGAs) and is arguably the hardest hit by the farmer-herder conflict.

ii. Nasarawa State

Nasarawa State was created on 1st October 1996 from neighboring Plateau State. It has a total landmass of 27,117 square kilometers and is bounded in the north by Kaduna State, in the west by the Federal Capital Territory, in the south by Kogi and Benue States and in the east by Taraba and Plateau States. Nasarawa State is divided into three Senatorial Districts (South, North and West) comprising of thirteen (13) Local Government Areas. Like Benue, agriculture is the mainstay of its economy with the yearly production of varieties of cash crops. Known as the 'Home of Solid Minerals', Nasarawa State is blessed with various minerals such as salt, baryte, and bauxite, among others.

iii. Plateau State

Plateau State was created in 1976 out of the northern half of former Benue-Plateau state and is celebrated as "The Home of Peace and Tourism" due to its beautiful natural rock formations, hills and waterfalls. It is located at North Central part of Nigeria with an area of 26,899 square kilometres. It is located between latitude 08°24'N and longitude 008°32' and 010°38' east. It is bounded by Bauchi State to the northeast, Kaduna State to the northwest, Nasarawa State to the southwest and Taraba State to the southeast. On creation in 1976, Plateau State consisted of fourteen (14) Local Government Areas (LGAs). Three (3) additional LGAs were created in 1989, 1991 and 1996 respectively. Today it consists of seventeen (17) LGAs.

iv. Niger State

Niger State was established 1976 by the bifurcation of the then North-Western State into Niger and Sokoto States. Home to the two former military rulers (Ibrahim Babangida and Abdulsalami Abubakar), Niger State is predominantly occupied by the Nupe, Gbagyi, Kamuku, Kambari, Hun-Saare, Hausa and Koro ethnic groups, among others. The state is named after the River Niger shares its borders with the republic of Benin to the West, Zamfara State to the North, Kebbi to the North-West, Kogi to the South, Kwara to the South-West, Kaduna to the North-East and the FCT to the South-East. It consists of 25 local government areas.

Having briefly described the study area, it is important to state that the research would adopt a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative) approaches for the purpose of triangulation. While a thematic approach and analysis of storylines would be used for the qualitative part of the study, an ex post facto research design would be adopted for the quantitative aspect. Thus, data and statistics for the quantitative analysis would be generated from multiple sources, including the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS); the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD); the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA); the State Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development of each state; the State Emergency Management Agencies of each state; the World Development Indicators dataset of the World Bank; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, etc. Data from these sources shall focus on figures on the number of attacks, displaced persons as well as

food production statistics for the past and present decades. Other secondary data on the nature and causes of the conflicts shall be sourced from relevant books, journals, newspapers, and online materials. The study shall also adopt the Community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, specifically key informant interviews and focus group discussions, for sourcing largely primary data from the field. The research team shall visit IDP Camps and places most affected by the conflicts in the study area to directly generate information from IDPs and other victims on how the conflicts have impacted their farming activities and economic subsistence, among other things. Fulani/pastoralist settlements would also be visited for data generation. The data generated from these places would be thematically analysed to understand informants' perspectives on the drivers and impact of the conflicts on food security.

THE REALITY OF FOOD (IN) SECURITY IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

Inflation which has hit the Nigerian economy generally, rages more on the cost of food items. While allusions can be made to the implementation of the removal of subsidies on vital products as the cause for this inflation, the current situation is also exacerbated by the impending danger of food insecurity occasioned by the rising rate of attacks, especially in North-central Nigeria. The table below reflects the ratings from respondents with regard to the reality of food insecurity in North-Central Nigeria.

Questions	To a great extent	To no extent
Farmers' /herders' attacks prominent all season?	56.2%	29.2%
To what extent do think your inability to farm will affect food production?	68.5%	21.3%
To what extent is any form of agricultural activity taking place in your community at the moment?	13.4%	61.3%

Data from field work, 2024.

The table above shows that, 56.2% of the respondents agree that farmer/herder attack are an all season phenomenon. 68.5% agree that their inability to farm directly affects food production. 61.3% are of the opinion that no farming activity is going in their communities at the moment. Only 13.4% agree that farming activities are going on in their communities. The data generally shows farming activities have reduced significantly in the farming communities of those living in the IDP camps and herder communities affected by the attacks. Similarly, the respondents are quite agreed that that their inability to farm directly affects food production. The fact that a higher percentage of the respondents are agreed that tacks are all season round, means the chances of returning to productivity is still quite low and the fear of farming is all

season round phenomenon. This data gives a picture of the dire situation of food production situation and likely food insecurity that will follow subsequently.

The question of displacement and how it affects food production has been the fundamental part of the discussions on the farmer-herder conflicts. The Farmers-Herders crisis in Nigeria has become alarming as it becomes a widespread phenomenon. These crises are considered as a negative phenomenon which has often led to the loss of many lives and property (Adams, Atelhe and Emmanuel, 2017). Adebayo and Olaniyi, (2008) posited that the impact of the herders-farmers conflict is one of such that has led to the displacement of the farmers from their places of origin as they have thus become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with far-reaching impact on farming activities. Olabode and Ajibabe (2010) further stressed that farmers-herders crises lead to widespread displacement of farmers from their farms following the destruction of farms by the invading pastoralist and subsequently a fall in farm yield as farmers abandon their more fertile farmland in avoidance of conflict and death. This shows that Herders-Farmers crises lead to unsafe environment for farming, forceful relocation of farmers, and increase in the number of widows and orphans and migration to marginal areas (Ukamaka, Mbadiwe, Danjuma, Mbolle and Achonam, 2017). With this negative effect of the crises, scarcity of food items which often leads to poverty and disease is bound to prevail. The North-central, middle-belt, southern parts and some other parts of Nigeria have been characterized by chronic food insecurity driven by the crisis between local farmers and cattle herders (World Food Programme, 2019). Sequel to this, food production in Nigeria has faced severe obstacles, coupled with adverse climate shocks, unpredictable rainfall, lack of modern farm inputs and technologies, government neglect and lack of policy directions (Adebayo and Ojo, 2012; Verter, 2016; MBNP, 2017; FAO, 2018).

These constraints, coupled with other socio-economic consequences, have nullified Nigeria's capacity to achieve food self-sufficiency and national peace and sustainable development (UNCTAD, 2019, FSIN, 2019). And as such, the Nigerian government and other agencies need to take urgent and effective steps to end these crises in Nigeria.

THE TRAJECTORY OF FOOD (IN) SECURITY IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

Food production has been dropping steadily in the region in the last 10-15 years. This has been occasioned primarily by rate of insecurity. As a result of paucity of data on state-to-state documentation of food production levels across the region, data presented here is predominantly from fieldwork. This data attempts to elicit information for a 10-year yield in crop production. Three crops were sampled here: rice, maize and roots/tuber these are given priority because they represent the major farm products across the regions under study.

Items	Above 10bags/1000 tubers	Below 10 bags/1000 tubers
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Rating on rice production in the last 10 years	26.7%	36.8%
Ratings on Maize Production in the last 10 years	25.6%	38.3%
Ratings on root and tuber production in the last 10 years	29.8%	32.5%

Source: Field work, 2024.

With regard to rice production, a higher percentage of the respondents indicated that their production has been below 100 bags per annum in the last 10 years. On maize, a higher percentage of respondents also indicated production of below 10 bags in the last 10 years. Only in the case of root and tuber, the margin between production at above 1000 tuber and below 1000 tubers is very insignificant. Two sets of trajectories emerge from this data. In the first case, the trajectory in the production of rice and maize have been steadily and slowly on the decline in the study area over the period in question. This has been largely attributed to the instability of farming communities occasioned by the conflicts. The other set of trajectory indicates that there is quite a spike in the production of roots/tubers, especially cassava. But this increased production of cassava especially in the Benue-Nasarawa axis of the study is not for consumption. Other non-nutritional factors are responsible for this rise in production. Thus, this rise has a significant consequence for food security.

A study carried out by Adu, et al (2024) on “Analysis of Farmers’ Level of Productivity Before and After the Insurgency in Benue State, Nigeria” has results that corroborates the data in the above. From their study, the paired samples t-test conducted to compare crop yields (Productivity) before and after the insurgency in the study area is shown in Table 3 which reveals significant findings. The paired sample statistics and correlation can be found in Appendix B. The results indicate a mean difference of 181.32 units between the yields before and after the insurgency, with a standard deviation of 170.70 and a standard error mean of 8.72. The 95% confidence interval of the difference ranges from 164.17 to 198.47, with a t-value of 20.79 and a significance level (p-value) of 0.00. This statistical analysis underscores a profound impact of the insurgency on agricultural productivity. The substantial mean difference of 181.32 units highlights a severe reduction in crop yields due to the insurgency. This decrease can be attributed to various factors such as displacement of farmers, destruction of farmlands, and disruption of agricultural activities.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS AND FOOD (IN) SECURITY IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

From data obtained from the field, the Farmers – Herders conflict has significant implications on food security particularly in the area of study. Questions in the table below were crafted to determine the opinion of respondents, especially occupants of IDP camps and Fulani settlements to ascertain the extent the conflicts affect food production and supply.

Questions	Agree	Disagree
Where people displaced leaving their farms and settlement?	67.4%	21.2%
Did you change settlement during and after any conflicts?	72.3%	12.6%
Do you have difficulties feeding or accessing food during and after the conflict?	79.1%	10.3%

Data from field study, 2024.

The table above show there is a general displacement of farming communities and these victims have difficulty accessing food during and after the conflicts. The relocation of a large number of farming communities into IDP camps in the states under study and the fact that they have no alternative means of continuing with their farming adversely affects the quantity of food stuff produced. This break in the supply of food has contributed significantly to the current food inflation experienced. The break in supply creates scarcity that invariably drives the prices up as result of the high of demand on the little food produced. The current rate of inflation of food items also make it difficult for these respondents to access food long even after the crises. Based on data obtained here, the study finds that there is a nexus between the Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Food (In) Security in North Central Nigeria

Discussions on how the insecurity situation ties into food insecurity have also been replete in the conversations on the subject matter. The food production situation in the areas of study has become worse as a result of the recent framer-herder clashes in the region. Generally, farmer – herder conflict in Nigeria significantly contributes to food inflation and food insecurity in the country as opined by Ake, Owoeye, Ajakaiye, and Ayantunji (2023). They further asserted that the conflict destabilizes local farmers, affecting food security negatively in terms of quantity and quality. The scarcity of food products results in inflation, making food items unaffordable for the citizenry. The conflict distracts farmers as they divert their energy from crop production to other unproductive engagements such as community security, which will further hamper food security. Riebe (2022) further buttresses the fact that the conflict between farmers and herders has led to the destruction of farmland, the killing of farmers and herders,

and the displacement of farming communities, reducing their contribution to the market supply of available food. Ahmed (2023) corroborates the fact that the conflicts lead to the destruction of farm inputs and outputs to the detriment of market supply which has scale up the prices of food and further exacerbate rural poverty. In Nigeria in 2023, food inflation was a significant concern with rates reaching alarming levels. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that the annual food inflation rate in January 2023 was 24.32%, which increased to 35.41% in January 2024 (Izuaka, 2024).

A FRAMEWORK FOR CONFLICT MITIGATION AND FOOD SECURITY

The data in this section also seeks to elicit information about how best to mitigate the situation of food production in the area. For a fact, most the states under consideration are agrarian states with very low level industrialisation and minimal urbanisation. For this reason, farming seems to be the major income wealth index across these states. This fact greatly affects how the questionnaire is structured for this section.

Items	Agree	Disagree
Implementation of Anti-open Grazing Bill	37%	13%
Creating Grazing Routes across the country	38%	15%
Creating Ranches across the country	36%	12%
Application of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms	17%	28%

Source, Field work, 2024

As regards implementing the Anti-open Grazing Bill, 37% of the respondents agreed to implement it as a way of mitigating the conflicts. On the question of creating grazing routes, 38% of the respondents agreed to its implementation as against 15% that do not. The rating for creating ranches as a solution to the also had almost similar ratings with that of creating grazing routes. As for using traditional conflict resolution mechanism, there seems to be unanimous opinion about respondents that these mechanisms do not work. The primary reason they site for this is because they think custodians of this traditional mechanism are complicit in exacerbating the conflicts. But a more curious disposition that come from the data is pattern of agreement to the various variables in this categories. There was a higher disposition to agreeing with implementation of anti-open Grazing policy amongst farming communities Also, there is a higher disposition to agree to create grazing routes or ranches across the country for herding communities. Due to the centrality of farming to economic fortune of this region, there seemed to be a lot interest in how best to conflicts. Respondent were quite passionate in rendering their

opinions about how best to address this issue. But these responses were attuned to the sentiment preference of the respondents.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the nexus between farmer-herder conflicts and food security in North-central Nigeria. The findings of this study is, apart from the loss of lives and decline in economic activities, herder/farmer conflicts have a serious implication on accessibility, consumption, and stability of food, since agriculture is the main preoccupation of the rural population in North-central Nigeria. Farmer/herder conflicts have drastically reduced the availability of food supply. As such, farmers view cattle routes and grazing reserves as land not possessed by anyone and can therefore be freely encroached. The herders, on the other hand, has the belief that feeding their cattle under whatever circumstances is a superior and uncompromising right given to him by nature and these had led to clashes between the competing parties. Based on the data from the field in the course of the study, it is evident that there is indeed a relationship between the conflicts and food security. The data shows that the higher the conflicts, the higher the risk of food insecurity. And the lower the conflicts, the higher the fortune of food security in the region. Also, the conflict does not just persist in constant confrontations but the perpetuation of a life next to death and evidenced in the living condition of people in IDP camps. While these (those in IDP camps) seem to have escaped the area of intense conflict, their lives are still burden by the conditions of living under which the struggle to survive and this poses as a great danger to the fortune of food security in the region. Thus, both government, non-governmental organisation and individuals must give adequate attention in place to address these conflicts if there is going to be any hope of restoring the North-Central region of the country as the food basket of the nation.

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