

Forced Migration and Displacement: Understanding the Clashes in Benue State Herders-Farmers Conflict

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Abstract

The protracted violence between farmers and herders in Benue State, Nigeria, has resulted in widespread forced migration and displacement. The complex dynamics of this conflict are explored in this paper, with a particular emphasis on how conflicts exacerbate displacement. Clashes between sedentary farmers and Fulani herders, which have their roots in old grudges, have become more intense due to rivalry for resources and land, and as a result, many people have been displaced. Access to basic essentials and safety from violence are just two of the many difficulties faced by displaced people and their communities. Non-state actors frequently contribute to the escalation of hostilities, and government responses have been insufficient. Multidisciplinary measures, such as livelihood diversification plans, sustainable resource management, and conflict resolution techniques, must be implemented in order to resolve the issue. By seeing how crucial confrontations are to the conflict between farmers and herders, policymakers can formulate targeted interventions to mitigate forced migration, foster reconciliation, and uphold the rights of affected populations in Benue State.

Keywords: Benue State, Conflict, Displacement, Forced-Migration, Herders-Farmers

La migration forcée et le déplacement : comprendre les affrontements dans le conflit entre éleveurs et agriculteurs de l'État de Benue

Résumé

La violence prolongée entre agriculteurs et éleveurs dans l'État de Benue, au Nigéria, a entraîné des migrations et des déplacements forcés à grande échelle. La dynamique complexe de ce conflit est explorée dans cet article, en mettant l'accent sur la manière dont les conflits exacerbent les déplacements. Les affrontements entre les agriculteurs sédentaires et les éleveurs peuls, qui trouvent leurs racines dans de vieilles rancunes, sont devenus plus intenses en raison de la rivalité des ressources et de terre, ce qui a entraîné le déplacement de nombreuses personnes. Avoir accès aux produits de première nécessité et de sécurité face à la violence ne sont que deux des nombreuses difficultés auxquelles sont confrontées les personnes déplacées et leurs communautés. Les acteurs non étatiques contribuent fréquemment à l'escalade des hostilités, et les réponses gouvernementales ont été insuffisantes. Des mesures multidisciplinaires, telles que des plans de diversification des moyens de subsistance, une gestion durable des ressources et des techniques de résolution des conflits, doivent être mises en œuvre pour résoudre le problème. En constatant à quel point les confrontations sont cruciales dans le conflit entre agriculteurs et éleveurs, les décideurs politiques peuvent formuler des interventions ciblées pour atténuer la migration forcée, favoriser la réconciliation et défendre les droits des populations affectées dans l'État de Benue.

Mots-clés : L'État de Benue, le conflit, le déplacement, la migration forcée, les éleveurs-agricult

Introduction

Forced migration and displacement are significant global issues that alter social structures and elicit strong humanitarian reactions. "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity,"¹ said Pope Francis in an elegant speech. These individuals, who include men, women, and children, are compelled to leave their homes for a variety of reasons and have a justifiable desire to know, possess, and most importantly, to survive. This statement highlights the need to understand and deal with the complicated issue of forced migration and displacement in national contexts as well as on a global one.

In Nigeria, the phenomenon of forced migration and displacement is characterised by complex dynamics that are heavily impacted by environmental and socioeconomic causes. This is never more apparent than in Benue State, where conflicts between farmers and herders have engendered significant population displacement. These clashes, fueled by competition over diminishing resources and exacerbated by climate change impacts, pose substantial challenges to the socio-economic and environmental fabric of the state.

Socioeconomically, the conflict in Benue State highlights the fight over rights to land, water, and grazing areas. As Odinkalu (2018) puts it, "The conflicts are as much about access to land and water as they are about the boundaries between settled agriculturalists and migratory cattle herders."² Competition has resulted in recurrent acts of violence and displacement, and communities are finding it extremely difficult to obtain possibilities for livelihood and basic necessities.

The conflict has an environmental component as well. Resource shortage is made worse by deserts and altered rainfall patterns brought on by climate change. According to Iliya (2019), "The conflict has also been exacerbated by climate change-induced environmental stressors such as desertification, which have diminished grazing lands and water sources."³ Displacement in Benue State is made worse by these natural stresses, which exacerbate already-existing conflicts.

¹ Pope Francis. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Forum on "Migration and Peace." Vatican City.2018

² Odinkalu, C. "The Unholy Herders of Nigeria: Conflict, Culture, and the Destruction of Lives." *Journal of International Affairs*, 71(1),2018; 27–47.

³ Iliya, J. A. "Climate Change, Resource Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria: A Case Study of Benue State." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(6),2019; 189–199.

Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend forced migration and displacement in the context of Benue State's socioeconomic and environmental dynamics in order to develop policies that would effectively tackle these issues. In order to reduce conflict, foster resilience, and protect the rights and general welfare of impacted communities, policy makers and other stakeholders can develop focused interventions by looking into the underlying causes, dynamics, and effects of displacement in Benue State.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the historical elements that fueled the conflict between farmers and herders.
2. To comprehend the trends and effects of forced relocation and migration.
3. To investigate how different parties involved in the problem can contribute.
4. To make suggestions for long-term attempts at rehabilitation and conflict settlement.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study uses a historical-qualitative methodology to examine the forced migration and displacement brought about by the herders-farmers conflict in Benue State. It does this by combining archival research, oral history interviews, and analysis of contemporary records. Thematic analysis is another tool used in the study to pinpoint important trends and themes associated with the crisis.

Study Area

The study focuses on Benue State, Nigeria, an area heavily impacted by the conflict between farmers and herders. Comprehensive information on the area's geography, population, and socioeconomic status is taken into account to provide the study's background.

Data Collection

Archival Research: Examination of historical records, government documents, and previous studies to trace the roots of the herder-farmer conflict.

Oral History: Interviews with elders, community leaders, and displaced persons to capture personal accounts and local perspectives.

Contemporary Reports: Review of reports from non-governmental organizations, media, and government agencies to understand the current situation.

Ethical Considerations

The appropriate ethical committees granted their approval. All participants gave their informed consent, guaranteeing that they understood the goal of the study and that they might withdraw at any moment. Given the delicate nature of the subject, precautions were made to preserve participant anonymity and protect their identities.

Limitations

The report notes potential biases and difficulties, including the likelihood of underreporting due to the sensitive nature of the conflict and security concerns that may have limited access to particular places. By using stringent data validation procedures and triangulating data from several sources, these constraints were resolved.

Results

The historical patterns of land usage and the economic exchanges between farming communities and pastoralist groups can be linked to the herder-farmer conflict in Benue State. Disagreements were largely managed through the use of conventional conflict resolution techniques including intergroup talks and local councils. Tensions have, however, increased as a result of the failure of these systems as well as external factors and population shifts.

Discussion

The Herders-Farmers Conflict in Historical Perspective

Conflicts between farmers and herders have always been a result of the socioeconomic and environmental dynamics of pastoral and agricultural communities. These disputes between pastoralists and farmers over resources are not specific to Nigeria; they have been a recurrent problem in many regions of the world.

Conflicts between herders and farmers have their origins in pre-colonial Nigeria, when various ethnic groups developed unique subsistence strategies according to the topography and climate of their respective areas. For example, the Fulani herders used to move their livestock around seasonally in search of pastures and water, a practice known as transhumance. The native farming groups, on the other hand, cultivated the land for crops and were mostly sedentary. According to Odoh and Chilaka (2012), "The Fulani herders have historically migrated across West Africa, including Nigeria, in search of grazing land, which inevitably brought them into contact—and often conflict—with farming communities".⁴

British measures during the colonial era frequently made these problems worse. The colonial government disturbed customary patterns of land use and migration by attempting to draw boundaries and encourage cash crop cultivation. As a result, there was more rivalry for grazing and arable land. "Colonial land policies, which favoured sedentary agriculture over pastoralism...laid the groundwork for future conflicts,"⁵ as Shettima and Tar (2008) argue.

The delicate balance between farmers and herders has been impacted by the agricultural policy of the Nigerian government ever since independence. Programmes to increase agricultural output have frequently been charged with invading customary grazing areas and routes. Competition for resources has increased due to this encroachment, rapid population development, and environmental changes including deserts and irregular rainfall patterns. As per Adisa and Adekunle's (2010) findings, "Population pressure and environmental degradation have compounded the struggle for resources, leading to increased incidences of clashes between herders and farmers".⁶

Furthermore, modern conflicts are longer-lasting and more violent due to the spread of small guns and the deterioration of conventional conflict settlement techniques. According to Blench (2004), "The breakdown of traditional mechanisms for managing

⁴ Odoh, S. I., and Chilaka F. C. "Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Worsening Incidence of Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Northern Nigeria." *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2 (1), 2012: 92.

⁵ Shettima A.U. and Tar A.G. "Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in West Africa: Exploring the Causes and Consequences." *Information, Society and Justice Journal* 1 (2), 2018: 163.

⁶ Adisa, R. S., and Adekunle O.A.. "Farmer-Herder Conflicts: A Factor Analysis of Socio-economic Conflict Variables among Arable Crop Farmers in North Central Nigeria." *Journal of Human Ecology* 30 (1), 2010: 136.

conflicts between herders and farmers has led to more frequent and deadly encounters".⁷

Traditional Migratory and Land Use Patterns

Particularly in agrarian and pastoral civilizations, the biological and sociocultural dynamics of various regions have determined traditional patterns of migration and land use. In order to maximize resource usage and guarantee sustainability, these patterns show a symbiotic interaction between communities and their surroundings. Many pastoralist societies have historically relied heavily on semi-nomadic and nomadic herding methods for their subsistence. The Fulani herders are a well-known group in West Africa, which includes Nigeria. In order to deal with the climatic unpredictability and guarantee that their cattle have access to pastures, they have historically engaged in seasonal migration patterns known as transhumance. Transhumance, as explained by Blench (1994), "allows pastoralists to exploit different ecological zones and minimize the risk of overgrazing, which is crucial in arid and semi-arid regions".⁸

Sedentary agricultural communities, on the other hand, have created land use strategies centred on established farming. The requirement to manage water supplies and preserve soil fertility frequently affects these activities. Crop rotation, agroforestry, and shifting cultivation are a few methods used to maintain agricultural productivity. According to Mortimore (1989), "Traditional farmers have developed a deep understanding of their environment, employing practices that enhance soil fertility and reduce the risk of crop failure".⁹

Farmers and pastoralists have historically had a beneficial connection. Pastoralists used their animals to provide manure for field fertilization, and they would exchange livestock goods for grains and other agricultural output. As said by Tyover Iorjah,

While growing up, we use to see herders living side by side with us. These herders were usually in company of their wives, children and even their aged parents. They would invite us during their naming or other ceremonies. Our coexistence with them

⁷ Blench R. "Natural Resource Conflicts in North-Central Nigeria: *A Handbook and Case Studies*." Mallam Dendo Ltd, Cambridge.2004; 45

⁸ Blench R. "The Expansion and Adaption of Fulbe Pastoralism to Subhumid and Humid Conditions in Nigeria." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 1994; 231.

⁹ Mortimore M. *Adapting to Drought: Farmers, Famines, and Desertification in West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.1989;157

was not free from disagreement. Such misunderstandings were usually settled by elders from the two parties amicably...¹⁰

However, a number of things have harmed their friendship. The rivalry for land and water resources has intensified due to factors such as population expansion, growing agricultural practices, and environmental changes. According to Turner (2004), "The expansion of cultivated areas into traditional grazing lands has reduced the availability of pastures and water points, leading to conflicts between herders and farmers".¹¹

Traditional patterns of land use have also been profoundly altered by colonial and post-colonial land policies. Traditional migratory pathways were disrupted by colonial administrations, which frequently enforced fixed territorial boundaries and favoured sedentary farming over nomadic herding. According to Bassett and Crummey (1993), "Colonial land tenure systems privileged agricultural expansion at the expense of pastoralism, leading to the marginalisation of pastoral communities,"¹² these policies had long-lasting impacts.

These problems have been made worse by environmental changes like desertification and climate variability. Pastoralists frequently encroach on agricultural regions because they must travel farther to locate sufficient grazing places. Conflicts have become increasingly prevalent as a result of the increased tensions. Hussein, Sumberg, and Seddon (1999) note that "climate change and environmental degradation have increased the incidence of conflicts between farmers and herders by intensifying the competition for scarce resources."¹³

There is, however, a different school of thought that holds that the violent attacks and counterattacks between herders and farmers in the Middle Belt region were primarily caused by the herders' natural desire to seize the rich, fertile land from the indigenous owners. We obtained responses from a random sample of the impacted individuals in this situation, which supports this reality. Each of them contended that the herders' attacks on their settlements were premeditated and designed to seize control of their ancestral grounds. They assert that the pattern of targeted locations serves as evidence of this. These localities, or villages, are located in Agatu, Ortukpo, Logo, Kwande,

¹⁰ My interview with Tyover Iorjah C50 years one of the displaced persons in Jato-Aka town. 23/5/2023

¹¹ Turner M. D. "Political Ecology and the Moral Dimensions of 'Resource Conflicts': The Case of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in the Sahel." *Political Geography* 23 (7),2004: 854.

¹² Bassett T. J., and Donald C, eds. *Land in African Agrarian Systems*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993;112

¹³ Hussein K., James S, and David S. "Increasing Violent Conflict between Herders and Farmers in Africa: Claims and Evidence." *Development Policy Review* 17 (4), 1999: 400.

Ukum, Guma, Gwer West and part of Makurdi Local Government Area which are the main hub of food production that earned the state the slogan of “food basket of the nation.” These places have been attacked by the herdsman with the farmers fleeing for dear life. This has thrown the state into food security challenges.¹⁴

Analysing the narrative that places the blame for the crisis from 2014 to 2023 on the federal government, security leaders, and Fulani social and cultural organizations

Significant controversy and criticism have been directed at former President Muhammadu Buhari, security chiefs, and Fulani socio-cultural groups as a result of the herders-farmers dispute in Benue State. The people of Benue State and other interested parties have made several accusations against these organizations, citing bias, carelessness, and collusion. Given his Fulani ancestry, one of the primary arguments made against the former president Buhari is the purported ethnic bias. Critics claim that in order to save the predominantly agrarian villages of Benue State from attacks by Fulani herders, his administration failed to act swiftly or forcefully. According to Agbo, "the people of Benue have a general belief that Buhari's administration, because of his ethnic affiliations, has not handled the situation honestly."¹⁵ People who are impacted by this perception feel abandoned by the federal government, which has increased their mistrust and hostility.

Failure to Provide Adequate Security: Despite repeated requests for federal intervention, Buhari came under fire for not sending enough security forces to Benue State. One theory for why violence persists is that there hasn't been a strong enough response. As reported by Amnesty International, "the federal government's delayed and inadequate security measures have been a major factor in the continued violence and loss of life in Benue State."¹⁶

The Buhari administration's failure to adequately attend to the victims of the crises' humanitarian needs is another point of contention. Many believed that the federal government had disregarded the many pleas for greater aid and support for the impacted areas and displaced people. Orjinta notes that "the federal government's

¹⁴ My interview with James Luper C.45 years one of the victims in Anyiin in Logo LGA. 23/1/2023

¹⁵ Agbo E. "Ethnic Bias and Presidential Inaction: The Case of Buhari and the Benue Crisis." *Journal of Nigerian Political Studies* 12, no. 3 ,2019: 45-67.

¹⁶ Amnesty International. "Harvest of Death: Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria." *Amnesty International Report*, December 2018

failure to respond adequately to the humanitarian crisis in Benue has exacerbated the suffering of the victims".¹⁷

Security chiefs have also been accused of failing to stop the violence before it started and of responding to attacks with inefficiency. Many times, this inefficiency has been taken to mean that the impacted communities are not being sufficiently protected. "Security agencies have failed to act on intelligence reports and have not provided adequate protection to vulnerable communities,"¹⁸ the House of Assembly of Benue State stated. Allegations have been made that certain members of the security staff may have participated in the violence by either remaining silent during the attacks or, in certain situations, possibly working with the assailants. "There have been several instances where security forces were accused of standing by during attacks, leading to suspicions of collusion,"¹⁹ according to a Human Rights Watch investigation.

In a related development, the socio-cultural groups belonging to the Fulani people, specifically the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, have been accused with endorsing or justifying the violent herders' acts. Significant mistrust and hostility toward these groups have resulted from the impacted communities' perception of their support. According to Ikhide, "the rhetoric from Fulani leaders has often been seen as justifying the actions of violent herders, which has further fueled the conflict".²⁰

Additionally, these groups came under fire for their adamant resistance to the Ranches Establishment and the Open Grazing Prohibition Law passed by the state of Benue. Opponents contend that by opposing these regulations, the Fulani socio-cultural groups are unable to embrace contemporary, peaceful methods for managing livestock, hence sustaining the war. As stated by The Guardian, "the resistance to anti-grazing laws by Fulani groups has been a significant barrier to achieving lasting peace and stability in the region".²¹

Similar to the allegations made against the federal government and security chiefs, who are mainly Fulani at the time of this study, herders from the Fulani ethnic group

¹⁷ Orjinta C. "The Humanitarian Crisis in Benue: A Call for Federal Intervention." *Journal of African Humanitarian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2020): 22-39.

¹⁸ Benue State House of Assembly. "Resolution on the Role of Security Agencies in Addressing the Herders-Farmers Conflict." Benue State Legislative Records, 2019.

¹⁹ Amnesty International. "Harvest of Death: Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria." *Amnesty International Report, December 2018*

²⁰ Ikhide P. "Miyetti Allah and the Herders-Farmers Crisis: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of Contemporary Nigerian Studies* 15, no. 2 .2020: 78-95.

²¹ The Guardian. "Fulani Herdsmen and the Anti-Grazing Law in Benue State." *The Guardian, April 12, 2019*

have also made several accusations against the people of Benue State and other regions of Nigeria. Complaints of violence, discrimination, and restricted access to grazing pastures are common themes in these complaints.

One well-known charge is that the inhabitants of Benue State have been deliberately embroiled in violent conflicts with herders, which have resulted in a significant number of fatalities and destruction of property. Some herders claim that resistance to herding practices and the application of anti-grazing regulations is what has led to these conflicts. As mentioned by Okello, "Herders have accused communities in Benue State of targeting them through violent attacks, claiming that these actions are motivated by ethnic and religious differences".²²

Furthermore, herders contend that discriminatory anti-open grazing regulations enforced in places such as Benue State have heightened tensions. Their traditional way of life, which depends on having the ability to transport livestock across vast tracts of the country, is unfairly limited, they claim, by these restrictions. Such laws, in their opinion, are "intended to criminalise and marginalise the herding community."²³

The herders further assert that the Nigerian government often ignores them and offers them no protection. They contend that because the state hasn't given their properties and animals enough security, they're at risk of violence and theft from nearby rural communities. As Abdullahi puts it, "The herders feel abandoned by the government, which they believe is biased towards the agricultural communities".²⁴

These grievances are a reflection of Nigeria's larger problems with ethnic conflict, resource competition, and the difficulties in striking a balance between customs and contemporary governmental policies. The charges made by the herders draw attention to the intricate dynamics of interethnic relations and the necessity of inclusive, all-encompassing measures to resolve these disputes.

Displacement Case Studies

The serious effects of conflicts between farmers and herders in Benue State are demonstrated by specific cases of displacement.

²² Okello M. "Ethnic Tensions and Conflict between Herders and Farmers in Nigeria." *African Peace Journal* 34, no. 1.2020: 76-89.

²³ Adamu, Musa, and Ben Osei. "Anti-Grazing Laws and Their Impact on Herders in Nigeria." *Journal of African Studies* 45, no. 2 .2021: 110-123.

²⁴ Abdullahi, I. *Herders and Farmers in Nigeria: Conflicts and Prospects*. Lagos: Lanre Publishers, 2019.

Attacks in the Guma and Logo local government districts in early 2018 that were blamed on Fulani herders left thousands of people homeless and over 70 dead. Many camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) were established as a result of the violence, where displaced people had to live in substandard conditions with no access to basic necessities. "The displacement caused by the 2018 attacks in Guma and Logo has left thousands of people in dire need of humanitarian assistance, with many living in overcrowded and under-resourced IDP camps,"²⁵ according to a report from the International Crisis Group (International Crisis Group 2020). Long-term repercussions of the relocation include disruptions to the impacted communities'.

Agatu Massacre and Displacement

The Agatu massacre in 2016, where hundreds of people were killed and numerous villages destroyed, led to a significant displacement. Survivors fled to nearby towns and IDP camps, where they struggled to rebuild their lives amidst the ongoing conflict.

According to Idowu, "The Agatu massacre not only resulted in a large loss of life but also forced thousands of people to flee their homes, creating a severe displacement crisis in the region"²⁶ (Idowu 2016, 98). The displacement has had lasting impacts on the Agatu community, with many displaced persons still unable to return to their homes years after the attack.

Impacts of these conflicts on migration

The conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State has had a significant impact on regional migratory trends. Large-scale migrations have resulted from the war, which centres on the struggle for land and water resources, which has uprooted a sizable number of farmers and herders. A significant rural migration has occurred as a result of the persistent violence, which has compelled many farmers to flee their homes in search of safety. In pursuit of security and a means of subsistence, farmers are forced to migrate to other states or urban areas due to the ongoing conflicts between herders and farmers, according to Nwafor (Nwafor 2020, 65).²⁷

²⁵ International Crisis Group. Managing Trafficking in Northern Nigeria: Nigeria's Humanitarian Crisis [Report No. 123]. 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/managing-trafficking-northern-nigeria-nigerias-humanitarian-crisis>.

²⁶ Idowu A.O.; Urban Violence Dimension in Nigeria: Farmers and Herders Onslaught. P.188 AND NOT 98 <http://www.agathos-international-review-.com/issues/2016/14/Idowu.pd>

²⁷ Nwafor, P. A. *Agricultural Development and Food Security in Nigeria*. Lagos: Greenleaf Publishing, 2020; 65.

The impact has also been felt by herders, who frequently find that growing animosity and legal constraints prevent them from accessing customary grazing routes and areas. As a result, a large number of herders have moved in quest of safer grazing grounds. The herders in Benue have been forced to travel to other regions or even neighbouring nations where grazing opportunities are thought to be safer and more available due to rising resistance and restrictive rules, as noted by Mbachu (Mbachu 2019, 122).²⁸

This displacement born out of crisis has amplified population shifts and prompted migration, putting a strain on local resources and causing overcrowding in some urban areas. "The influx of displaced persons from conflict zones in Benue into urban areas has exacerbated challenges related to housing, employment, and social services"²⁹

In addition, the crisis has upset the customary migratory habits of herders, who traditionally engaged in transhumance—moving periodically in pursuit of pastures. These patterns have been drastically disrupted by the conflict, with herders now aiming for permanent migration instead of seasonal travel. The traditional herders' migration routes have been seriously interrupted, as Adetunji notes, which has caused them to migrate in more permanent ways in an effort to find stability and security for their livelihoods (Adetunji 2022, 76).³⁰

Conclusion

The herders-farmers conflict in Benue State, characterized by clashes between pastoralist herders and local farming communities, has led to widespread forced migration and displacement. The conflict stems from deep-rooted historical, economic, and environmental factors, including competition over scarce resources, land-use patterns, and environmental degradation. The increasing desertification in northern Nigeria has pushed nomadic herders southward in search of grazing land, while population growth and agricultural expansion in Benue have limited the availability of land, leading to frequent clashes over territory and livelihoods. This struggle for survival has intensified tensions, leading to violence, displacement, and the destruction of property.

Forced migration resulting from these clashes has had profound social, economic, and political consequences. Thousands of people have been displaced from their homes,

²⁸ Mbachu, O. *Nigeria's Security Challenges and Policy Responses*. Lagos: University Press, 2019; 122.

²⁹ Mbachu, O. *Nigeria's Security Challenges and Policy Responses*. Lagos: University Press, 2019; 122.

³⁰ Adetunji, A. O. *Economic Development and Policy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2022; 76.

with entire communities uprooted and forced to seek refuge in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or neighbouring states. This mass displacement has strained local resources, disrupted social and family structures, and increased poverty levels, as many of the displaced have lost access to their farmland, homes, and means of livelihood. The conflict has also deepened ethnic and religious divisions, as herders, primarily from the Fulani ethnic group, often come into conflict with predominantly Christian farming communities in Benue.

Efforts by the government to resolve the conflict, such as the establishment of grazing reserves and anti-open grazing laws, have had limited success, as they often fail to address the root causes of the conflict and are met with resistance from affected parties. Long-term solutions must involve not only resolving disputes over land but also addressing the underlying issues of resource scarcity, climate change, and economic inequalities. Without a comprehensive and sustained effort to address these challenges, forced migration and displacement will continue to plague Benue State, exacerbating the already fragile social and economic situation in the region.

Recommendations

With its origins in rivalry for territory and natural resources, as well as in the cultural and socioeconomic divide between the two groups, the herders-farmers conflict in Benue State, Nigeria, has persisted for a long time. Food security and social cohesion in the area have suffered greatly as a result of the fighting, which has claimed lives, destroyed property, uprooted families, and disrupted agricultural operations.

Promoting Dialogue and Reconciliation

The creation of community leaders, farmers, and herders in local peace committees is essential to promoting social cohesion, communication, and reconciliation. These committees can act as forums for settling land disputes, fostering intergroup trust, and creating cooperative plans for resource management.

Engaging Community Leaders

Traditional leaders and religious leaders are examples of community leaders who are essential in energising their followers and promoting communication. The reconciliation process can be more successful and long-lasting if these figures are included in the peace committees.

Organizing Conflict Resolution Workshops

Conflict resolution workshops can provide herders and farmers with the skills and tools necessary for managing disputes and finding mutually beneficial solutions. These workshops should focus on communication, negotiation, and mediation techniques, as well as the importance of compromise and mutual understanding.

Establishing Grazing Reserves

Grazing reserves can provide herders with designated areas for grazing their livestock, reducing the need to encroach on farmlands. These reserves should be developed in consultation with herders and farmers, ensuring that they meet the needs of both groups and are managed sustainably.

Developing Livestock Value Chains

By making investments in livestock value chains, herders might become less dependent on customary grazing methods and discover new avenues for economic growth. This can involve projects like expanding the availability of veterinary care, raising the productivity of cattle, and facilitating the connection between herders and markets.

Increase in the visibility of security in places prone to conflict by the presence of a larger security force can aid in preventing violence and enabling prompt response to new threats. To foster confidence and trust, security personnel must interact with communities in a courteous and professional manner.

In order to address the underlying causes of the conflict, such as resource management and land tenure difficulties, legislative and policy frameworks must be reviewed and strengthened. It is imperative that laws like the Ranches Establishment Law and the Open Grazing Prohibition in Benue State be implemented and enforced effectively. Tenure disputes can be lessened by making land tenure rights clear and ensuring their equitable distribution. In order to create more inclusive and transparent processes, this may entail evaluating the current land tenure policies and interacting with stakeholders.

Upholding current laws ensuring compliance and discouraging infractions need the effective execution of current regulations, such as the Open Grazing Prohibition and

Ranches Establishment Law in Benue State which is necessary for the ability of law enforcement organizations and making sure they have the tools and assistance they need to do their jobs well.

Supporting Displaced Communities

The provision of a comprehensive assistance to internally displaced persons, including humanitarian relief, livelihood support, and reintegration efforts, is crucial for addressing the consequences of the conflict. Engaging affected communities in the planning and implementation of these interventions is essential for ensuring that they are responsive to their needs and priorities.

Delivering Humanitarian Relief

Delivering humanitarian relief, such as food, shelter, and medical assistance, to displaced communities is a critical first step in addressing their immediate needs. This relief should be provided in a timely and equitable manner, ensuring that it reaches all those in need.

Facilitating Reintegration

Facilitating the reintegration of displaced communities into their home areas or new settlements is essential for enabling them to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. This may involve providing support for rebuilding homes and infrastructure, as well as assistance for restoring agricultural activities and other economic opportunities.

Engaging Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) play a crucial role in mobilizing local communities and advocating for their needs and priorities. Engaging CBOs in the development and implementation of interventions can help ensure that they are responsive to local contexts and priorities.

Conclusively, the Nigerian government and relevant stakeholders can work towards a sustainable resolution of the crisis by putting into practice the recommendations made in this paper.

Acknowledgement

We really appreciate all the people who helped with this study on forced migration and displacement brought on by the herders-farmers conflict in Benue State, Nigeria, as independent researchers working without official institutional or financial assistance.

We would like to start by sincerely thanking the refugees and displaced people who shared their personal tales and experiences with us. Their ability to bounce back and withstand extreme adversity and bereavement is incredibly motivating. We hope that this work honours their struggles and helps to improve their situation in some small manner.

Additionally, the personnel of nearby NGOs, community leaders, and refugee camp workers deserve our gratitude for their crucial insights and facilitation of our fieldwork. Their relationships and in-depth knowledge of the area were crucial to developing a sophisticated comprehension of this intricate problem. Despite lacking the support of a significant research institution or funding agency, we had the good fortune to work with a committed group of scholars who generously donated their time and knowledge. Their dedication to conducting thorough, moral research has been essential to maintaining the project's integrity.

Lastly, we would like to thank all of the journalists, activists, and earlier researchers whose work served as a foundation for this investigation and whose results we have expanded upon. We believe that people tackling the humanitarian issue in Benue State and the Middle Belt region will find this report to be a helpful resource.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal ties that could improperly influence or slant the papers content. Without financial support from any group directly associated with the conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State, this study was carried out on its own. The writers don't belong to any political, ethnic, or cause-related advocacy groups.

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