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Impact of Herders-Crop Farmers Conflicts on Educational Development in Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has continued to experience persistent herders-crop farmers conflicts arising from competition over land, destruction of farmlands, cattle grazing, population growth, climate change, and weak conflict management mechanisms, resulting in widespread insecurity, displacement, loss of lives and property, disruption of livelihoods, and socio-economic instability across many rural communities. Benue State has remained one of the worst affected states, making it necessary to examine how the recurring conflicts influence educational development. This study investigated the impact of herders-crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State. The study adopted the Eco-Violence Theory because it explains that competition over scarce environmental resources such as land and water often triggers violent conflicts that undermine community development. The data for this study were generated from primary and secondary sources. Findings from the investigation shows that frequent outbreaks of violence and insecurity in the state arising from Farmer-Herder have led to the closure of schools for extended periods. This disrupts the continuity of learning, leading to academic regression among students. The key policy that has been set by the Benue state government to mitigate pastoralist-crop farmer conflict is 'anti-grazing law' and 'Livestock Special Task Force' which as explained has not been effective in ending the conflict on the sustainable level because the law only targets an aspect of the livestock sector, security against herdsman attacks. The study recommended among other things that the main responsibility of any government is to protect lives and properties of her citizens. Therefore, the Federal government should rise up to its responsibility by providing enough security in all the affected areas and Federal government of Nigeria, state, local governments, individual and non-governmental organisations should collaborate and embark on reconstruction, building of schools, hospital, homes and other infrastructures damaged in the study areas. This will encourage the people to send their children back to school.

Keywords: Herders-Crop Farmers, Conflicts, Infrastructural Facilities, School-enrolment, Educational Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict between herders and crop farmers has become a persistent issue in many parts of Nigeria, with significant implications for various aspects of society. One of the critical areas affected by these conflicts is educational development. Benue State, located in North-Central Nigeria, has experienced its fair share of herders-crop farmers conflicts, and its impact on the educational sector is a matter of great concern. Benue State, known as the "Food Basket of Nigeria," is renowned for its fertile land and robust agricultural activities. However, this very identity has made it a hotspot for clashes between herders and crop farmers. These conflicts, rooted in competition for resources

such as grazing land and water, have escalated over the years, resulting in dire consequences for the state's educational system [1].

The conflict situation in Benue State has been complex, involving various stakeholders, including the government, security agencies, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations. The persistent nature of these conflicts has not only led to loss of lives and property but has also had far-reaching effects on the overall development of the state, particularly in the area of education. Education is widely regarded as a crucial factor in socioeconomic development. It plays a pivotal role in poverty reduction, human capital development, and the overall progress of a society. However, the herders-crop farmers conflicts have disrupted the educational landscape in Benue State in numerous ways, impeding the state's ability to harness the full potential of its youth population. This paper delve into the various aspects of the impact of herders-crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State, examining the disruptions caused in terms of infrastructure, access to education, the psychological well-being of students, and the overall quality of education. Furthermore, it will also consider the response of the government and other stakeholders in addressing these challenges and mitigating their effects.

In Benue State, Herdsmen-farmers' conflict has ravaged most rural communities by depriving them of their farmlands and ancestral homes leading to loss of their sources of livelihood. Most worrisome in the present development is the raping, killing and kidnapping of innocent people where women and children are the most vulnerable and worst hit [2]. According to [3], an attack on villages in Benue state on the first day of January, 2018 left 73 people dead, with communities razed and buildings destroyed and the state emergency agency says 40,000 were injured by the attack. These attacks have forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety. Worthy of note are the social issues of the raping of women, robbery and kidnapping with ultimate intent for ransom. Besides the destroyed properties, socio-economic life in the affected areas is grounded to a halt as people cannot freely go about their farming and socio-economic activities for fear of being killed [4].

Sequel to the above, it is important to note that the farmers-herdsmen conflict assumed devastating dimension in Benue and other states of Nigeria. It has affected local government areas like Agatu, Guma, Logo, Gwer-west, Gwer-East, Ukum, Buruku, Katsina-Ala, Kwande and Makurdi all in Benue state. [4], asserted that in recent attacks which occurred in Guma and Logo local governments many people were killed and properties worth billions of naira were destroyed in one of the latest attacks on the defenseless rural dwellers that started on the 1st January 2018. The violence instantly spread to other towns and villages in the area. In these local governments, the attackers usually invade the settlements, kill, search the people, destroy both public and private properties and farm lands and by extension breach the security of the state. In most of these communities, they occupy the areas after chasing away the original dwellers. Aside killing and destruction of properties, their activities also affect the management of primary schools as they often settle in these schools and destroy the facilities [5].

Management of secondary schools which requires proper planning, directing, monitoring and controlling of human, material, time and physical resources, finances, records and information flow has been affected drastically within this latter part of the 21st century as most school facilities and documents have been destroyed thereby keeping students and teachers out of school [6]. The incessant destruction of lives and properties has created management problems for school teachers and head-teachers in such areas. According to [7], when farmer-herders disaster strikes, infrastructural facilities in the schools such as classroom buildings, offices, books and other relevant documents are greatly destroyed or damaged. Most often, schools are burn down to ashes in the rural areas. This makes it hard for learners to continue with their learning activities for a long time as they relocate to a safer place with their families. The carnage also brought about decreased school enrolment in some parts of the state that are affected by the crises. The emotional and psychological problems created in the people as a result of the fear further lead to decreased enrolment [8].

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation, this paper explore the various dimensions of the impact of herders-crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State, providing a nuanced view of the challenges faced by students, educators, and the education system as a whole. Understanding the multifaceted impact of these conflicts on education is crucial for devising effective strategies to mitigate their consequences and ensure a brighter future for the youth of Benue State. This essay will shed light on the complex interplay between conflict and education, offering insights into the challenges faced by the state and potential pathways to address them.

2. Statement of the Problem

The herders-crop farmers conflict in Benue State, have escalated over the past decade, leading to dire consequences for various aspects of society. The conflict assumed devastating dimension in Benue state and has affected local government areas like Agatu, Guma, Logo, Gwer-west, Gwer-East, Ukum, Buruku, Katsina-Ala, Kwande and Makurdi respectively. Report shows that about 5,138 the death figures were recorded between 2015, when the last administration of Samuel Ortom assumed power, and March 13, 2023. Within seven years, 18 out of the 23 local government areas of the state were affected by the invasions/killings, and in 2015 alone, the state recorded 1,177

killings, 809 were killed in 2016, 43 persons were killed in 2017, while the state recorded 440 killings in 2018; a total of 174 in 2019 and 88 killed in 2020. The killings took on a colossal dimension in 2021 with a higher figure of 2,131 while in 2022, the state recorded 172 killings between January and March 2023 [9].

One critical area that has been significantly affected is educational development. Herders-crop farmers conflict has had a profound impact on educational development across Benue State, affecting school attendance, infrastructure, teachers, students' psychological well-being, and the overall quality of education. The recurring violence in Benue State has forced many families to flee their homes in search of safety. As a result, a substantial number of children have been displaced, leading to a decline in school attendance and enrollment rates. Statistical data from [10], indicated that Nigeria accounts for one in every five out-of-school children in the world and 45 percent of the children in West Africa; while Benue state accounts for 260,000 out-of-school children in Nigeria. This places Benue on the list of states with low school enrollment rates.

The conflicts have caused extensive damage to schools, including the destruction of classrooms, books, and educational materials. This infrastructure damage disrupts the learning environment and impedes students' access to quality education. Data from the past seven years shows that as of March 2023, over 30 primary schools have been closed down, and more than 10 secondary schools are also affected with quite a number of children going into thousands that cannot access schools in their places, with Guma, Agatu, Gwer West, Kwande and Makurdi LGAs more affected [11].

In addition, teachers have not been immune to the consequences of the herders-crop farmers conflicts. Many educators have been displaced or have left their teaching positions out of fear for their safety. This has resulted in a shortage of qualified teachers in affected areas, compromising the quality of education provided to students. The persistent exposure to violence and insecurity has left a profound psychological impact on students and teachers alike. Many students experience trauma, anxiety, and depression, which negatively affect their cognitive and emotional development. The emotional toll of the conflicts on the education system requires attention and intervention. Frequent conflicts disrupt the academic calendar, leading to irregular school sessions and examination schedules [12]. This inconsistency hinders the ability of students to acquire a consistent and quality education, ultimately affecting their academic performance, hence the need for this study.

3. Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to interrogate the overall extent of the damage of herders-crop farmers conflicts on the educational development in Benue state. However, specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To examine the impact of the conflicts on the educational Development programmes in Benue state.
- ii. To interrogate the mechanism put in place by the institution of government to manage pre-conflicts and the post conflicts in order to reduce the impact.

4. Conceptual Review

Herders

A herder is a pastoral worker responsible for the care and management of a herd or flock of domestic, usually on open pasture. It is particularly associated with nomadic or transhumant management of stock, or with common land. According to [13]; [14], herders, other wisely called herdsmen or pastoralists, are nomadic or semi-nomadic herders whose primary occupation is raising livestock. Nomadic herding is a practice that entails moving with cattle from one place to another in search of pasture carried out especially by Fulanis. According to [15], the Fulani have, for over a thousand years, remained an established feature of West African ecology both in its sociology and history. The remarkable role of the Fulani in the history and development of West Africa has always been controversial, hence engendering the need to pay attention to the group's activities. Today, about 20 million Fulani inhabit West Africa, and are spread across ten countries where the majority are found in Nigeria (7 million), Guinea (4.7 million), Mali (2.8 million), Niger (1.5 million), Cameroon (700,000), Chad (138,000) and Sudan (90,000) [15].

Farmers

A farmer is a person who engages in agriculture by raising living organisms for food or raw materials. Agriculture includes farming in all its branches as well the cultivation and tillage of soil, dairying, production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodities [16]. Agriculture is practiced for the purposes of producing food, clothing and shelter; as well as for business or economic gains. As a result, farmers usually take necessary steps to ensure proper nourishment of the products for either personal consumption or commercial purpose. In developed nations, a farmer is usually defined as someone with an ownership interest in crops or livestock, and who provides land or management in their production. Those who provide only labour are most often called farmhands. Alternatively, growers who manage farmland for an absentee landowner, sharing the harvest (or its profits) are known as sharecroppers or share farmers. In the context of developing nations or pre-industrial cultures, most farmers practice meager subsistence agriculture - a simple organic farming system employing crop rotation, seed saving, slash and burn, or other techniques to maximize efficiency while meeting the needs of the household or community. In a subsistence economy, farm products might be either consumed by the

farmer's family or by the community. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, farmers are individuals that are crop farmers, peasant farmers or subsistence farmers.

Conflict

There is no consensus amongst the various scholars on the definition of conflicts. In this regard, Kenneth Building defined conflicts as a situation where some changes in a society makes at least one of the parties to a conflict to be better-off, and other parties worse-off, given their diverse estimations. In the view of Johan Galtung, conflict emanate from injustice as well as structural violence. For Adam Curie, conflict is broader, and represents a situation where likely progress of one of the parties is hampered by the progress of another party. Also, Michael Nicholson sees conflict as a situation which exists when two different parties desire to participate in activities that are mutually exclusive. However, the definition of conflict offered by Nicholson can be enlarged to cover not only single individuals, but groups of people given the fact that usually more than two individuals take part in conflicts. This shows that conflicts are defined to reflect contradictory goals as well as interests of two or more parties who adopt diverse methods in achieving their goals [17]. The foregoing is vital in the understanding of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria because it shows that for conflict to occur, there must be parties to the conflict and such parties must have contradictory interests or goals that they want to realize.

According to [18], conflict does not have a universally acceptable definition, which shows that many scholars have defined the concept in diverse ways to reflect their perceptions of issues as well as their academic orientations. That aside, conflict has been defined as disagreement or friction that take place in a group, especially when the belief of a member or some members of the group runs contrary to the beliefs or actions of other members of the group. From this perspective, a conflict is defined as presence of discords among members of a group, and this may arise when the interests of some parties within the group pose threats to common interests of other members of the group. The foregoing definition of conflict is vital to this study because it shows that conflict usually arise when there are diverse parties, especially when their interest of, at least, one of the parties threatens the interests of other parties. Nevertheless, the definition of conflict did not adequately capture the diametrically opposed differences that have characterised herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, over the years.

Development

The concept of development is complex and contested. As such, there are numerous perspectives as to what constitute the concept of development. There is the perspective that sees it from the economic perspectives, while others see it as a concept that is multidimensional, meaning that development is beyond the economic domain. The earliest concept of development was interpreted in terms of growth of output over time and later in terms of per capita output. The terms growth and development were used interchangeably. It is on this premise that [19], posited that:

Development is the act of lifting to the highest value the Gross National Product through the process of accumulating capital and industrialization. Development can also be viewed as the capacity of a nation to increase its static economy to a level where it can generate and sustain an annual increase in its Gross National Product (GNP). He stated further that development is not limited to just the process of acquiring industries, but encompasses such processes as modernization, productivity, social and economic equalization, modern technical know-how, improved institutions, and attitudes as well as rationally coordinated policy apparatus [19].

[20], defined development as a fundamentally economic concept with positive connotations. Historically, between the 1950s and 1960s, development was significantly referred to as economic growth, which reflected quantitative change instead of qualitative change in economic activities. Given the foregoing, development theories were constructed to speed-up the process of economic growth and position the Third World countries along the development route designed by the advanced industrialized countries of the West. This shows that development theories in the 1950s and 1960s were designed to make the Third World countries to desist from depending basically on agricultural production to relaying basically on trade and industrial production. The foregoing is important in the understanding of the meaning of development, and how the concept has evolved over the years. However, the study did not establish the linkage between development and change, which is vital to this study.

Educational Development

Educational development refers to the continuous improvement and transformation of education systems, teaching practices, learning processes, and educational policies to enhance the quality of education and promote human and societal progress. It involves the systematic efforts made by governments, institutions, educators, and communities to expand access to education, improve curriculum content, strengthen teaching methods, and ensure that learners acquire relevant knowledge and skills for personal and national development. Educational development also focuses on creating learning environments that support innovation, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. According to [21], educational development can be understood as a process that promotes the transformation of curricula, knowledge systems, and learning experiences so that education can better respond to the needs of society. Similarly,

[22], describe educational development as the coordinated effort to improve teaching, learning, and institutional practices in order to achieve higher educational quality and better outcomes for learners.

Furthermore, educational development includes the expansion of educational opportunities, improvement of teacher competence, and the integration of modern technologies and innovative teaching strategies in the learning process. It emphasizes the development of learners' intellectual, social, and moral capacities so that they can contribute meaningfully to society. Educational development is therefore not limited to the growth of schools or institutions but also involves reforms in policies, curriculum design, teacher training, and educational management. Scholars such as [23], argue that improving teachers' pedagogical skills and instructional methods is an essential component of educational development because effective teaching directly influences students' learning achievements. In addition, [24], explain that education plays a crucial role in addressing societal challenges and supporting national growth, making educational development a key factor in sustainable development.

Educational development can therefore be viewed as a dynamic and continuous process aimed at improving the effectiveness, accessibility, and relevance of education in society. It seeks to ensure that education equips individuals with the knowledge, values, and competencies needed to adapt to social, economic, and technological changes in the modern world. In my view, educational development is the continuous improvement of education systems, teaching methods, and learning opportunities to enhance knowledge, skills, and societal progress.

5. Empirical Review

[25], investigated the social and economic effects of the menace of Fulani herdsmen crises in Nigeria. The study specifically examined the social and economic effects of the menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. The sample of the study consisted of 250 farmers and 150 respondents from Fulani tribe selected from affected Local Government areas in Southwest, Nigeria via purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire titled Economic and Social Effects of Herdsmen Clashes Questionnaire (ESEHCQ) was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics of t-test were used to analyze the data generated from respondents. The findings revealed that the social effect of the menace of Fulani herdsmen are loss of human life, sexual harassment of human life, acquiring of weapons/arms, reduction in quality of social relationship, reduction of social support and high cases of rape while the economic effect of the menace of Fulani herdsmen are reduction in output and income of farmers/nomads, loss of produce in storage, displacement of farmers, scarcity of agricultural products, loss of house and properties and infrastructural damages. The findings also revealed that farmers and Fulani perception of the causes of Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria are not different while farmers and Fulani perception of the social effects and economic effects of Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria are different. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that representatives of the host communities and Fulani herdsmen should be conveyed under a public forum and involved in the decision making and permitted to take part actively in the planning procedure of restoring peace to most of the affected communities. However, the study did not ascertain how herders-farmers conflicts affects educational development in Benue state, which is one of the objectives of this study.

[26], conducted a study on farmer-herdsmen conflicts: A factor analysis of socio-economic conflict variables among arable crop farmers in North Central Nigeria. The research objectives were to determine the occupational and personal characteristic of arable crop farmers, to ascertain the losses and gains (if any), experienced by the arable crop farmers in the conflict and to analyse the variables of arable crop farmers associated with their conflicts with herdsmen. A four-stage random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. Kwara State was randomly selected from six states in north central Nigeria – where farmer-herdsmen conflicts occur frequently. A total of 300 farmers in communities contiguous with herdsmen' stock routes were selected for the study. Data were collected with the aid of structured questionnaire from the respondents on variables which include: personal and occupational characteristics and perspectives of respondents on socio-economic, production, situational, institutional and ethno-cultural variables. The data were subjected to factor analysis and descriptive statistical procedures.

Data analysis revealed that respondents generally experienced 'losses' in nine out of ten identified material and non-material resources, and 'gains' in three. Factor analysis showed that socioeconomic, production, institutional, and situational factors among farmers, with Eigen values of 2.6412, 1.6103, 1.2456, and 1.0348 respectively, accounted for their conflict with herdsmen. Awareness of and compliance with designated stock routes (situational variables), having coefficients -0.741 and -0.662 respectively were particularly crucial farmer variables of conflict. The study recommended regular review of stock routes and educational campaigns to increase their awareness and compliance rates among conflict actors. Farmer-herdsmen conflict resolution initiatives should also incorporate a careful consideration of all conflict factors from the perspectives of the actors. Nevertheless, the study did not ascertain the impact of herders-farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue state, hence this study.

[27], in research titled The Expansion and Adaption of Fulbe Pastoralism to Sub humid and Humid Conditions in Nigeria conducted in Kebbi and Plateau States used conflict theory and questionnaire as instrument for data collection, found that most of the conflicts are settled directly between the two parties. If not unresolved, it is usually carried to a meeting between the Ardo (Head of the Herders) and the Village Head of the farmers. In rare cases, it would then be taken to the District Heads. The last resort, according to Blench, is to report to the police, a practice

that is more prevalent amongst the farmers. He further explained that herders declined to go to the police for conflict resolution because they are always made scapegoats. It is salient to state that the increasing competition for scarce quality land and resources between the two groups provides the basis for the recurring violence that takes place between farmers and herders. It was recommended that periodic consultations take place amongst the police, statutory agencies, community leadership and the stakeholders in having a holistic understanding of the underlying issues of the conflict in order to provide an effective means of resolving those conflicts before they snowball into a major crisis. The gap here is that responses of government in combating herders-farmers conflicts for better educational development in Benue state were not captured.

[28], examined applying restorative justice in resolving the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria. The study employed Frustration-Aggression theory. With the use of qualitative method, the article argues that the continuing occurrence of this conflict can be explained by the non-application of restorative justice procedures by government when dealing with such conflict. This has made the structures of traditional conflict resolution ineffective. The article concluded that the application of restorative justice as part of conflict resolution mechanisms will more sustainably resolve the farmers-herders conflict in the country, as well as enhance national security and development. Emphasis was not made on the responses of government in combating herders-farmers conflicts for better education development in Benue State.

From the foregoing review, the study shows that farmers-herders conflict has been of existence for over 12 years now which causes lost of lives and properties of people especially as it affects educational development. Despite the intense conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria particularly in Benue State, researchers have done little towards providing solutions towards these problems between farmers and herdsmen which prompt this researcher to carryout research on how to provide lasting solutions between farmers and herdsmen in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Therefore. This research work will fill gaps in areas such as impact of herdsmen and farmers conflict, mechanisms put in place, its effectiveness and challenges faced towards enhancing educational development in Benue State and how to ensure peace between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State and Nigeria at large.

6. Theoretical Framework (Eco-Violence Theory)

This paper is anchored on Eco Violence theory as propounded by Homer-Dixon in 1999. The eco-violence theory derives its epistemological foundation from the political ecology perspective [29]. Eco-violence explores links between environmental scarcities of key renewable variables such as cropland, fresh water, forests and violent rebellions, insurgencies and ethnic clashes in developing countries.

The theory seeks to explain the relationship between environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources and violent conflict. The theory assumes that resource scarcity is the product of an insufficient supply, too much demand or an unequal distribution of resources as a result of environmental hazards that forces some sectors of a society into a condition of deprivation, which leads to frustration and consequent violence. Contested resources commonly include land, water, forests, wildlife in protected areas and minerals [29].

The assumptions of this theory are summarized by [30], as follows: Decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and resource access, act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests, and fish. This can reduce economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts.

Put differently, eco-violence theory sees conflict as a product of scarcity or the fear of natural resources depletion that may occur in at least two primary ways as illustrated by its proponents: (1) "the environmental effects of human activities in a given ecological zone, which is in itself a function of the total population of the region and the physical activity per capita as defined by the level of available physical resources (whether non-renewable resources, renewable or ideational such as institutions, belief systems, social relations and preferences), and (2) the level to which the ecosystem in that region is vulnerable [31].

What this implies by implication is that competition over scarce ecological resources can possibly engender violent conflict. This competition has become very stiff in recent years as a result of the impacts of climate change, which has consequently worsened ecological resource scarcity across the World [27], [32], [33]. Consequently, scarcity of ecological resources therefore raises the competitive stakes and premium that the various competing societal groups place on available ecological resources [29]. This condition tends to hasten the occurrence of violent conflicts.

However, critics have argued that scarcity of resources is neither always natural nor does it automatically lead to violent conflicts between resources users [34]. The focus on scarcity, according to [35], does not lead us to a useful understanding of the relationship between resources and conflicts. They maintained that, the emphasis on the so-called resources excludes the real sources of such conflicts, and in so doing makes them more difficult to resolve.

Eco-violence theory is a relevant framework for examining the impact of herders-crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State because it explains how environmental degradation and resource scarcity

can trigger violent competition between groups. The theory argues that ecological stress such as desertification, drought, and shrinking grazing land forces pastoralists to migrate into new territories where they compete with farmers for land and water. In northern Nigeria, climate change and desertification have reduced pasture and water resources, pushing many pastoral herders southward into the fertile Middle Belt, including Benue State.

This environmental migration increases pressure on farmland and often leads to violent clashes with farming communities. Between 2016 and 2025, farmer–herder violence caused more than 19,000 deaths across Nigeria, with Benue among the most affected states. For example, the 2016 Agatu massacre killed about 300–500 people and displaced at least 7,000 residents, forcing many families to flee their communities. Displacement and insecurity directly affect education because schools are destroyed, closed, or converted into shelters for internally displaced persons. Research in Benue also shows that conflict has led to declining school enrolment and damaged school infrastructure in affected areas such as Gwer West.

Furthermore, more than 300,000 people have been displaced in Benue between 2023 and 2025 due to repeated attacks, creating unstable learning environments for children. Therefore, eco-violence theory convincingly links climate-driven migration, resource competition, violent conflict, and the disruption of educational development in Benue State.

7. Research Methodology

This study employs survey research designs in carrying out its investigation. A sample of four hundred (400) derived from three (3) local government areas of Benue State namely: Kwande, Agatu and Guma local government area. Kwande local government has a population of 359,000, Agatu has 166,900 while Guma local government has 280,300 respectively. Therefore, a total of eight hundred and six thousand and two hundred (806,200) (Population Projection, 2022). The justification for the selection of above local governments is because, they represent each of the senatorial districts, Benue North-East Senatorial District, Benue South and Benue North-West Senatorial Districts and were among most affected by the recently conflicts between farmer-herdsmen in the state. the categories of people selected include, representatives of the Benue State Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture Benue State, Selected Pastoralists and farmers from the North-West, North East and Southern Senatorial District of Benue State, Selected government Officials from the three Senatorial District of Benue State. The study adopts simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies and percentages.

8. Data Analysis

The study seeks to examine the extent to which Herders-Crop Farmers Conflicts affected Educational Development in Benue State. The data as presented shows that, 244 respondents representing 63.7% and 123 respondents representing 32.1% strongly agree and agreed that pastoralists-crop farmers conflicts has a very significant impact on disruption of educational activities, 4 respondents representing (1.0%) and 10 (2.6%) disagreed and strongly disagree with the statement, while only 2 respondents representing 0.5% declined comments. This indicates that one of the most significant impacts of herders-crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State is the disruption of educational activities. Frequent outbreaks of violence and insecurity in the state have led to the closure of schools for extended periods.

In item 2, 235 respondents representing 61.4% and 133 respondents representing 34.7% were of the view that, pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts has a significant impact on decline in School Enrollment as well as teacher and student safety concerns 9 respondents representing 2.3% and 5 respondents representing 1.3% disagree and strongly disagree with the above assertion. This indicates that, persistent insecurity and displacement resulting from herders-crop farmers conflicts have also led to a decline in school enrollment. Families who are constantly displaced due to violence find it difficult to provide a stable educational environment for their children. Similarly, herders-crop farmers conflicts often occur in close proximity to schools, raising significant safety concerns for both teachers and students. Educational institutions become vulnerable targets, and the fear of violence can deter both educators and learners from attending school regularly.

The study also seeks the opinions of respondents on mechanisms employed by government in handling the pastoralists-crop farmers' conflict and its implications in Benue State. The analysis on the above table shows that, 188 respondents and 123 respondents representing 49.1% and 32.1% respectively agreed that government has used military and security forces to handle the conflict, 47 respondents representing 12.3% and 21 respondents representing 5.5% respectively disagree with the above statement, while 4 (1.0%) did not comment.

From item 2 of same analysis, 278 respondents representing 72.6% and 88 respondents representing 23% agreed that government has enacted State anti-grazing laws to handle the conflict as one of the ways that the state government involve herself in the resolution of the conflict, 3 respondents representing 0.8% and 4 respondents representing 1.0% disagree. This means that as part of measures to bring an end to herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Benue state, anti-grazing law has been enacted by the state government.

However, data from secondary sources indicates that the persistent conflict between pastoral herders and crop farmers has significantly undermined educational development in Benue State, Nigeria. Benue, popularly known as

the “food basket of the nation,” has experienced repeated violent clashes between herders and farming communities over land and grazing routes. These attacks have led to large-scale displacement of rural populations, destruction of infrastructure, and the closure of many schools, particularly in rural local government areas such as Kwande, Guma, and Agatu. The education sector in these areas has therefore suffered severe disruptions, affecting school attendance, enrolment, and the general quality of learning.

In Guma Local Government Area, the impact of the conflict on education is particularly severe. Many communities such as Gbajimba, Daudu, Yelwata, and Tse-Torkula have experienced repeated attacks that forced residents to flee their homes. As a result, more than 50 primary schools were closed across the ten council wards of Guma, leaving thousands of pupils without access to education. Several of these schools were destroyed or abandoned because teachers and students fled for safety, while some buildings were converted into camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Reports from the Local Government Education Authority also show that over 15 teachers were killed in violent attacks, which further discouraged educators from working in rural schools. In addition, studies indicate that approximately 3,500 students in both primary and secondary schools in Guma were displaced and forced out of classrooms, demonstrating the scale of educational disruption in the area (Usman, 2023; Ngbede, Adamu, & Itodo, 2024). The closure of these schools has resulted in declining enrolment rates and the loss of academic sessions for many children.

Kwande Local Government Area has also experienced serious educational setbacks due to the violence. Several villages such as Ichembe, Jato-Aka, and Turan communities have been repeatedly attacked, leading to the displacement of thousands of families. The destruction of communities forced many schools to shut down completely as teachers and pupils relocated to safer towns. Educational authorities reported that more than 20 primary schools and several junior secondary schools in rural Kwande communities were closed temporarily due to insecurity, while others operate with very low attendance because many parents are afraid to send their children to school. In some cases, classrooms were destroyed or vandalized during attacks, leaving the facilities unusable for learning activities. The conflict has therefore contributed to a dramatic increase in out-of-school children within the LGA and reduced educational participation among rural households.

Agatu Local Government Area presents another clear example of how violent conflict disrupts educational development. Agatu was one of the earliest areas to experience large-scale herders–farmers violence, particularly between 2016 and 2023. Several villages such as Adagbo, Odugbeho, and Aila experienced repeated attacks that forced thousands of residents to flee their homes. As communities became deserted, many schools stopped functioning completely. Reports indicate that more than 15 primary schools and a number of community secondary schools were closed in Agatu, while enrolment levels dropped drastically in those still operating. For example, in one community school, enrolment reportedly declined from about 600 pupils to fewer than 100 students within a single academic year due to insecurity and displacement. The destruction of houses and farms also forced families into poverty, making it difficult for parents to provide school materials or pay educational expenses for their children. Across the three LGAs, the overall educational consequences are extensive. According to UNICEF estimates, over 260,000 children in several conflict-affected LGAs of Benue, including Guma, Agatu, and parts of Kwande, have been forced out of school due to persistent violence and displacement. Many classrooms have been abandoned, burnt, or occupied by displaced families seeking shelter. The conflict has therefore created a cycle of educational deprivation where children lose access to learning, teachers abandon rural postings, and school infrastructure deteriorates due to lack of use (Jato & Iornumbe, 2025; Fiase & Gbaden, 2024). Consequently, the herders–crop farmers conflict has not only threatened security and livelihoods but has also severely undermined educational development and human capital formation in Benue State.

9. Discussion of Findings

This study examines the impact of herders–crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State. However, based on the findings the investigation shows that;

1. One of the most significant impacts of herders–crop farmers conflicts on educational development in Benue State is the disruption of educational activities. Frequent outbreaks of violence and insecurity in the state have led to the closure of schools for extended periods. This disrupts the continuity of learning, leading to academic regression among students. When schools are forced to close, students miss out on valuable instructional time, and teachers often struggle to maintain consistent educational standards. Similarly, the persistent insecurity and displacement resulting from herders–crop farmers conflicts have also led to a decline in school enrollment. Families who are constantly displaced due to violence find it difficult to provide a stable educational environment for their children. In addition, Herders–crop farmers conflicts often occur in close proximity to schools, raising significant safety concerns for both teachers and students. Educational institutions become vulnerable targets, and the fear of violence can deter both educators and learners from attending school regularly. This situation not only affects the physical safety of individuals but also their mental well-being, leading to increased stress and anxiety among students and teachers alike. This finding supports the view of

Ajibefun (2017) who admitted that the major economic effects farmer-herder conflicts according to the study are loss of produce, infrastructural damages, reduction in farmer's income, shortage of food due to the displacement of farmers. This study is relevant to the present study as both studies sought to find out food security implication of herdsmen farmers clashes.

2. The study discovered that there appears to be existing government measures against the continuous farmers-pastoralist conflict. The key policy that has been set by the Benue state government to mitigate pastoralist-crop farmer conflict is 'anti-grazing law' and 'Livestock Special Task Force' which as explained has not been effective in ending the conflict on the sustainable level because the law only targets an aspect of the livestock sector – security against herdsmen attacks. The Anti-Open Grazing law does not envisage and provide a platform to tap the economic opportunities that come with the conflict and develop the sector in such a manner that it can create jobs and wealth for majority of the Benue populace.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was established that farmers-herders conflicts have significant negative effect on educational development in Benue State in the areas of infrastructural facilities and students' enrolment to a high extent. These conflicts undermine educational development and economic growth by destroying productive system of the society. The worst part is that many students in this part of the country may have failed to be enrolled in school during this disastrous calamity. These conflicts between farmers-herders often force school children to relocate with their families to places that are safe from the conflict areas and this may affect their education as these new places may not have educational facilities to accommodate them.

The following recommendations were made for this study:

1. Both Federal government of Nigeria, state government, local government areas, individual and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should collaborate and embark on reconstruction, building of schools, hospital, homes and other infrastructures damaged in the study areas. This will encourage the people to send their children back to school.
2. Benue and Taraba states have already suggested a workable template as solution to farmers-herders clash by enacting the open grazing, prohibition and ranches establishment law. The Federal government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency, use all security apparatus to ensure full and immediate implementation of this law and as well adopt it as the solution to end farmers-herders clash which is the cause of incessant killing and destruction of lives and properties in the country.

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