

## The Spasmodic Conflict and the Challenges of Rural Development in Benue State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** One of the central problems that have constrained or hamstrung rural development in Benue state is the spasmodic conflict that have engulfed the state in the past two decade. The state today has become a theatre of crisis and acrimony resulting to a scenario that is tragic. The objective of this paper is to examine the spasmodic conflict in Benue State that has become a recurrent nightmare that kept re occurring despite several interventions by both the state and national government to put a lasting solution to it. Eco-Violence theory is adopted for the study. It explains the intricate linkages that have developed between resource scarcity as a result of climate change and violent conflict which to some extent explains the basis for spasmodic conflict in Benue State. The study also employs multi - stage cluster sampling techniques. Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaire was deployed in collecting quantitative data from 400 respondents that were made up of key actors in the study area. Quantitative data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and was presented in form of tables, frequencies and percentages. In interpreting out data, the relationship between the conflicts and rural development was established at both theoretical and empirical levels. The study established that land, land resources and crop damages are at the heart of the protracted conflicts in Benue State. Recommendations such as: the need for developmental programme towards overcoming economic discrimination against indigenes and settlers, the implementation of democratic principles representation of all nationality, government and civil society collaboration among others.

**KEYWORDS:** Spasmodic, Conflict, Rural, Development

### INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest issues facing the African continent in recent time is the issue of spasmodic conflicts that have engulfed the continent in different dimensions. In the case of Nigeria, while she is endowed with abundant human and material resources, yet it remains of the poorest countries in the world which is to the fact that the Nigerian state has experienced a great measure of these conflicts since its inception but particularly since the beginning of the present democratic dispensation. These conflicts are usually fought out by militias each which claim to fight for the right of their interest group and in particular to the rectify perceived exclusion, political domination and injustice, limited access to economic resources and social services,

Central Nigeria, which is one of the six Geopolitical zones in the country today, has had enough of its own share of these conflicts particularly between pastoralists and farmers. In the last one decade, it has become very glaring that Central Nigerian region has become the epicenter of this conflict certainly due to the geographical attributes of the region which support a wide range of agricultural practices such as crop farming and animal husbandry. For instance, it was reported that the pastoralists – farmers violent conflict claimed an estimated 8,000 lives from 2011 to 2019 in Nigeria based on a 2019 joint assessment by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Migrant and Internally Displaced Persons (CDD, 2020). Similarly, the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict is also alarming with an estimated 620,000 people that have been displaced in states such as Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau where the conflicts have been prevalent. In Benue, over 180,000 people were internally displaced living in at least eight Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps (Duru, 2016),

Frequent eruption of violent conflicts between herders and farmers in Benue State of North-Central Nigeria in the last decade has adverse implications for rural development in the State. Productive men and women are killed, disabled or displaced as a result of incessant attacks orchestrated by nomadic cattle herders. Some of the people displaced as a result of these frequent attacks are now living at the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps where basic social amenities are either lacking or insufficient, while others have relocated to places within and outside the State where there is relative peace. The constant clashes between cattle herders and crop farmers have not only threatened rural development, but have also reduced its economic productivity, and deepened food crisis (Okwor, 2016). According to a report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an estimated 7,000

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Nigerians died between 2015 and 2019 in the persistent violent conflicts over land resources in Benue and Nasarawa states of north-central Nigeria (Kunle, 2019). Similarly, it is estimated that between 2001 and 2018, an estimated 176,000 persons were displaced in Benue state, 100,000 were displaced in Plateau state, 100,000 persons were displaced in Nasarawa state and 19,000 persons were displaced in Taraba state as a result of violent conflicts over land resources (Agency Report, 2021).

The increase need for natural resources – land and water by both the farmers and the herders has led to high pressure and competition on land and land resources. The farmer due to increasing demand encroached on some grazing reserve and traditional cattle routes and the herders who practices open access grazing and browsing system capitalizes on these windows as they move their herds on cultivated fields. The two groups took a different shape and approaches on how the land resources can be managed and judiciously be utilized; and thus, the rising cases of protracted attacks and reprisal attacks. Oral sources indicated that increase in population of both the indigene's cultivators and the herders, as well as that of the animals, meant an increasing pressure on the limited available natural resources – land and water. This pressure led to keen competition among the users of the resources. The competition sometimes culminated into open clashes. This factor operated under both underlying and immediate causes of violent clashes between the inhabitants cultivators and the Fulani herders in Benue state. It is against this backdrop that this paper interrogated the nexus between the spasmodic conflicts and the challenges of rural development in Benue state, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Conflict, generally is a reality of social relations. Conflicts at any level arise from divergences of interests, desires, goals and values aspirations in the competition for resources to meet imposing demands on social life in a defined socio-physical environment (Otiye, 2001). As a matter of fact, Man in a socio-physical environment lives in continuous process of dependence and interdependence which often produces contradictions and conflicts. Herders-Farmers conflicts have been one of the problems that dwindled rural development in Benue state. In these spasmodic conflicts between farmers and the herders have rendered many citizens homeless, powerless and sometimes without access to resources necessary for human living such as: food, shelter, health and education among others which are fundamental to rural development.

Given the above background the leadership in Benue State since the beginning of these conflicts has made several efforts intended to adequately address this conflict situation but it seems the efforts made so far by the government have not yielded enough required positive result. Some of these efforts include: convening peace meetings to restore peace and tranquility between the indigenous crop farmers and the pastoralist; the enactment of Anti-open Grazing and Ranchers Establishment Law; establishment and employment of livestock guards to monitor the movement of livestock within the state; the establishment of State Volunteer Guard; the introduction of amnesty program for those in position of prohibited weapons in the state - the program that intended to take away all arms and ammunitions from those that were unlawfully using them indiscriminately to rob members of the public and sometimes for cattle rustling. All the above efforts together with a host of other strategies put in place by the government to handle this problem have not tangibly solved the problem as it continues to affect the rural development of the state. It is against this backdrop that after considering the centrality of rural development to threat posed to it by the persistent conflicts in Benue State, it is assumed that finding a lasting solution to this menace can be a fillip to the positive transformation in the quality of lives of the inhabitants of this State, which is also tantamount to rural development. The study provided answers to the following questions:

- i. What are the causes of the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state?
- ii. What the effects of the spasmodic conflicts on rural development in Benue State?
- iii. What ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state?

The study therefore specifically examines:

- iv. Ascertain the causes of the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state.
- v. Examine the effects of the spasmodic conflicts on rural development in Benue State.
- vi. Suggest ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state.

The following hypotheses were tested in the study

- i. There major causes of spasmodic conflicts in Benue state.
- ii. Spasmodic conflicts have effects on rural development in Benue State.
- iii. There are ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

#### **Conflict**

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change. According to Obiora-Okonkwo (2017) asserted that conflict is used in describing any situation characterised by irreconcilable goals between diverse groups that may eventually lead to hostile confrontations between them. The author further stressed that conflicts occur in many ways, but in most cases, it is triggered by

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competition. Apart from different drivers of conflicts, it can occur at different levels like inter-personal, intrapersonal, intra-group, intergroup, and inter-organisational levels.

Conflict may not be regarded only in a negative light of dysfunctional or disjunctive process and a breakdown of communication as some scholars tend to suggest (Lundberg, 1939). Conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication. Together with, though distinct from competition, struggle, and contest, etc. conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce. Although conflict may generally exist “wherever incompatible activities occur” (Deutsch, 1973:156), and may result in a win-lose situation; the resolution, transformation and management of conflict may produce a “win-win” outcome.

Hence Coser (2010: 10) elaborate definition of conflict becomes a useful clarification:

Social conflict may be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rival. Such conflict may take place between individual, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Inter-group as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life.

This definition of conflict is helpful to this study because it is vital for the understanding of the great role triggers of conflict play in the comprehension of the character of herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. However, the foregoing definition did not largely capture the role of diverse groups with often contradictory interests in the understanding of the concept of conflict. The foregoing perspectives to conflict did not bring to the fore the truism that conflict is a process and dynamic in character, which is vital to this study. Conflict means a situation in which diverse parties compete in order to acquire common scarce resources at the same time (Swanstrom and Weissmann, 2005). Therefore, conflict is defined, in this study, as disagreements between herders and farmers over land resources in a given area over a period of time, and where herders are perceived as visitors and farmers perceived as land-owners.

### **Rural Development**

An understanding of the concept of development will give a clearer picture of rural development. Hornby (2000) defines development as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc; the process of producing or creating something new. This definition implies that development involves a gradual or advancement through progressive changes. Umebali (2006) sees the changes to be multi-dimensional involving changes in structures, attitude and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth; the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. He asserts that development involves economic growth component, equality or social justice component, and socio-economic transformational component which are all on a self-sustaining basis. Viewing the concept differently, Simon (2004) sees development as an improvement in quality of life (not just material standard of living) but also in quantitative terms. He opines that development must be seen as actually and temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, space, society, and culture.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that rural development is not a one-off thing or an immediate and snap phenomenon. Rather, it is a gradual and progressive process towards perfection having a set standard in mind. Rural development has variously been defined. Ayichi (1995) stated that rural development is based on the need to balance the pattern and direction of government for the benefit of both the urban and rural sectors and provide technical requirements for speeding up economic growth in the development. Adekanye (1995) sees the concept of rural development to include resettling displaced communities or adopting new types of housing unit. He continues that rural development should include alongside land-use development, economic factors such as land carrying capacity for each area of farmland, irrigation improved farming method and finance.

Rural development is concerned with the improvement and transformation of social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of the low-income rural dwellers through the mobilization and rational utilization of their human, natural and institutional resources aimed at enhancing their capacities to cope with the daily tasks of life and the demands of contemporary times (Okoli & Onah, 2002:162).

As it is today, rural development needs to be given priority attention. Several reasons for such urgency include high and unacceptable rate of poverty, poor access to social and economic infrastructure and services such as access to safe drinking water supply and sanitation, higher rate of health indicator such as infant and maternal mortality rate, malnutrition and disease prevalence, and lower enrolment of children in school.

### **Overview of Conflict in Nigeria**

Conflicts have the capacity to severely constrain development by destroying infrastructure, interrupting the production process and diverting resources away from productive uses. Apam (2011:120) postulate that, in the home of Africa for example, civil wars in the 1980s and 1990s hindered development by affecting not only state structures but also other sectors. In three decades, life expectancy went down by 10 20years: per capital income decreased by fifty percent: famine become endemic and other welfares indicators such as health and education were worsened (Adetula 2006: 385)

As a matter of fact, Man in a socio-physical environment lives in continuous process of dependence and interdependence which often produces contradictions and conflicts. Herders and farmers conflicts constitute one of the major recurring problems bedeviling

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the socio-political landscape of Africa. To be sure, communal conflicts are not new, particularly in socio-cultural complex societies defined by a high number of ethnic nationalities and language groups such as Nigeria. Pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria experienced inter-kingdom dynastic feuds, and inter-community conflicts (Ikime, 1986). Many contemporary Nigeria communities have experienced several cases of communal conflicts. Some of the notable examples include the Zango-Kataf conflict in Kaduna State (1999-2001); Tiv and Jukun of Wukari conflict in Taraba State (1999-2001); Itsekiri and Urhobo of Warri crisis, (1999-2000); Yelwa-Shendam conflict (2003- 2005), Mwaghavul and Ron crisis (1988-1999), the Ife-Modakeke crisis (1999-2000) (Best 2007). One of the common features of these conflicts has to do with their confrontational and violent dimension which led to the loss of lives and property of people who hitherto lived together in relative harmony. The Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflicts has shown how communal co-existence could be ruptured with attendant disastrous consequences on the social, cultural, political life of the people and above all, affect agricultural development.

According to De Haan (2002), farmers maintain that the 'destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation equipment and infrastructure) by the pastoralists themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts, whereas burning of rangelands and FADAMA and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the pastoralists. De Haan (2002) further stated that antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources. Adisa (2011) is of the view that the perceived causes of farmer-herdsmen conflicts include inequitable access to land, diminishing land resources, antagonistic values among user groups, policy contradictions, and non-recognition of rights of indigenous people. In this regard, there are interwoven factors responsible for the herders-farmers' conflicts, and the complexity of each of them has resulted to the deepening of the conflicts in Nigeria.

According to Olayoku (2014), Abass (2012) contends that the major source of tensions between pastoralists and farmers is basically economic, with land related issues accounting for the majority of the conflicts. This can then be situated within the broader context of the political economy of land struggle, traceable to a burgeoning demography in which there is fierce competition for fixed space to meet the demands of the growing population (Olabode and Ajibade 2010; Solagberu 2012 in Olayoku, 2014) as quoted in (Onwunyi and Anekwe 2020) and the causes are fundamentally economic and centred around land issues, showing that the creation by the government of grazing routes did not mitigate the problem. Despite the fact that there has been no consensus agreement among scholars on the causes of the conflict, there is wide evidence that the negative impacts of the land ownership conflict have resulted to colossal loss of lives and properties. Fajonyomi, Fatile, Bello, Opusunju and Adejuwon (2018) reiterated that it is evident that conflicts between farmers and herdsmen hinged on land resource control, which has been heightened by pressure on land from the two conflict actors. This phenomenon of farmer-herdsmen conflicts represents what can be called a 'land resource control conflict', which poses a threat to food security in Nigeria

### **The Nature of Conflict in Benue State**

Violent conflicts between herdsmen from northern Nigeria and farmers in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's security, stability and peace (Ajibo, Onuoha, Obi-Keguna, Okafor and Oluwole, 2018). With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. The authors further stated that these conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have exacted a heavy humanitarian toll with thousands killed and tens of thousands displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states (Onwunyi and Anekwe, 2020:75).

In Benue State particularly, it has become a commonplace to talk of violent conflicts resulting from different forms of clash of interests, controversies and disagreements over scarce resources. Ugly headlines pointing out the attacks and the number of recorded casualties has flouted the media for quite a significant number of years. Attacks on the local communities have increased significantly over the years. In agreement with the above, Akerjiir (2018) noticed that the conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen in the country has existed and has been on the increase for many years as most of the recent increasing number of conflicts in the country is linked to the farmers – herders' conflict. The attacks had spread in Guma, Makurdi, Agatu, Logo, and other LGAs of Benue state.

In Guma LGA of the state, the family of Tse-Iordye experienced such attack in August, 2012. Gbajimba, the headquarters of Guma LGA, witnessed a brutal attack on the 26th of March, 2013 in which heavily armed herdsmen ran-sacked and displaced the residents of the town. The attacked witnessed the killing of over 130 people and the destruction of St. Athanasius Catholic Church (Yio, 2023: 454). The further postulated that, In Gwer-East LGA, of Benue state, the first noticeable violent attack by herdsmen occurred in Mbamar Clan of Mbasombo Council Ward on the 20th of June, 2012. This was followed by attack on Mbatsenda in Mbalom Council Ward on the 25th of March, 2014 during which 17 farmers were killed. Again, Mbalom area of Turan-Ayar witnessed another attack in the early hours of April 24th, 2018 in which 16 people were killed at St. Ignatius Catholic Mission Ukpok, including two Catholic Priests (Rev. Fr. Joseph Gor and Rev. Fr. Felix Tyolaha). This wicked act was widely condemned by local, national and international community.

In Logo Local Government Area of Benue State, the history of noticeable violent attacks against farmers by pastoralists can be traced to 2014 in March when suspected herdsmen numbering The conflicts have led to the destruction of a lot of human lives and



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properties worth billions of naira. A lot of people are homeless and thousand were disseminated. Settlements have been polarized and criminal elements have taken advantage of the scene to further perpetuate heinous activities. This has affected a lot of socio-economic activities in the state. more than 100 reportedly stormed the Tombo community at night in the early hours of 7th March, 2014, carrying guns, machetes, swords, bows, arrows and knives to execute their evil plan. This attack marked the beginning of herdsmen open violent attacked in Logo LGA. So far, 3 council wards in the Local Government have been on continuous attacks from the Fulani herdsmen. These are: Tombo, Mbagber and Ukemberagya council wards. (Warami, 2017)

Makurdi, the state capital is also not insulated from this new wave of attacks due to its proximity to Nasarawa state. Villages like Anter, Nyijir, Agom, Abagena, among others have been hit by the conflict. Many people lost their lives in the attacks. Just like in other attacks earlier highlighted, the Makurdi Local government attacks led to loss of lives, farms, destruction of schools, churches, markets, farms businesses and many more. Most of the IDPs in Makurdi LGA share IDPs camps with Guma LGA earlier discussed. The local governments worst affected are Guma LGA, (which has the highest number of IDPs camps), Gwer-West, Makurdi, Logo and Agatu LGAs of Benue state. From 2018 to date, many IDPs camps have been set up in these local governments and many people who were displaced by this new wave of attacks have been living there without any hope of return to their ancestral homes (CDD,2020).

In their point of view, Cinjel & Akende, (2015:69) maintain;

The conflict has bred room for malaise such as cattle rustling, communal clash, and bandit and worse of it all is that, it is now being seen as a way of lives and the local government area is just a shadow of itself with surplus of victims such as: widow, orphans, fatherless and many vulnerable; wondering helplessly and without direction. This development has affected mutual co-existence that hitherto has been experiencing in the time past. Agricultural produce and their productions have declined due to the curious fact that marketers (merchant and investors) have not only lost confidence but have turned their back to this unwanted and ugly development that is so common in the area.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was predicted on environmental/resources scarcity theory following the nature of the discourse which largely explores the interlink and the nexus between environmental scarcity and violent conflict. The environmental/resources scarcity theory develop by Homer-Dixon (1994). will be explored to offer explanations on issues of conflicts between herders and the farmers in Benue and Nigeria in particular. According to Homer-Dixon (1994), resource depletion and degradation are significant challenges facing humankind. He argues that the depletion and degradation will lead to five general types of violence as developing countries will not adapt to environmental problems. Firstly, there will be an upsurge in intensification in disputes arising from local environmental degradation such as dam construction. Secondly, Homer-Dixon (1999) states that ethnic clashes will manifest due to deepened social cleavages, population migration and environmental scarcity. The scarcity of resources such as land and water provoke ethnic rivalries that jeopardise a country's stability to democratic stability and prosperity. Thirdly, Homer-Dixon (1999) posits that environmental scarcity leads to civil strife that directly affects economic productivity, threatens people's livelihoods, and affects the State's ability to adapt and address the challenges. Homer-Dixon lists coup d'état, insurgency and banditry as epitomes of civil strife. Fourthly, Homer-Dixon (1999) states that scarcity will lead to interstate war over the fight for resources. The river water was outlined as the most renewable resource that was most likely to stimulate interstate war. Fifthly, Homer-Dixon (1999) argues that environmental scarcity also leads to conflict between developed and developing nations.

Relating the theory to the topic under investigation, the theory is considered pertinent because Benue state is always characterized with the communal conflict due to divergent interest over land matters. The imperativeness of this theory to the study stretches to the act that the conflicts between rural Benue farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsmen are traceable to population increase without commensurate adequate resources. This has led to scarcity of natural resources such as farmlands, grazing lands, vegetation etc. for economic activities. The increase in the cattle population and influx of "alien nomads" account for the problem, as they deliberately move the cattle to graze on peoples' farms (Kazzah, 2018).The struggle, competition and conflicts over farming and grazing lands have been driven mostly by the scarcity of land as a result of increase in population and economic activities where land remain the key resources, and competition between the farmers and the Fulani herdsmen to ensure their viability in the area (Kazzah, 2018).

The scarcity of land is due to the degradation and shrinking ecological space, human and cattle population explosion, and resource depletion. Therefore, the farmers need the land for cultivation, while the herdsmen need the land for grazing and rearing of cattle. The conflict might have different trajectories and specificities, but control of the resources is at the centre (Markakis, 1998). According to Cascão (2018), manipulation and competition of resource control have often been used with political intention to control, maintain or expand power. The struggle to exploit and control natural resources is also aggravated by external actors who finance chaos to control or loot resources.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study used a descriptive survey design since it collected opinions from the respondents in different locations. The study was based in Benue State. Benue State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. It has one of the longest stretches of river systems in the country

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(George, 2017). Benue State is made up of 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) which include: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, GwerWest, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya with Makurdi as the state capital, and three geopolitical zones with a population of 4,219,244 (George, 2017). However, a particular population that is derived from this state encompasses only three local governments, each of which was purposively selected from each of the three geopolitical zones of the state. Guma, Logo and Agatu local Government Areas were therefore selected for study. Based on the 2022 National Bureau of Statistic Projection Figures, the population of the three selected local government areas was projected at 692000 people (280300, 244800 and 166900 respectively). With the above population, the Taro Yamani (1967) statistical formula was employed to get the exact sample size for the study as shown below;

$$n = N / (1 + N * e^2)$$

Were

\*n representing Sample size

\*N representing Population size

\*E representing Margin of error 0.05

Calculation

Population size (N) 692000

Margin of error( $e^2$ ) 0.05

$$e^2 = 0.05^2 = 0.002500$$

$$1 + N * e^2 = 1 + 692,000 * 0.002500 = 1,731.000$$

$$n = 692000 / 1,731.000 = 399,7689$$

Sample Size (n) = 400

In this research, two methods of data were used these include the primary and secondary. The instrument used for the collection of data was the questionnaire. The five-point Likert scale was used in structuring the questionnaire. The questionnaire was framed according to sections: A and B. Section A contained the personal data of the respondents and section B contained relevant questions that assisted in understanding the relationship between the variable factors in the hypothesis and in the eventual analysis. To ensure the content and face validity of the instrument, the drafted copy of the questionnaire was properly modified and used for data collection and analysis. The study adopted a test-retest method to ensure the reliability of the research instrument. This involved administering twenty copies of the questionnaire to respondents that are not part of the sample of the study twice within two weeks and thereafter determined the coefficient of variation by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. The statistical analysis used was correlation. All computations requiring the use of data analysis technique were assessed by a computer statistical software package called SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1: The causes of the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conflict between famers and herders in Benue State has been a common occurrence	400	1	5	4.60	.870
Lack of grazing fields, indiscriminate bush burning, crop destruction were the major causes of herders'-crop farmers' conflict in the study area.	400	1	5	4.17	1.190
Politicization of the already conflictive farmer/herder relations in that context has contributed in complicating the conflict situation in Benue state.	400	1	5	4.30	.901
The failure of the State to resolve the settler/indigene identity is considered one of the causes of spasmodic conflict in Benue state.	400	1	5	4.10	1.077

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The ownership and utilization and struggle over land and other scarce available resources have escalated the conflict between the farmers and herdsman in Benue state.	400	1	5	4.03	1.205
Valid N (listwise)	400				

Source: Field Survey (2025) as computed from SPSS version 23.0

From table above, the mean of; Conflict between famers and herders in Benue State has been a common occurrence (4.60), shows that majority of the respondents agreed strongly that conflict between famers and herders in Benue State has been a common occurrence, majority of the respondents agreed strongly that lack of grazing fields, indiscriminate bush burning, crop destruction were the major causes of herders' -crop farmers' conflict in the study area (4.17), greater number of the respondents agreed strongly that politicization of the already conflictive farmer/herder relations in that context has contributed in complicating the conflict situation in Benue state (4.30), majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the failure of the State to resolve the settler/indigene identity is considered one of the causes of spasmodic conflict in Benue state (4.10), and majority of the respondents agreed strongly that the ownership and utilization and struggle over land and other scarce available resources have escalated the conflict between the farmers and herdsman in Benue state (4.03). This implies that the respondents agreed strongly that the above are the causes of the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state.

**Table 2: The effects of the spasmodic conflicts on rural development in Benue State**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Several persons have been displaced, with women and children exposed to inadequate food and shelter and rape and at risk of communicable diseases arising from poor sanitary conditions.	400	1	5	4.69	.659
Some traders lost their goods in market during attacks therefore could not have access to capital to continue in business	400	1	5	4.42	.922
Spasmodic conflict affects the level of employment opportunities in Benue state.	400	1	5	4.08	1.144
Spasmodic conflict leads to displacement of teachers whose absenteeism denies students access to quality education in Benue state	400	1	5	4.62	.694
The ownership and utilization and struggle over land and other scarce available resources have escalated the conflict between the farmers and herdsman in Benue state.	400	1	5	4.03	1.205
Valid N (listwise)	400				

Source: Field Survey (2025) as computed from SPSS version 23.0

From table above, the mean of; several persons have been displaced, with women and children exposed to inadequate food and shelter and rape and at risk of communicable diseases arising from poor sanitary conditions (4.69), shows that majority of the respondents agreed strongly that several persons have been displaced, with women and children exposed to inadequate food and shelter and rape and at risk of communicable diseases arising from poor sanitary conditions, some traders lost their goods in market during attacks therefore could not have access to capital to continue in business (4.42), greater number of the respondents agreed strongly that spasmodic conflict affects the level of employment opportunities in Benue state (4.08), majority of the students strongly

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agreed that spasmodic conflict leads to displacement of teachers whose absenteeism denies students access to quality education in Benue state (4.62), and greater number of the respondents strongly agreed that the ownership and utilization and struggle over land and other scarce available resources have escalated the conflict between the farmers and herders in Benue state (4.03). This implies that the respondents agreed strongly that the above are actually the effect of spasmodic conflicts on rural development in Benue State

**Table 3: ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increased awareness creation on the need for peaceful coexistence	400	1	5	4.39	.938
Establishment of ranches alongside the provision of amenities in line with world best practices for livestock/animal production	400	1	5	4.23	.943
Transformation of the agrarian sector to mechanize system of agricultural production	400	1	5	4.09	1.165
Good maintenance culture in the provision of social services such as water, health clinics and schools on the grazing reserves	400	1	5	4.14	1.105
Government should stop arms proliferation and disarm the herders/farmers in the state	400	1	5	4.28	1.096
Valid N (listwise)	400				

**Source: Field Survey (2025) as computed from SPSS version 23.0**

From table above, the mean of; increased awareness creation on the need for peaceful coexistence (4.39), strongly agreed that increased awareness creation on the need for peaceful coexistence, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that establishment of ranches alongside the provision of amenities in line with world best practices for livestock/animal production (4.23), majority of the respondents agreed strongly that transformation of the agrarian sector to mechanize system of agricultural production (4.09), majority of the respondents strongly agreed that good maintenance culture in the provision of social services such as water, health clinics and schools on the grazing reserves (4.14), majority of the respondents agreed strongly that government should stop arms proliferation and disarm the herders/farmers in the state (4.28). This implies that the respondents strongly agreed that the above are the ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Hypothesis One:

The analysis of the result shows a chi – square of  $\chi^2(4) = 250.750$ ,  $P=0.000$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. This implies that there are major causes of spasmodic conflicts in Benue state. The result shows that there is evidence of the existence of causes of spasmodic conflict in Benue state. The data also shows that there was a significant difference in the number of those that agreed to those that disagreed that there are major causes of spasmodic conflicts in Benue state. This implies that conflict between famers and herders, lack of grazing fields, indiscriminate bush burning, crop destruction, politicization of the already conflictive farmer/herder relations, failure of the State to resolve the settler/indigene identity and the ownership and utilization and struggle over land and other scarce available resources statistically and significantly causes spasmodic conflicts in Benue state. This finding is in tandem with Duru (2016). that, conflict in Benue State has become a recurrent decimal; it has led to death of several persons, the destruction of copious of properties worth billions of naira and the displacement of thousand people. This is a serious setback to rural transformation. The conflict is mostly between herders and state citizens who are predominantly the farmers. The finding has as well subscribed to the position of Odey (2017), who argued that destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation equipment and infrastructure) by the cattle herders themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by farmers, whereas burning of bush and range lands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the cattle herders. He states further that, the increasing rate of cattle theft and



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rustling is always accompanied by violence and reprisal attacks by herders. The result also corroborates with Cinjel, Arinzechi, and Okwah (2020), they postulate that struggle for land is one of the causes of the conflict in the area. This is because the conflicting parties have much value on land and as such, they fight for ownership of the land.

### **Hypothesis Two:**

The analysis of the result shows a chi – square of  $\chi^2(4) = 290.325$ ,  $P=0.000$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. This implies that spasmodic conflicts have effects on rural development in Benue State. The result shows that there is evidence of the existence of the effects of spasmodic conflict on rural development in Benue state. The data also shows that there was a significant difference in the number of those that agreed to those that disagreed that spasmodic conflicts have effects on rural development in Benue State. This implies that displaced persons, with women and children exposed to inadequate food and shelter and rape and at risk of communicable diseases arising from poor sanitary conditions, traders losing their goods in market during attacks therefore could not have access to capital to continue in business, reduced level of employment opportunities, displacement of teachers whose absenteeism denies students access to quality education and ownership and utilization and struggle over land and other scarce available resources statistically and significantly has a negative effect on rural development in Benue state. This finding is in agreement with Yio (2023) who demonstrated that the displacement of the farmers on their ancestral land by the pastoralists has brought other debilitating consequences on them. The farmers have lost all the life-supporting structures that exist in their environment. He further opined that they have lost their farms, small businesses, livestock, food stuff, seed and seedlings, and small entrepreneurial opportunities like thrift cooperatives. They have also lost other social institutions like markets, schools, churches and other social cultural institutions that are important to their survival. This finding is also in line with that of Tyav, Kuhe and Makurdi (2020) that the attacks led to loss of lives, farms, destruction of schools, churches, markets, farms businesses and many more. The findings in a similar view corroborated with the Tyav, Kanyi and Gbatse (2020) statistic which indicated that at least 13 million cows and 35 million sheep were lost by the pastoralists in the conflicts. They further state that several other attacks were recorded in 2016, 2017 and 2018 with more devastating outcomes. Livestock and property worth billions of naira belonging to both warring parties were lost, others destroyed and some were vandalized in the crisis.

### **Hypothesis Three:**

The analysis of the result shows a chi – square of  $\chi^2(4) = 267.225$ ,  $P=0.000$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. This implies that there are ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state. The result shows that there is evidence of the existence of ways that spasmodic conflict can be managed in Benue state. The data also shows that there was a significant difference in the number of those that agreed to those that disagreed that there are ways of managing the spasmodic conflicts in Benue state. This implies that increased awareness creation on the need for peaceful coexistence, establishment of ranches alongside the provision of amenities in line with world best practices for livestock/animal production, transformation of the agrarian sector to mechanize system of agricultural production, provision of social services such as water, health clinics and schools on the grazing reserves and putting a stop to arms proliferation and disarming the herders/farmers will statistically and significantly manage spasmodic conflict in Benue state. This finding is consistent with the findings of Onwunyi and Anekwe (2020); Ekperechukwu and Carla (2021); Adeoye, (2017); Adogi, (2013) and Ahmadu (2011) among others who in their separate studies found that provision of infrastructural amenities such as animal farms, good roads, veterinary services, farm inputs, extension services and farmer education, markets, banking services and credit facilities for pastoralists and arable farmer. They further postulated that the initiation and implementation of appropriate laws, peacebuilding and human rights protection strategies governments at all levels including community-based organizations, civil society organizations, the international community and well spirited individuals will bring about sustainable peace and protection of the remaining lives of the citizens of Benue State and other States in North Central Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Spasmodic conflicts between herders and farmers are among Benue state most pressing security challenges. The study concludes that The farmers – herders conflicts in Benue State pose a threat to rural development and today Nigeria is posited with the challenges of social, economic as well as political development and the utmost experiences is food insecurity in the society, hunger, unemployment and destruction of lives and properties worth billions of naira that clearly epitomized that the herders conflict have greatly damaged the livelihood of citizens in the state as result of competition for scarce land use resources

Based on the major findings of this study as derived from the three research questions, The people of Benue State are already deeply suffering from the negative effect of farmers – herders' conflict in the areas mentioned above. Governments' response over the years have been ad hoc and reactive, without concrete measures for sustainable conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms beyond the deployment of security agents and establishment of commissions of enquiries. But these conflict management strategies of the government appear not to have yielded positive results as killings and destruction of properties seem to be on the rise thereby affecting peaceful coexistence in Benue state.

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However, this study does not claim to be an end in itself but a means to an end. The effort here is to exploit measures that can facilitate the attainment of high sense of serenity and peacefulness which may be considered inadequate. Further research in this regard is therefore essential because without proper management strategies of conflict, conflict will continue to effect social, political and economic development much needed in rural communities of Benue state, Nigeria.

### RECOMMENDATION

From the discoveries, the following recommendation are made; Government should create an environment that will prevent herdsmen and farmers conflicts by overcoming economic discrimination against indigenes and settlers. The implementation of democratic principles representation of all nationality, indigenes and settlers must be pursued with vigour. The representation must not necessarily be at the highest level of governance, once political power and participation have been significantly devolved to lower of governance this participation will be ensure. Government and civil society groups in alliance with international sympathizers should make efforts towards establishing basic schools and health units with the requisite facilities. This may go a long way in helping the displaced children to have access to quality education and health services. Government should restructure emergency management agencies beyond given of relief materials to affected persons but should also be providing loan facilities induced empower the affected farmers and equally support their agricultural activities and resettlement in the post conflict period.

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