
**FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT AND THE AGRICULTURAL LIVELIHOOD
ACTIVITIES OF FARMERS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

Ifeoma Vivian Nwankwo¹, Mbajiuka Stella Chinenye², Odoemelam, L.E.³ and Maduka, O.A⁴

¹Department of Biological Sciences, Clifford University Owerrinta, Abia State, Nigeria

²Program Associate Justice, Development and Peace Caritas Umuahia

³Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria

E-mail: nwankwoiv@clifforduni.edu.ng, ifeomaviviankelechi@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

The study examined the farmer-herder conflict and the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select 120 rural farmers. Data collection was through a questionnaire and analyzed using mean while ANOVA was used to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. Findings show that grazing rights dispute ($\bar{x} = 3.11$), lack of security in the rural areas ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), destruction of farmlands and crops ($\bar{x} = 3.05$), land encroachment ($\bar{x} = 3.01$), reprisal attacks ($\bar{x} = 2.97$), poor arrest and prosecution of offenders ($\bar{x} = 2.72$), stealing of farm produce ($\bar{x} = 2.68$), rape and sexual harassment ($\bar{x} = 2.64$) and population increase ($\bar{x} = 2.54$) were the perceived causes of farmers- herdsman conflict in the study area. Destruction of crops ($\bar{x} = 3.69$), loss of labour as a result of killings and displacement of rural dwellers ($\bar{x} = 3.57$), high transportation costs ($\bar{x} = 3.45$), disruption of planting activities ($\bar{x} = 3.44$), disruption of supply and distribution of agricultural inputs ($\bar{x} = 3.43$), loss of storage and processing facilities ($\bar{x} = 3.38$), loss of cultivable farm lands ($\bar{x} = 3.35$), unfavorable market prices ($\bar{x} = 3.29$) and lack of contact with extension agents ($\bar{x} = 3.17$) were the negative effect of farmers herdsman conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area. Findings also revealed that the formation of vigilante groups/night watcher volunteers ($\bar{x} = 3.12$), use of males as major source of farm labour ($\bar{x} = 3.04$), ban on open grazing ($\bar{x} = 2.98$), reporting conflict activities to community leaders and security agents ($\bar{x} = 2.91$), walking in groups to the farm ($\bar{x} = 2.87$), formation of cooperative groups ($\bar{x} = 2.83$) and relocation to other areas in periods of severity ($\bar{x} = 2.80$) were the coping strategies adopted by rural farmers in the study area. The ANOVA result shows that there was a significant difference in the effect of farmer's herdsman conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area at a 5% probability level. Conclusively, farmers herdsman conflict had a negative effect on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area. The study recommended that extension agents and non-governmental organizations assist in the proper education of rural farmers on the adoption of effective coping strategies in mitigating the effects of farmers-herdsman conflict on their livelihood activities.

Keywords: Effect, Rural, Farmers, Herdsman, Conflict, Agricultural, Livelihood

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable feature of every human society and the struggle over resources occurs in societies where natural resources determine the means of livelihood and survival (Canice and Yunana, 2022). The Nigerian State has experienced and is still experiencing conflicts of immense proportions and dimensions amongst numerous ethnic and religious communities across her States (Iheanacho, Iheriohanma, Ezeji, Okafor, and Austin-Egole, 2022). Nwakanma and Boroh (2019) noted that Nigerian history is saddled with different types of conflicts, stretching from religious to ethnic violence, and to the more recent surging clashes between different livelihood groups, particularly between the farmers and the nomadic Fulani herdsman across the country. According to Odalonu (2020), factors such as climate change, high population growth, the Boko Haram insurgency and cattle rustling have resulted in recurrent drought in the Sahel regions and have pushed the herders from the North southwards towards the Guinea Savannah of the tropical rain forest in search of pasture and water resulting in competition for grazing routes with farmers. In the course of their search for pasture and water for the grazing animals, the herders frequently trespass farmlands owned by inhabitants in their host communities, wreaking havoc and destroying crops and other properties in their wake. Nwakanma and Boroh (2019) and Nwosu (2017) noted that the farmers are not only overpowered and injured, but the herders also use the opportunities to steal, rape, raze houses, and kill dwellers in the communities they pass through and in very extreme cases make them vacate their communities thereby rendering them homeless.

According to Udosen (2021), the farmer-herder conflict can be understood as a problem of access to land for economic survival, which as a result has caused economic, political, and environmental tensions in the country, especially in the Middle Belt and Southern parts of Nigeria. Agriculture provides the means of livelihood and economic sustenance for the majority of the rural population in Nigeria, Ebonyi State inclusive. Farmers and herders through their respective farming activities make significant contributions to their livelihoods and economic sustenance in Nigeria (Onuoha, and Ezirim, 2015). The invasion of farmlands has prompted many rural farmers to abandon their farms for fear of being maimed or killed by the herdsman. This will no doubt have an adverse effect on the livelihood activities of rural farmers in Ebonyi State. Similarly, Ogbomah (2022) noted that the killing of farmers and the destruction of farms as a result of farmers' herdsman conflicts will likely disrupt the agricultural livelihood activities of farmers. The study thus examined the effect of farmer's herdsman conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study ascertained the perceived causes of farmers herdsman conflict, determined the effect of farmers-herdsman conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers, and examined the coping strategies adopted by rural farmers in the study area. The study also hypothesized that the effect of farmers herdsman conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers does not differ significantly across the selected local government areas in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State, located in the South-East geo-political Zone of Nigeria. Purposive and random sampling techniques were adopted for the study. The first stage involved a purposive sampling of three Local Government Areas from the State based on the prevalence of farmers-herdsman conflicts. In the second stage, two (2) communities with records of farmers-

herdsmen conflicts were purposively selected from each of the selected LGAs for the study. This gave a total of six (6) selected communities for the study. The final stage involved a random sampling of twenty (20) rural farmers from each of the selected communities. This gave a total of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents.

Data collection was through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using mean and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Perceived causes of farmers' herdsmen conflict were analyzed using a 4-point rating scale. The rating scores were assigned as follows: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. Respondents' mean scores were computed for each of the statements by adding the weights; $4+3+2+1=10$ and divided by 4 to give a mid-point of 2.50. A mean score greater than or equal to 2.50 was adjudged a perceived cause while a mean score less than 2.50 was adjudged otherwise. The effect of farmers' herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers was analyzed using a 4-point rating scale. The rating scores were assigned as follows: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. Respondents' mean scores were computed for each of the statements by adding the weights; $4+3+2+1=10$ and divided by 4 to give a mid-point of 2.50. A mean score greater than or equal to 2.50 was adjudged a negative effect while a mean score less than 2.50 was adjudged otherwise. Coping strategies adopted by rural farmers were analyzed using a 4-point rating scale. The rating scores were assigned as follows: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2 and disagree = 1. Respondents' mean scores were computed for each of the statements by adding the weight $4+3+2+1=10$ and divided by 4 to give a mid-point of 2.50. A mean score greater than or equal to 2.50 implied a coping strategy adopted and otherwise disagreed. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the significant difference in the effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area. Similarly, in order to identify which treatment means are different from the others, and to separate one mean score from the other, the Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) was used to distinguish between 2 or more means.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived causes of farmers herdsmen conflict in the study area

The result in Table 1 shows grazing rights dispute ($\bar{x} = 3.11$), lack of security in the rural areas ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), destruction of farmlands and crops ($\bar{x} = 3.05$), land encroachment ($\bar{x} = 3.01$), reprisal attacks ($\bar{x} = 2.97$), poor arrest and prosecution of offenders ($\bar{x} = 2.72$), stealing of farm produce ($\bar{x} = 2.68$), rape and sexual harassment ($\bar{x} = 2.64$) and population increase ($\bar{x} = 2.54$) were the perceived causes of farmers herdsmen conflict in the study area. This implies that grazing rights disputes, lack of security in the rural areas, destruction of farmlands and crops, land encroachment, reprisal attacks, poor arrest and prosecution of offenders, stealing of farm produce, rape, and sexual harassment, and population increase were the major causes of farmers herdsmen conflict in the study area. Destruction of farmlands and crops and grazing disputes would likely lead to farmers herdsmen conflict. Poor security presence, failure to arrest and prosecute offenders, land encroachment, rape and sexual harassment of women, and reprisal attacks could also generate tensions and conflict between the farmers and herdsmen. Population increase would most likely lead to the continuous struggle over natural resources by the farmers and herdsmen in the

communities. Okoro (2018) noted that during the peak of the rainy season, characterized by cattle breeding, increased milk production, and shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production which sometimes emanates into farmers-herdsmen conflict. The resultant increase in the competition for grazing pasture and arable land has oftentimes led to the serious manifestation of hostilities and friction among the two user groups in Nigeria. Sani, Micheal, Tologbonse, Mahmoud, Muhammed, Raji, and Abubakar (2021) also noted that the ever-increasing population in Nigeria, as well as climatic changes, have led to the cultivation of more lands that are meant for grazing and cattle routes which subsequently leads to violent clashes between the farmers and herdsmen in various States in Nigeria.

Table 1: Perceived causes of farmers herdsmen conflict in the study area

S/N	Perceived causes of farmers' herdsmen conflict	Mean	Remarks
1	Reprisal attacks	2.97	Agree
2	Destruction of farmlands and crops	3.05	Agree
3	Grazing rights dispute	3.11	Agree
4	Rape and sexual harassment	2.64	Agree
5	Stealing farm produce	2.68	Agree
6	Failure to arrest and prosecute offenders	2.72	Agree
7	Land encroachment	3.01	Agree
8	Cattle rustling	1.63	Disagree
9	Population increase	2.54	Agree
10	Lack of trust and hostility between farmers and herders	1.71	Disagree
11	Lack of security in the rural areas	3.07	Agree
	Grand mean score	2.65	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2022

Keys: Mean score ≥ 2.50 = agree; mean score < 2.50 = disagree.

Effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area

The result in Table 2 shows that the destruction of crops ($\bar{x} = 3.69$), loss of labour as a result of killings and displacement of rural dwellers ($\bar{x} = 3.57$), high transportation costs ($\bar{x} = 3.45$), disruption of planting activities ($\bar{x} = 3.44$), disruption of supply and distribution of agricultural inputs ($\bar{x} = 3.43$), loss of storage and processing facilities ($\bar{x} = 3.38$), loss of cultivable farmlands ($\bar{x} = 3.35$), unfavorable market prices ($\bar{x} = 3.29$), lack of contact with extension agents ($\bar{x} = 3.17$), poor supply and distribution of farm produce ($\bar{x} = 2.97$), poor harvesting of crops ($\bar{x} = 2.89$), reduced investment and savings ($\bar{x} = 2.86$) and hindering hunting of animals ($\bar{x} = 2.56$) were the negative effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area. This implies that the destruction of crops, loss of labour as a result of killings and displacement of rural dwellers, high transportation costs, disruption of planting activities, disruption of supply and distribution of agricultural inputs, loss of storage and processing facilities, loss of cultivable farmlands unfavorable market prices, poor supply and distribution of farm produce, lack of contact with extension agents, poor harvesting of crops,

reduced investment and savings and hindering hunting of animals were the negative effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in Ebonyi State. Farmers' herdsmen conflict would likely have negative implications for the livelihoods of rural farmers because the disruption of farming activities and the threat to the lives and properties of farmers will lead to the abandonment of their farms and homes for refuge seeking elsewhere. This would subsequently lead to the loss of productive assets and reduced investment and savings which are vital to their livelihood activities and sustenance. Agricultural extension is essentially the means by which new knowledge and innovations are introduced into rural areas in order to bring about desirable changes and improvement in the lives of farmers and their households, however, farmers herdsmen conflict would lead to reduced contact between the farmers and extension agents as a result of insecurity situations in the affected or conflict-prone communities. Farmers herdsmen conflict is also expected to lead to the poor harvesting of crops and poor supply and distribution of farm produce as a result of rural farmers being afraid to go to their farms for harvesting activities and the marketing of the farm produce. Hunting of animals could also be hindered by farmers herdsmen conflict due to the fear of potential violent clashes between the farmers and nomadic herders in the forests that also serve as grazing areas for the cattle. This finding is in consonance with those of Chikaire, Atoma, Oyem, and Akeni (2020) who reported that the disruption of agricultural production activities ($\bar{x} = 3.60$), disruption of marketing activities ($\bar{x} = 3.28$), unfavorable market prices ($\bar{x} = 3.21$) and reduced investment and savings ($\bar{x} = 3.19$) were the perceived effect of resource-use conflicts on rural households and food security in Abia State. This finding is also similar to those of Adelokun, Adurogbangba, and Akinbile (2015) who reported that rural farmers in Oyo State were worst hit by farmers herdsmen conflict as it affects their farming activities and leads to a reduction in farm output, income, loss of properties and scarcity of food.

Table 2: Effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area

S/N	Effect of farmers herdsmen conflict	Mean	Remarks
1	Destruction of crops	3.69	Negative
2	Disruption of planting activities	3.44	Negative
3	Prevents livestock rearing	2.51	Negative
4	Hinders hunting of animals	2.56	Negative
5	High transportation costs	3.45	Negative
6	Poor harvesting of crops	2.89	Negative
7	Loss of cultivable farmlands	3.35	Negative
8	Poor supply and distribution of farm produce	2.97	Negative
9	Loss of storage and processing facilities	3.38	Negative
10	Disrupts supply and distribution of agricultural inputs	3.43	Negative
11	Reduced investment and savings	2.86	Negative
12	Loss of labour as a result of killings and displacement of rural dwellers	3.57	Negative
13	Leads to unfavorable market prices	3.29	Negative
14	Lack of contact with extension agents	3.17	Negative
	Grand mean score	3.18	Negative

Source: Field survey, 2022

Keys: Mean score ≥ 2.50 signifies a negative effect; mean score < 2.50 signifies a positive effect.

Coping strategies adopted by rural farmers in the study area

The result shown in Table 2 which is the effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in the study area shows that the formation of vigilante groups/night watcher volunteers ($\bar{x} = 3.12$), use of males as a major source of farm labour ($\bar{x} = 3.04$), ban on open grazing ($\bar{x} = 2.98$), reporting conflict activities to community leaders and security agents ($\bar{x} = 2.91$), walking in groups to the farm ($\bar{x} = 2.87$), formation of cooperative groups ($\bar{x} = 2.83$), relocation to other areas in periods of severity ($\bar{x} = 2.80$), mediation ($\bar{x} = 2.77$), negotiations ($\bar{x} = 2.74$), promotion of ranching ($\bar{x} = 2.68$) and engagement in a combination of farm enterprises ($\bar{x} = 2.58$) were the coping strategies adopted by rural farmers in the study area. This implies that rural farmers in Ebonyi State adopted conflict coping strategies such as the formation of vigilante groups/night watcher volunteers, the use of males as a major source of farm labour, a ban on open grazing, reporting conflict activities to community leaders and security agents, walking in groups to the farm, formation of cooperative groups, relocation to other areas in periods of severity, mediation, negotiations, promotion of ranching and engagement in a combination of farm enterprises. Rural farmers would be willing to form cooperative societies and engage in more than one farm enterprise to pool their resources together and maximize profits obtained from the various enterprises to cope with the low productivity and losses that could be incurred during and after conflict periods. Rural farmers through their farmer and community groups could also engage in dialogue/negotiations with the nomadic herders to ensure peace and security as both livelihood groups engage in their respective activities. Conflict occurrences may lead to farmers and their households fleeing troubled areas and relocating to other areas so as not to be caught in the situation. This finding is similar to those of Sani *et al.* (2021) who reported the use of conflict mitigation strategies such as mediation and negotiations by farmers and herders in Gombe State. Nwokafor, Cletus, and Ejinwa (2020) also noted that conflict resolution mechanisms such as mediation, negotiation, arbitration, conciliation, and reconciliation can be adopted for conflict resolution between farmers and herders.

Table 3: Conflict coping strategies adopted by rural farmers in the study area

S/N	Conflict coping strategies	Mean	Remarks
1	Relocation to other areas in periods of severity	2.80	Agree
2	Negotiations	2.74	Agree
3	Promotion of ranching	2.68	Agree
4	Formation of vigilante groups/night watcher volunteers	3.12	Agree
5	Mediation	2.77	Agree
6	Formation of cooperative groups	2.83	Agree
7	Reporting conflict activities to community leaders and security agents	2.91	Agree
8	Securing insurance for my farm enterprise	1.65	Disagree
9	Ban on open grazing	2.98	Agree
10	Use of males as a major source of farm labour	3.04	Agree
11	Walking in groups to the farm	2.87	Agree
12	Engagement in a combination of farm enterprises	2.58	Agree
	Grand mean score	2.75	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2022

Keys: Mean score ≥ 2.50 = agree; mean score < 2.50 = disagree.

Hypothesis

The result (Table 4) shows a significant difference in the effect of farmers-herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities in the study area. The heterogeneity implies that the effect of farmers' herdsmen conflict on agricultural livelihood activities varies across sampled local government areas in the study area. This could be attributed to the severity of farmers' herdsmen conflict and the conflict coping strategies employed by rural farmers across the sampled local government areas in the study area. The severity of farmers' herdsmen conflict in the sampled local government areas could determine its effect on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers. Similarly, the conflict coping strategies employed by rural farmers could also assist in mitigating the effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities in the respective local government areas. Furthermore, the result shows that the effect of farmers' herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of farmers was higher in the Onicha local government area than in the Ishielu local government area but similar to that of the Izzi local government area. The F-test value of 3.169 was statistically significant at a 5% probability level, implying that there is a significant difference in the effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers across the sampled local government areas in Ebonyi State.

Table 4: Result of ANOVA for test of significant difference in the effect of farmers herdsmen conflict on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in Ebonyi State

Local government areas	Mean difference
Ishielu	3.0301 ^b
Izzi	3.1200 ^{ab}
Onicha	3.3975 ^a
LSD	0.2775
F-test	3.169***
Df	117

F-value is significant at $P < 0.05$

Key: means with the same letters were not statistically different

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the farmers' herdsman conflict had a negative effect on the agricultural livelihood activities of rural farmers in Ebonyi State. Reprisal attacks, disputes over the destruction of farmlands and crops, grazing rights disputes, cattle rustling, land encroachment, and rape and sexual harassment were some of the perceived causes of farmers herdsman conflict in the study area. Destruction of crops, loss of labour as a result of killings and displacement of rural dwellers, high transportation costs, disruption of planting activities, and others were identified. The study further concluded that the rural farmers in Ebonyi State adopted conflict-coping strategies that helped in managing the conflict.

Recommendations

1. The State government through the security agencies should be proactive in addressing the perceived causes of farmers-herdsman conflict in the study area. This can be achieved through community policing and increased security presence in the rural areas to detect security threats since cattle rustling, reprisal attacks, rape and sexual harassment and destruction of farmlands and crops were some of the identified perceived causes of farmers-herdsman conflict in the study area.
2. The State Government should promulgate legislation outlawing open grazing of cattle while encouraging herders to establish ranches for their cattle since grazing rights dispute is one of the major causes of farmers-herdsman conflict in the study area.
3. Extension agents and non-governmental organizations should assist in properly educating rural farmers on adopting effective coping strategies in mitigating the effects of farmers-herdsman conflict on their livelihood activities. They can also link rural farmers to viable livelihood opportunities that would enable them to cope and sustain themselves during and after conflict periods since the farmers-herdsman conflict had a negative effect on agricultural livelihood activities in the study area.

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