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The impact of Herdsmen Activities on farmers' safety and food security in Anambra State Nigeria (2017 – 2022)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to asses impact of herdsmen Activities on farmers' safety and food security in Anambra State Nigeria. To that effect, two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study, The objectives of the research work were to determinethe effect of the herdsmen activities on the social of lives and properties, of the people living in Anambra State. The study made use of frustration-aggression theory as the theory that supports the study. The study adopted cross-sectional survey research design, while data were gathered from primary and secondary sources, Structured questionnaire was developed and used for data collection from a sample size of 323 respondents, that where gotten through the use of the taro Yamane formula, The respondents are made up of farmers and the members of the selected local government area in Anambra State, purposive sampling Technique was used to administer the questionnaires, while Chi-square test was used to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. The outcome of the analysis carried out shows that the herders farmers clashes affect the social life of the people living in Anambra state. However, the study recommends that the security agents need to Sustain and build on the existing success recorded so far, by being more proactive than reactive, the government needs to also sensitize the members of the general public on the new anti-grazing laws, and compensate those who have been traumatized. the government needs to bring to light the success recorded so far in the cause of arresting the herders-farmers clashes in the state, they also need to orientate and sensitize the farmers and the general public of the state, on the need to return to normalcy our reputable attribute of been peaceful and hospitable.

Keywords:
Herdsmen activities, insecurity, food security, land competition, farmers' safety

INTRODUCTION

Before the 20th century, cattle rearing in Nigeria was largely concentrated in the Guinea, Sudan, and Sahel savannah regions, where small-scale farming thrived due to seasonal rainfall and irrigation. However, due to increasing desertification in the north, herders began migrating southward in search of greener pastures and clean water, leading

to encroachment on farmlands and conflict with sedentary farmers (Olaniyan & Okeke, 2015). This conflict has become particularly severe as cattle rearing, a primary occupation of the Fulani ethnic group, now increasingly clashes with crop farming—both vital economic livelihoods. Oli, Ibekwe, and Nwankwo (2018) explain that the root cause of herder-farmer conflict lies in the struggle to preserve economic livelihoods. A comparison with Western agricultural practices shows significant contrasts: in the West, large, mechanized farmlands are situated far from residential zones, and livestock are raised in ranches with scientifically balanced diets. In Nigeria, subsistence farming is practiced near homes, and herders roam freely across state lines, often destroying crops and occasionally engaging in criminal acts like kidnapping and violence against host communities.

The Fulani herdsmen's activities have intensified Nigeria's internal security crisis, with political, economic, and environmental implications. Numerous reports highlight their involvement in killings, kidnappings, and destruction of property, often using sophisticated weapons like AK-47s. For example, on July 1, 2020, communities such as Ifite Anam and Umuikwu Anam in Anambra were attacked, resulting in deaths and displacement. These attacks have discouraged school attendance, lowered literacy rates, destroyed businesses, and increased unemployment. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, security is foundational for development.

The frequency and brutality of these attacks—from Ayamelum to Ihiala and beyond—have become daily concerns in Anambra. Vanguard (July 2, 2020) reported that ten communities in Awka North LGA lamented the constant destruction of farmlands. These events have deeply disrupted community life, hindering education, damaging food systems, and sparking widespread fear. Akhain (2012) identifies insurgency, such as the Fulani herdsmen crisis, as a significant barrier to Nigeria's development. It scares off investors, limits residents' freedom of movement, and lowers the quality of life. Communities under such threats suffer from crumbling democracy, weakened rule of law, and the erosion of trust in the state.

Agriculture, especially in developing countries, is central to economic development. Yet, increasing competition for arable land has intensified hostilities between herders and farmers. These clashes contribute to Nigeria's deepening food crisis through loss of lives, crops, and properties (Ofuoku, 2019). Livestock products (LLPs) make up over half the agricultural output in industrialized countries and a third in developing ones. As populations grow and incomes rise, demand for animal protein has surged, prompting the "next food revolution." Cattle rearing remains economically significant in Nigeria, especially in the Southeast, where Fulani herders support the supply of meat and milk nationwide. However, despite the value of both crop cultivation and livestock rearing, the methods used are outdated and conflict-prone. Unlike best practices found in modern economies, Nigeria lacks systems that balance the coexistence of herders and farmers. This has made simultaneous economic growth for both sectors nearly impossible.

The justification for this study lies in the escalating cycle of violence that affects both farmers and herders. While much attention has been given to the attacks on farming communities, it is equally important to acknowledge that herders have also been victims. Numerous cases of cattle rustling, armed robbery, kidnapping, and even killings of herdsmen have been reported. This underscores the complexity of the conflict, revealing a mutual struggle where both groups experience loss, insecurity, and displacement. Many herders have had their cattle stolen or killed, while others have been forced to abandon their grazing routes

due to fear of reprisal attacks. Similarly, farmers have deserted their farmlands out of fear for their lives. These realities highlight the urgent need to examine the broader implications of the conflict—not only on individual safety but also on food production, security, and the overall stability of rural livelihoods in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's unplanned farming system has long fueled persistent conflicts between farmers and herders, particularly in Anambra State. Herders from the arid northern regions move southward in search of greener pastures, often encroaching on farmland. Factors contributing to these conflicts include increased southward migration of pastoralists, disease control, access to veterinary care, and shrinking pasture lands. In Anambra, these clashes result in the destruction of farmland, discouraging farming and leading to food insecurity. Many communities along herders' routes face recurrent attacks, including kidnappings, arson, rape, and killings.

The failure of the Nigerian government to provide adequate security has emboldened perpetrators (Ewetan and Urhie, 2014), resulting in widespread fear, displacement, and a decline in farming. The ensuing scarcity of food drives inflation and famine. Socially, schools are shutting down, and cultural festivities like Easter, the New Yam Festival, and Christmas see reduced participation due to insecurity. Many residents migrate to safer regions or foreign countries such as Libya and South Africa, risking statelessness.

Security is a prerequisite for development, and its absence in Anambra has led to increased poverty, unemployment, inflation, and a decline in infrastructure. Despite depending heavily on rural farmers to meet food demands, the state's insecurity deters new businesses and disrupts community relationships. This study aims to evaluate the extent of herder-related violence on the lives, livelihoods, social norms, and security of Anambra residents. It further seeks to recommend actionable strategies to help government authorities address the crisis and restore socio-economic stability.

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain how competition for land space triggers killing of farmers in Anambra state.
2. To determine how criminal killings by herdsmen affects food security in Anambra State.

Research Questions

In the light of the above, the following research questions have been constructed to guide the study.

1. Does competition for land space triggers killing of farmers in Anambra State?
2. Does criminal killings by herdsmen affects food security in Anambra State?

Research Hypotheses

To effectively address these research questions and to meet the related objectives, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. Ho: Competition for land space does not trigger killing of farmers in Anambra state.
   Hi: Competition for land space triggers killing of farmers in Anambra state.
2. Ho: Criminal killings by herdsmen does not affect food security in Anambra State.
   Hi: Criminal killings by herdsmen affects food security in Anambra State

Review of literature.

Empirical Literature Review

The persistent conflict between herders and farmers across Nigeria has attracted considerable academic attention, especially due to its detrimental impacts on socio-economic development. Various empirical and theoretical studies offer insight into the dynamics, causes, effects, and possible solutions to the Fulani herdsmen-farmers conflict, especially within the context of states like Anambra and other conflict-prone areas. Adisa (2013) explored how incessant resource-based conflicts between farmers and herders have undermined agricultural extension services in Nigeria. His study revealed that 78% of farmers perceived the conflict as a loss, while 68% of herdsmen saw it as a threat. Most farmers (75%) used problem-oriented coping strategies, whereas only a small number of herdsmen did the same. The study also showed that conflict perceptions were associated with variables such as annual income, farm size, and household size among farmers, and age and herd size among herders. Importantly, only 4% of respondents saw conflict as an opportunity. Adisa advocated a strengthened role for agricultural extension workers in promoting awareness, revising stock routes, and managing psychological impacts of the conflict.

Musa (2014) highlighted mutual problems, noting that while herders overgraze farmland, farmers encroach upon cattle routes and waterholes. Similarly, Adelakun (2015) found in Oyo State that crop destruction and path encroachment were the primary conflict triggers. Akerjiir (2018) took a more localized approach, studying Ukpabi-Nimbo in Enugu State and identifying multiple factors—climate change-induced soil erosion, cattle rustling, and ineffective governmental response—as culprits. Alarmingly, he found that warnings prior to the 2016 attacks were ignored by security forces.

Mnguashima and Olushola (2020) studied conflict in Benue State, linking it to climate change and land use stress. The majority of respondents reported high exposure to conflict impacts like property destruction, homelessness, and disrupted market access. The anti-open grazing law was widely supported. They recommended adopting ranching as a sustainable alternative. Musa and Shabu (2014) examined Guma LGA in Benue State and found herders were not accepted by host communities. Crop destruction, water contamination, and harassment were cited as major conflict causes. The effects were severe—displacement, loss of life and property, and reduced agricultural output. They proposed grazing reserves and modern livestock systems to minimize conflict.

From a broader political economy perspective, Awotokun, Nwozor, and Olarenwaju (2020) argued that the herder-farmer conflict undermines Nigeria's sustainable development goals, particularly poverty eradication and food security. Their findings emphasized government inaction and failure to prosecute offenders, which emboldens perpetrators and hinders conflict resolution. Ajibefun (2018) provided a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic effects of the conflict. His study found that destruction of crops was the primary cause, while social consequences included loss of life, sexual harassment, reduced social support, and high cases of rape. Economically, the conflict led to reduced output, loss of income, displacement, and infrastructural destruction. Notably, while both groups shared similar views on the conflict's causes, their perceptions of its social and economic effects differed. Ajibefun called for inclusive decision-making processes involving both herders and host communities.

Oluwaleye (2020) addressed peacebuilding efforts in Benue State. Using survey data from 247 respondents, including refugees, his findings detailed the causes, nature, and implications of the conflict. The study emphasized that herders were difficult to access for direct data collection, so secondary sources were used. Despite this, the findings corroborated

other studies that linked herders' aggression to poor peacebuilding outcomes and development stagnation. A recent study by Abubakar, Waziri, Johnson, Olawale, and Esther (2023) examined how state responses affect peacebuilding in rural grazing areas. Their analysis showed that measures such as blocking illicit weapon sources (P = 0.000), protecting women (P = 0.019), and food provision (P = 0.037) significantly contributed to peace. The study also found that peace is more likely when ranches are established by the Federal (ß= 0.452) or State Government (ß= 0.522) rather than herders themselves (ß= –0.355). This implies a need for cautious implementation of the Livestock Transformation Plan to avoid perceptions of favoritism.

Theoretical Framework

The Frustration-Aggression Theory, originally proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears in 1939 at the Yale Institute of Human Relations, posits that aggression is always a consequence of frustration, and that frustration arises when an individual's efforts to achieve a goal are blocked (Dollard et al., 1939). The theory was later revised by Miller (1941), who argued that while frustration does not always lead to aggression, it creates a disposition toward aggressive behavior, which may or may not be acted upon. Further modification was made by Berkowitz (1989), who emphasized that frustration leads to aggression only when it generates negative affect, particularly when the individual perceives the frustration as deliberate or unjustified. Applying this theory to the ongoing conflict between farmers and herders in Anambra State, Nigeria, the repeated destruction of farmland, killings, and displacement caused by land competition results in heightened frustration among farmers. Likewise, herders who experience restrictions from anti-grazing laws or cattle loss due to retaliation may also feel provoked. This mutual frustration fosters cycles of aggression, thereby escalating violence and undermining both safety and food security in the region. The theory helps explain the psychological underpinnings of the persistent hostility between these groups

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METHOD

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted in the course of carrying out this research, as different people from different locations that make up the sample size were given questionnaires, within a definite time frame.

Population of the Study

Anambra is an agrarian state and as such, most of them depends on agriculture for their economic needs. According to the National Population Census, the total population of people living in the selected local government areas in Anambra State is 1,686,900. Specifically, Anambra East Local Government Area has a population of 216,800, while Anambra West has 238,400. Orumba South records a population of 236,000, and Ihiala has the highest with 430,800 people. Anaocha follows closely with 405,000, and Awka North has the lowest population among the selected areas, totaling 159,900. These figures were obtained from the National Population Commission of Nigeria.

Sample Size

Yermane's formula was used to determine the sample size, Yermane's formula:

$$N = \frac{N}{1+ N(e)^2}$$ When

N = The sample size

N: The population size
e: equals the margin error in the calculation.

At a confidence level of 95% the margin error is 0.05. So therefore, the sample size of the farmers in Anambra state is n= 1686900/1686900 (0.05)² 323 approximately 323. Therefore the sample size gotten from the adoption of Taro Yermane formula is323.323, Divided by the 6 communities under review, we have 54 questionnaires for each community.

Sampling Techniques

The researcher made use of Purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was adopted because the researcher was intentional about the local government areas and the farming locations to visit for the questionnaire sampling, since the degree of herder-farmers clashes varied from local government to local government and from one farm location to Another. Our targeted respondents were the farmers who have their farmlands located on the roadway and to those who resides, own businesses and service rendering establishments within this risk prone areas.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents were analysed using chi square statistics, percentage, frequencies and tables, while the research hypothesis were tested using the chi-square test.in order to arrive at a logical and definite findings.

Test of Hypothesis

This section centers on testing of hypothesis formulated for the study. The hypothesis was tested using Chi-square (X^2)

The formula for Chi-square is given by: $X^2= \Sigma(f\boldsymbol{o}-fe)^2$

Where;

X^2 = Chi-square

fo = observed frequency

fe = expected frequency.

RESULTS

Hypothesis one

Ho: There are Positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the safety of lives and properties of the people living in Anambra state

Hi: There are no Positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the safety of lives and properties of the people living in Anambra state

Questions 1,2 and 3 of the questionnaire were used to test hypothesis one which are shown in the table 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3

Table 1. Observed frequency for hypothesis one

QUESTIONS	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL
1	20	29	20	97	148	314
2	15	17	10	115	157	314
3	10	8	6	117	173	314
TOTAL	45	54	36	329	478	942

Expected frequency: This is calculated using the formula below

The formula;

$$= \frac{\text{Row total x Column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$$

This; SA = 314×45/942= 15
A=314×54/942= 18
UD =314×36/942=12
D = 314×329/942= 109.6
SD = 314×478/942= 159.3
The calculated value of Chi Square (X^2) = 19.14
The critical value of Chi-square (X^2) at 8 degree of freedom and 0.05 significant level is 15.507

Decision rule: reject the null hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than the critical value of Chi-square Since the result shows that the calculated value of Chi-square (19.14) is greater than the critical value (15.507), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, which states that there are no Positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the safety of lives and properties of the people living in Anambra state

Hypothesis Two

Ho: There are positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the food security of the people living in Anambra state. Hi: There are no positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the food security of the people living in Anambra state

Question 4,5 and 6 in the questionnaire are used to test hypothesis two

Table 2. Observed Frequency for hypothesis two

QUESTIONS	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL
4	177	82	19	14	22	314
5	127	72	40	42	32	314
6	152	90	28	30	25	314
TOTAL	456	244	87	86	69	942

Expected frequency is given by : $\frac{\text{Row total x Column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$

Thus; SA=314×456/942= 152
A = 244×314/942= 81.3
U = 87×314/942= 29
D = 86×314/942= 28.6
UD =69×314/942= 23

The calculated value of Chi-square(X^2) =17.65
Df = (c – 1) (r – 1)
= (3 - 1) (5 – 1)
= (2) (4)
= 8
The critical value of Chi-square (X^2) at 8 degree of freedom and 0.05 significant level is 15.507

Decision rule: reject the null hypothesis if calculated value of Chi-square is higher than critical value of Chi-square Since the calculated value of Chi-square (25.57) is greater than critical value (15.507), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that There is no positive impact of the herdsmen activities on the food security of the people living in Anambra state

Discussion of Results

The presentation and analysis of data provided clear answers to the research questions and addressed the study's objectives and hypotheses. The findings were discussed in light of each research question and hypothesis. The first hypothesis sought to determine whether a significant relationship exists between competition for land space and the killing of farmers in Anambra State. The result revealed that the calculated chi-square value (20.17) exceeded the critical value (15.507), indicating a significant relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This finding aligns with the study by Abdussalam & Ntagu (2024), which identified poor land management and open grazing as core causes of violent conflict in farming communities. Similarly, Abbass (2012) noted that competition over land and natural resources continues to trigger deadly clashes in agrarian regions of Nigeria.

The second hypothesis tested whether a significant relationship exists between criminal killings by herdsmen and food security in Anambra State. Again, the calculated value (23.51) was greater than the critical value (15.507), indicating that criminal killings significantly affect food security. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted. This supports the findings of Kazzah (2018), who reported that herdsmen-farmer conflicts have contributed to food shortages and inflation. Similarly, Adisa (2010) found that such conflicts result in farm abandonment and reduced food output, while Oli, Ibekwe, and Nwanko (2018) highlighted the socioeconomic disruptions and widespread food insecurity resulting from the crisis. These findings reinforce the growing consensus that herdsmen-related violence significantly undermines agricultural productivity, rural safety, and food access in affected regions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study has revealed a troubling intersection of violence, displacement, and food insecurity. Findings indicate that persistent clashes between herdsmen and farmers, driven by competition over land and inadequate resource management, have led to widespread fear, destruction of farmlands, loss of lives, and a significant decline in agricultural productivity. The implementation of anti-grazing laws has provided some relief; however, the continued fear of attacks underscores the fragility of the current security situation. As many farmers abandon their lands and herders struggle with restrictions and feeding difficulties, the state increasingly depends on food supplies from neighboring regions, resulting in higher food prices and strained livelihoods. The study highlights the urgent need for sustained enforcement of security measures, peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, and policies that ensure both the protection of farmers and the regulation of pastoral activities to safeguard food security and rural development in Anambra State. In the light of the challenges identified above, the following recommendations were made

1. The security agents need to Sustain and build on the existing success recorded so far, by been more proactive than reactive.
2. The government needs to sensitise the members of the general public on the new anti-grazing laws, and also on the success recorded so far in the cause of combating herders-farmers crisis and other social vices, The government also needs to compensate, orientate and equip farmers, most especially those who have been traumatized either directly or indirectly, as a result of the herder-farmers clash in order to restore the confidence of the people so that they can confidently go back to farming.

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