

Socio-Economic Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict and National Security: A Study of Wamba Local Government of Nasarawa State 2015 - 2021

BY

LAMUS Asma'u Rayyanu
Department of Political Science
Nigerian Defence Academy
Kaduna

Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic impact of the farmer-herder conflict and its implications for national security in Wamba Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, between 2015 and 2021. It explores the root causes of the conflict, evaluates its effects on socio-economic conditions, food security, and national stability, and assesses the effectiveness of existing conflict-mitigation measures. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates qualitative and quantitative data through questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that the primary drivers of the farmer-herder conflict include seasonal migration, farmland destruction due to grazing activities, population pressures resulting from an influx of herders, and cattle rustling involving both herders and some farmers. The conflict has led to significant disruptions in agricultural productivity, threatening food security and posing broader risks to national stability. Local interventions, such as supervised cattle herding and prompt reporting of crop destruction incidents to authorities, have shown the potential to reduce tensions. However, the study underscores the need for comprehensive government action. It recommends policies that secure equitable land-use rights for herders and farmers, the adoption of sustainable ranching models, and the establishment of community-driven peace-building initiatives and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: Herdsmen, Farmers, Resource, Conflict, Nasarawa State

Introduction

Globally, competition for limited natural resources such as land and water—intensified by climate change, population growth, and environmental degradation—has often led to conflicts with severe socio-economic and security consequences. Among these, farmer- herder conflicts stand out as a significant challenge, impacting agricultural productivity, social cohesion, and economic stability while posing serious threats to national security (Nnaji et al., 2022).

Farmer- herder conflicts are not unique to Nigeria. They are prevalent across regions such as Asia, Latin America, and Africa, where they have escalated into broader socio-economic crises (Kratli

& Toulmin, 2020). In Africa, these conflicts are exacerbated by reliance on agriculture and pastoralism as primary economic activities, coupled with rapid population growth and climate variability (Maze, 2014; Ugwueze et al., 2022). The Sahel region, in particular, has experienced significant disruptions, including loss of life, displacement, and widespread destruction of property due to these disputes (Hamro-Drotz, 2014; Benjaminsen, 2012).

In West Africa, including countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Mali, the rise in farmer-herder conflicts has drawn concern from organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Migration by herders in search of grazing land frequently leads to tensions with settled farming communities, worsened by weak governance, inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms, and the proliferation of small arms (Lenshie et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, these conflicts are particularly acute in the Middle Belt and Northern regions, with profound implications for food security and national stability (Egwu, 2011; Obioha, 2015). Historically, farmers and herders coexisted with a degree of mutual understanding, resolving disputes through traditional mechanisms. However, rapid population growth and changing land use patterns have strained these relationships, transforming disputes over resources into violent conflicts, especially in North Central states like Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau (Shettima, 2018; Gregory, 2014).

The socio-economic and security impacts of these conflicts are significant. Agricultural productivity has plummeted, food security is under threat, and the displacement of communities has created fertile ground for criminal activities, including banditry. The farmer-herder conflict has become a convenient cover for broader security issues, as bandits exploit the chaos to carry out heinous crimes. In Nasarawa State, particularly in Wamba Local Government Area, strained

inter-communal relationships underscore the urgency of effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding measures.

Reports from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Nasarawa State Ministry of Agriculture reveal that incidents in the Wamba area have resulted in hundreds of deaths, mass displacement, and a 30% decline in agricultural output, leading to food shortages and economic instability. Women and children bear the brunt of these impacts, while increased security expenditures have yielded limited results. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive, community-driven peace initiatives.

This study explores the socio-economic impact of farmer-herder conflicts on national security, focusing on Wamba Local Government Area between 2015 and 2021. It examines the underlying drivers of these conflicts, their implications for local and national stability, and the effectiveness of existing conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, it interrogates how these conflicts have eroded social cohesion, trust, and intergroup relationships within the region. By addressing these issues, this research aims to provide actionable insights into mitigating the far-reaching effects of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction to the Literature

Farmer-herder conflicts have become a significant challenge to socio-economic development and national security worldwide. These conflicts arise due to competition for scarce natural resources, such as land and water, which are exacerbated by climate change, population growth, and environmental degradation. In Nigeria, these disputes have escalated in intensity, particularly in

regions where agriculture and pastoralism are key economic activities. Understanding the dynamics of these conflicts is essential to developing effective strategies for their resolution.

Herdsmen: Socio-Economic Role

Herdsmen, particularly the Fulani pastoralists, are a critical component of Nigeria's agricultural economy. Antonio and Silvia (2019) describe herdsmen as people whose livelihoods depend on their intimate knowledge of ecosystems and livestock management. The Fulani pastoralists, originating from Senegambia and spreading across West Africa and the Sahel, have historically contributed to the Nigerian economy as the primary breeders of cattle, a major source of protein (McGregor, 2014; Eniola, 2010). Ajala (2016) emphasizes that cattle rearing provides affordable animal protein consumed widely in Nigeria.

Herdsmen are traditionally semi-nomadic, migrating seasonally in search of pasture and water for their livestock (Iro, 2014). The seasonal movement begins southward at the end of the rainy season and transitions northward during the peak of the rainy season. This cycle often coincides with agricultural activities, leading to disputes between herders and farmers (Ibrahim, 2014; Iro, 2014). Despite their economic importance, herdsmen have faced increasing scrutiny for their involvement in conflicts, criminal activities, and social disruptions.

Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflicts

The root causes of farmer-herder conflicts are multifaceted and interrelated. Key drivers include resource competition, environmental changes, and governance deficits. Iro (2014) highlights that

conflicts are most prevalent during the rainy season when farming and grazing activities overlap. The increasing demand for arable land due to population growth has further strained relationships between farmers and herders (Shettima, 2018). Climate change has exacerbated these tensions by reducing the availability of grazing lands and water sources, forcing herdsmen to migrate more frequently and encroach on farmlands (Benjaminsen, 2012; Scheffran et al., 2019).

Additionally, weak governance and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms have contributed to the escalation of violence. The proliferation of small arms and the involvement of criminal elements have further complicated these conflicts (Lenshie et al., 2020). The perception of herdsmen as armed aggressors and their association with banditry, kidnapping, and other crimes have deepened societal divisions (The Vanguard, 2015).

Impact of Conflicts

Farmer-herder conflicts have profound socio-economic and security implications. The violence disrupts agricultural productivity, leading to food insecurity and economic instability (Obioha, 2015). The destruction of farmlands and displacement of farming communities reduce agricultural output by as much as 30% in affected regions (Nasarawa State Ministry of Agriculture, 2021). This decline exacerbates poverty and limits access to basic needs for many rural households. The conflicts also undermine social cohesion and intercommunal relationships. Tade and Yikwabs (2019) note that violent clashes often result in the loss of lives, destruction of property, and mass displacement. These conditions create a fertile ground for criminal activities, such as banditry, cattle rustling, and kidnapping. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

reports that such incidents have displaced thousands and significantly impacted women and children, who are the most vulnerable groups.

Conflict Resolution and National Security Frameworks

Effective conflict resolution requires a combination of local, national, and regional strategies. Traditional mechanisms, such as mediation by community leaders, have historically been successful in resolving disputes but are now less effective due to the scale and complexity of modern conflicts (Monod, 2018). State-centric approaches to security, as described by Weber (1919) and Chappius (2011), emphasize the role of the state in providing security and maintaining order. However, these approaches must be complemented by community-driven initiatives.

One promising strategy is the adoption of sustainable ranching models (SRM), which provide dedicated grazing areas and reduce the need for seasonal migration (Okoro, 2018). Policies that secure land rights for herders and promote coexistence through peace-building initiatives can also foster long-term stability. Additionally, improving governance, strengthening law enforcement, and addressing the root causes of resource scarcity are essential to mitigating these conflicts.

Socio-Economic Development and National Security

Socio-economic development is closely linked to national security. As Dabit and Gwom (2017) explain, unresolved conflicts over resources undermine efforts to improve living standards and reduce poverty. The impacts of farmer-herder conflicts on socio-economic development are evident in changes to the physical environment, loss of livelihoods, and disruption of social

services. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The literature highlights the complex interplay between farmer-herder conflicts, socio-economic development, and national security. While herdsman play a vital role in Nigeria's agricultural economy, their activities have increasingly become a source of tension and violence. Understanding the causes and impacts of these conflicts is essential for designing effective resolution strategies. Comprehensive government policies, community-driven initiatives, and sustainable development practices are crucial to fostering peace and stability in conflict-affected regions.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts materialism theory. Dialectical materialism is a philosophical approach to understanding the reality that emphasizes the interconnectedness and constant change of all things, based on the principles of dialects and materialism. It is often associated with the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who developed the theory as a framework for understanding the dynamics of social and economic change. At its core, dialectical materialism suggests that the world is made up of material processes that are constantly in flux. Change occurs through the interaction of opposing forces, or contradictions, which drive development and evolution. These contradictions can be internal and external to a system, giving rise to new structures and forms of organisation. Dialectical materialism also emphasises the role of human agency in shaping history and society. It sees human beings as active agents capable of transforming the world through their actions and shaped by the social and economic conditions in which they live. Thus, dialectical materialism is often associated with Marxist theories of history, which suggest that social and economic development is driven by class struggle and the evolution of the means of production. Dialectical materialism provides a framework for understanding reality's complex dynamics and

interconnected nature and analysing how social and economic systems evolve. It has significantly influenced many fields of study, including philosophy, social theory and political science.

Dialectical materialism focuses centrally on determining man's material condition and the way the society organises the production, distribution and exchange of these goods and services that man perceives as his possessions. The theoreticians observe that since these materials are limited, man's aspiration to possess them usually results in conflict with others seeking the same material. Dialectics is thus what the theoreticians call the resultant of this competition, hence the term dialectical materialism. The dialectical materialists are of the firm position that conflict will be inevitable in the absence of equity and justice occasioned by limited resources. Meanwhile, to allay this vicious circle of dialectics in order to ensure harmonious co-existence in society, the theorists advocate that attempts must be made to ensure equity and justice as the sine qua non for progress or development (Shakhnazarov, 1978). However, the theory as expounded here appropriately matches the situation obtainable in the herdsmen and farmers scenario in Nigeria. It is, therefore, the perception of each group that the other is a threat to its material condition in society that eventually escalates into violent conflicts between them. Herdsmen sometimes accuse farmers of killing their cattle and resort to attacking or killing the farmers. The farmers, on the other hand, see herdsmen as land encroachers and crop destroyers and, of course, make efforts to protect their properties (land and crops).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 The Study Area

Wamba, established by the Rindre people in 1180 AD, has a rich history rooted in its origins as 'Ogri,' meaning border. The name "Wamba" derives from the Jukun term "WABA," translating to

"he did not drink." This name emerged from a tale where a suspicious stranger asked for water, but the locals, mistrusting him, sent a magical calabash instead. The stranger's refusal to drink led to the name's adoption. In 1912, Wamba became the headquarters of the Nasarawa province, encompassing areas like Lafia, Keffi, Nasarawa, and Akwanga. Following independence, Wamba transitioned to a divisional headquarters, overseeing what are now Nasarawa Eggon, Akwanga, and Wamba local government areas. In 1972, the headquarters moved to Akwanga, but Wamba Local Government Area was reestablished in 1996. On October 2, 1953, the first recognised ruler of the Eggon people, HRH Abdullahi Idde, received his staff of office in Wamba. Geographically, Wamba lies along kilometre 140 on the southern edge of Jos, covering approximately 2,052 square kilometres. Its diverse population includes the Rindre and various ethnic groups, such as the Katana, Buh, Yashi, and Fulani, among others.

3.2 Method

The data for this study was collected using both an interview schedule and a structured questionnaire by the researchers. The data obtained from the field survey were in two categories: qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were subject to transcription and represented in narrative format to strengthen the quantitative data further, while the quantitative data was analysed using frequency tables and simple percentages. The statistical computations were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 for the purpose of accuracy and reliability.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of analysed data using questionnaire are shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Respondents Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	170	47.9
	Female	185	52.1
	Total	355	100
Marital Status	Married	140	39.4
	Single	112	31.5
	Divorced	25	7.1
	Widow	50	14.1
	Separated	28	7.9
	Total	355	100
Age	15-20years	60	16.9
	20-25years	75	21.1
	25-30years	140	39.4
	35 years and above	80	22.5
	Total	355	100
Educational Qualification	Diploma/NCE	155	43.6
	HND/First Degree	132	37.2
	Postgraduate Degree	30	8.5
	Professional	28	7.8
	Others	10	2.8
	Total	355	100
Occupation	Farmer	175	49.3
	Herder	45	12.7
	Artisan	27	7.6
	Public Servant	25	7.1
	Politician	20	5.6
	Retiree	28	7.9
	Unemployed	35	9.9
	Total	355	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 5.1 shows the socio-demographic details of the respondents by major defining attributes of the population of the study. Out of a total of 735,953 (47.9%) of the respondents are male while 52.1% are female. This means that the majority of the respondents are female. This reflects the female gendered nature of the study area and could be resulted to high rate of male mortality.

Data collected as presented in table 5.1, also shows the distribution of respondents by marital status. A rigorous look at the table shows that 39.4% of respondents were married. 31.5% of all those were single, 7.1% of respondents were divorced, while 7.9% and 14.1% were separated and widowed, respectively. Results of the study show that the majority of the respondents were married, with a high percentage recorded. The percentage of single respondents is significant to this study as it shows that this significant number of respondents, some of whom play measure role in either the herding or farming.

Respondents in the age range of 25 – 30 account for up to 69% of the respondents. This youthful age shows that respondents significant proportion of could relate with the researcher and, therefore are in a very good position to respond regarding the farmer and herder conflict. Data collected as presented shows the distribution of respondents by age. Table 5.1 indicates that 16.9% of respondents were under 15 to 20 years old. Also, 21.1% of respondents were within the 20 - 25 age group. Furthermore, 22.5% of respondents were within the 35-year-old age group. Table 5.1 also shows the distribution of respondents by level of education. The table (5.1) vividly shows that 43.6% of respondents had a Diploma/NCE Certificate, 37.2% had an HND/First Degree certificate, and 8.5% had a Postgraduate Degree certificate. Furthermore, 7.8% of the respondents had a professional certificate, and 2.8% had other qualifications from other institutions. Findings reveal that the majority of the respondents had Diploma/NCE Certificates. The table (5.1) presents the respondents' opinions on occupation. 49.3% of respondents are farmers, 12.7% are herders, 7.6% are Artisans, 7.1% are Public Servants, 5.6% are Politicians, and 7.9% are retired civil servants, while 9.9% are Unemployed. This implies that the majority of respondents are farmers.

Table 2: Causes of Farmer / Herder Conflict in the Study Area

SN	VARIABLES	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Environmental condition; such as drought, flood, erosion and pollution are the major causes of farmer/herder conflict in Wamba local government	82 23	95 26.7	43 12.1	92 25.9	43 12.1
2	Expansion of farmland and increase in herd are the causes of farmer herder conflict in Wamba local government	106 29.8	160 45.1	15 4.2	54 15.2	20 5.6
3	Cattle rustling, destruction of crops by herds and proliferation of small arms are the causes of farmer herder conflict in Wamba local government	94 26.4	64 18	27 7.6	26 7.3	144 40.6
4	Religion, tribalism, and hostility are the major causes of farmer herder conflict in the Wamba local government	99	122	37	30	67
5	Artificial increases in population such as migration and urbanisation are the major causes of farmer/ herder conflict in the Wamba local government	198 55.8	98 27.6	17 4.8	20 5.6	30 8.5

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Based on the analysis carried out to find out the causes of Farmer / Herder Conflict in the Study Area, it was revealed that the response of the participants of the sampled respondents is significant. This implies that the causes of Farmer / Herder Conflict in the Study Area among other; Wamba local government is one of the peaceful district in the state, where farmers and herders leave in harmony not until recently the conflict between farmers and herders emanated from the influx and migration of herders from other troubled part of the state and neighbour states, increasing or expansion of farmlands and cattle herds. However, other factors, such as cattle rustling and the destruction of farm crops by cattle herds, contributed to the conflict.

An in-depth interview was conducted with Divisional Police Officer in Wamba. (DPO Iliyasu Abubakar) to find out the causes of farmer/ herder conflict in Wamba local government and he responded:

“the factors that contribute to the farmers/herders conflict in Wamba LGA may be seen as retaliation of loss of houses and properties among the farmers and herders coupled with infrastructural damages and scarcity of

agricultural products where sanctions by the federal and state government is not followed as a result of all the breakages of law and order by the waving faction.” (Interview on Tuesday, October 27th, 2022 10, 00 am, Wamba).

Similarly, in an interview with a Lecturer from the Social Studies Department, College of Education Akwanga (Dr. Ibrahim Muhammed) on the same issue, the following submission was made;

“Season and land use are key drivers of farmer-herder conflicts: rainy season comes with high breeding with small area coverage of herding due to cultivation of lands. Often times led to invasion and destruction of cultivated lands” (Interview on Tuesday, October 4th, 2022; 2:00 pm, Akwanga).

On the same issue, FGD added that cause of farmer-herder conflict is as thus;

“Majority of the participants are of the opinion that resource (arable land) competition amongst farmers and herders result in conflict”. This corroborates the assertion of Van’ Hooft, Millar and Django (2005) that Herdersmen have identified conflicts arising from land use as the most important challenge faced in their occupation.

Table 3: Socio-economic Impact of Farmer / Herder Conflict in the Study Area

SN	VARIABLES	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Exposition to abject poverty through loss of basic needs: clothes, shelter and food	130 36.6	96 27	32 9	38 10.7	59 16.6
2	Destruction of farmlands and houses	138 38.9	98 27.6	32 9	57 16.1	30 8.5
3	Herdsman-farmers crisis has deny many farmers access to their farmland	125 35.2	109 30.7	32 9	63 17.7	26 7.3
4	Loss of human lives	110 30.9	184 51.8	32 9	9 2.5	20 5.6
5	The failure of government to address the situation of herdsman attacks decisively has several implications for national security	99 27.9	133 37.4	32 9	61 17.1	30 8.5

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Based on the analysis carried out, it was found that the response of the participant of sampled respondents is significant; this implies that the Socio-economic impact of the Farmer / Herder Conflict in Wamba local government includes, among other, the conflict affecting the social life of people living in the study area through the exposition to abject poverty through loss of viable

possessions of both cloths, shelter, food items and other social amenities. Furthermore, the social life of the populace in Wamba local government was thwarted by the crisis which denied many farmers access to their farmlands, loss of human lives and level of destruction caused by the farmer-herder conflict was a result of the failure of the government to address the issue and situation of herdsmen attacks decisively which has a multitude of insecurity implications. This affirms the studies conducted by Aliyu (2015), who opined that conflict leads to the destruction of lives and properties, which subjects the populace to a life of penury. Similarly, OliIbekwe and Nwankwo (2018) reported death and displacement of the populace as a result of farmer-herder conflict: Tiv people in Gwer West, Markudi and other towns at the border with Taraba state have recorded over 400 deaths and over 300 communities displaced, living in IDP Camps. Also, Ofem and Inyang (2014) reveal that the herder-farmer conflict has led to a reduction in income, savings and crop productivity.

In support of the above, a community leader in Ikkawangibi and Mada Station, Nasarawa Eggon (Mr. Adgizi Yakubu and Umbugus James) explained that;

“The influx of herder in their community due to herder-farmer conflict in the neighbouring state has done more harm than good. Their crops are destroyed on a yearly basis. In recent years, their crop production is nothing to show home about. Also their sales are very poor as little quantity of farm produced is taking to the market” (Interview on Saturday, October 16th, 2022; 1:24 pm, Nasarawa Eggon).

Similarly, further interview with security operatives ((SO) Police officers in Akwanga, Nasarawa Eggon and Wamba Command) on the same issue the following opinions was shared;

The command received countless complaints such as; destruction of crops and properties of farmers, rape of girls and women in the farm and cattle rustling. However, the security operatives ensured that the situations are promptly given adequate attention and put into order (Interview on Tuesday, October 4th,

2022; 2:25 pm, Akwanga. Saturday, October 16th, 2022; 9:30 am, Nasarawa Eggon, Thursday, October 27th, 10:00am, Wamba).

Table 4: Respondents opinion on impact of farmer/herder conflict on food security in the Study Area

SN	VARIABLES	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Insufficient food supply to agrarian communities	229 64.5	100 28.2	-	-	6 1.6
2	Loss of lives and injuries to people	95 26.7	198 55.7	4 1.1	18 5.1	40 11.3
3	Loss of stored products	98 27.6	180 50.7	10 2.8	37 10.4	30 8.4
4	Loss of farm income	138 38.8	200 56.3	-	11 3.1	6 1.6
5	Force relocation of farms	94 26.4	199 56.1	3 0.8	43 12.1	16 4.5
6	Farmers displacement	189 53.2	102 28.7	-	49 13.8	15 4.2
7	Unsafe environment for farming activities	220 61.9	88 24.7	7 1.9	8 2.2	32 9.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Based on the analysis conducted it was found that the responses of the sampled respondents is significant, this implies that impact of herder/ farmer conflict on food security in Wamba local government includes; insufficient food supply to agrarian communities (64.5), Unsafe environment for farming activities (61.9), loss of farm income (56.3), force relocation of farms (56.1), and loss of lives and injuries to local populace (55.7). This is in line with a study conducted by Dimelu et al (2017) reported that conflict significantly affects general livelihood assets of farmers. Herdsmen-farmers conflict is an impediment to food security. The displacement of farmers from the affected communities has drastically reduced agricultural productivity. This has been clearly demonstrated by relative shortage of farm produce in the rural and urban markets of central Nigeria (Chukwuma, 2016).

An FGD was conducted with the respondents to investigate how farmer / herder conflict affected food security in Wamba local government, according to their response;

“The aforementioned conflict has done much damage to their crops, which in turn significantly deteriorated farming output or productivity and paves room for tremendous price hike of food commodities across the study area.

FGD, further reveals that the conflict comes with other numerous challenges such as destruction of lives and properties, leaving wives as widows, children as orphans; native tends to forcefully migrate to other areas for safety, rape cases and subjection to life of penury due to loss of source of livelihood.” This corroborate with Abba and Usman (2008) asserted that farmers neglect the cultivation of some crops to avoid conflict with herdsmen and above all, conflict leads to breakdown of social system evidenced as insecurity of life, hunger or starvation and poverty.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the underlining factors for the escalation of farmer-herder conflict cannot be over emphasis. However, the studies revealed seasonality, expansion of farmland (landuse), increase in herds, environmental condition and cattle rustling. Wamba LGA and Nasarawa State at large is endowed with arable land for agriculture. These features attract more migrate from other state and neighbor conflict state, to settled down for farming and cattle rearing. In the recent time, the area has witnessed increased in population of herders which have created more propensity of herder / farmers conflict.

Following the increasing conflict, the following recommendation were made:

- The local communities should introduce peace building and conflict mechanism, this will served as peace builder in the circumstances of conflict escalation.
- The government should come up with policies that will paved herders right to land usage as this will curtail the ongoing clashes between both parties on arable lands.

- The government should adopt a sustainable ranching model (SRM) that can handle conflict faced as a result of open grazing which is the traditional method

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