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## Impact of Violent Conflict between Herders and Crop Farmers on Socio-economic Well-being of Women; a setback on the Sustainable Development Goals' Target

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### Abstract

The persistent prevalence of conflict between herders and crop farmers has increased both in frequency and intensity. The conflict is further compounded by climate change as desertification is driving a southward migration of cattle herders leading to frequent violent conflict between the herders and crop farmers. Due to their inherent social vulnerability, women are disproportionately impacted by violent conflict. The aftermath of these conflict poses a threat to the actualization of the target of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. This work x-rays the impact of violent conflicts between cattle herders and crop farmers on the socio-economic well-being of women in Makurdi town, Nigeria. Women in the internally displaces peoples' camps within Makurdi town were randomly selected for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire and was analyzed and presented in tables. The result shows that 52.5% of the women who used to earn between N51,000 – N100,000 before the crises now earn far less than that due to the negative impact of the conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen. Also, 50.7% no longer have access to sanitation and hygiene facilities due to their prolonged stay in the displaced peoples' camp due to the conflict. A further 70.0% of the women have lost shelter, which is very important, and their continuous stay in Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) camp has denied them a lot of things including good means of livelihood and income to handle their daily needs. The study recommends the implementation open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law to end the persistent conflict. Women should be given priority attention in order to alleviate their sufferings.

### Keywords

Violent conflict, Sustainable Development Goals, Socio-economic well-being, Women

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## I. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the heart of its implementation with its promise to “leave no one behind”. It provides an unprecedented opportunity to transform the lives of women and girls and to catalyze progress towards sustainable development in all dimensions; economic, social, and environmental (UN, 2017; Mishra and Tripathi, 2019). With its universal and transformative mandate, the 2030 Agenda outlines a set of 17 integrated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets to achieve our common aspiration for a more equitable and inclusive world.

In recent years, conflict between farmers and pastoralists has been one among the frontline threats to sustainable peace and development in Nigeria (Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018). Nigeria is not isolated in this equation, but Nigeria unfortunately, is a major climate theatre in the Sahel due to its geographical location; the country is straddled from the north by the expanding Sahara Desserts and from the south by the threatening sea level rise of the Atlantic Ocean. Situating her between this axis of evil burdened with exploding population, overcrowded urban centres, a weak economy, poor governance, corruption, poverty, unemployment, and conflicts Nigeria is sure in one big precarious climate and security crisis (Obaze, Kwaja, Onuoha, Adejoh, Sulaimon & Ugwu, 2022).

Sustainable production of agricultural products requires the prevalence of peaceful cohabitation among farmers and other settlers in their community. However, the quest for protection of secured economic sources of livelihood appears to be the bane of herdsman and farmers conflict globally, (Bello, 2013). In Africa, conflicts between farmers and cattle herders have been a common feature of economic activities for ages. According to Tonah (2006) as cited in (Ofuoku and Isife 2010) the period before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such problems were mainly restricted to the savannah belt of West Africa. During the period, cattle rearing was mainly prevalent in the Guinea, Sudan and Sahel savannah while crop production was done according to short rainy season on a very small scale. This situation gave the cattle herders the opportunity of having available to them a vast area of grassland. But as time went on and with the introduction of irrigation farming during the dry season when pasture normally wither and become unavailable for cattle, the herders started moving towards the coastal zones. This movement marked the starting point of the farmers-herders conflict (Ofuoku and Isife 2010).

The World Health Organization (WHO) as cited in Hamby (2017) has offered one of the stronger existing definitions of violence that is an influential example of the public health approach. Their definition is: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation”.

There is a long historical record of fluctuating conflict, competition and co-operation between settled farmers and herders, Sumberg (1997). Disappearing arable land and water bodies has gradually increased conflicts between farmers and pastoralist with respects to access to depleted or disappearing natural resource (Onuoha, 2022; IPCC, 2022). This change is compounding this trend, by exacerbating tensions and potentially triggering new violent conflicts in the context of pre-existing conflict drivers (Adejo, 2021). This includes periods of violent herders' domination over settled farming production systems and the conversion of former pastoral lands to cultivation. The current levels of conflict that occur in some locations are clearly intolerable for farmers, herders and also for the environment. The need for local communities to resort to such violence is indicative of a lack of policies, or that existing policies are not working to the benefit of these communities as a whole.

There is a conflict at the core of ecological phenomena, which include resource competition, environmental degradation (Ojo, 2022), and increasing urbanization. Conflict over Land Resources - Land degradation is a prominent feature of the Sahel, hence conflict over arable land resources remains a key area of climate change-induced security challenge. Therefore, the task ahead is to increase the adaptive capacity of affected poor communities and countries. Climate change has already affected West African agriculture through changes in rainfall patterns, characterised by strong inter-annual rainfall fluctuations, increased frequency of rainfall extremes and prolonged droughts (Sultan, Defrance & Iizumi 2019).

## II. Justification

Climate change poses a potential threat to aggravating the existing security problem worldwide (UN Security Council, 2021). Besides, there is a possibility that climate change exacerbates the current level of poverty, conflict, and ethnic distrust between communities and states (UN General Assembly, 2009). The consequences of climate change have

provided an understanding of human decision-making processes regarding where to migrate, when, and when to return (Warner & Van der Geest, 2013). Climate-induced drought is expected to aggravate socio-economic havoc and the endless migration of pastoralists. Available evidence reveals that competition and overreliance on natural resources for human survival trigger belligerence among ethnic groups (Ojo, 2020). This connection has been manifested in Nigeria, where climate-related migration has promoted armed conflicts among diverse ethnic groups. These violent conflicts over natural resources have been labeled in various dimensions as herders-farmers conflict (Ojo, 2020), eco-violence (Olumba et al., 2022), and pastoralists-farmers conflict (Ajala, 2020). These violent conflicts have occurred across Africa, including in Nigeria, where resource competition and access to natural resources remain a contention issue. Benue state at the epicentre of this conflict bearing its attendant consequences since the early 90s.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (2022) asserted that gender shapes an individual's experience of armed conflict in complex ways. Structural gender inequalities pre-exist armed conflict, gender roles and social power dynamics can shift and/ or be exacerbated in the course of armed conflict, and gender intersects with other factors including age, class, disability, race, religion and sexual orientation to determine individual experiences. Moreover, Anselme & Qamruzzaman, (2022) observed that women in developing countries face discriminatory practices, treated as been inferior to men and this societal disposition puts women at a disadvantage. There is a perceived link between the farmers-herders conflict and socio-economic well-being of women in Makurdi local government area, hence, the need for research in this area to uncover the real situation. In view of this situation, this study x-rays the impact of the conflict between crop farmers and cattle herders on the socio-economic well-being of women in town with a view to proffering solutions to this humanitarian and socio-economic problem.

### III. Materials and Methods

#### a. Study Area

The geographical local of Makurdi town is located at Lat.  $7^{\circ} 47'$  and  $10^{\circ} 00'$  North and Long  $6^{\circ} 25'$  and  $8^{\circ} 8'$  East of the equator. It is bounded by Guma Local Government Area to the North, 122 Applied Ecology and Environmental Sciences Gwer Local Government to the South, Gwer-West Local Government Area to the South-West and Doma Local Government Area of Nasarawa State to the North-West (Shabu & Tyonum, 2013) (Figure 1).

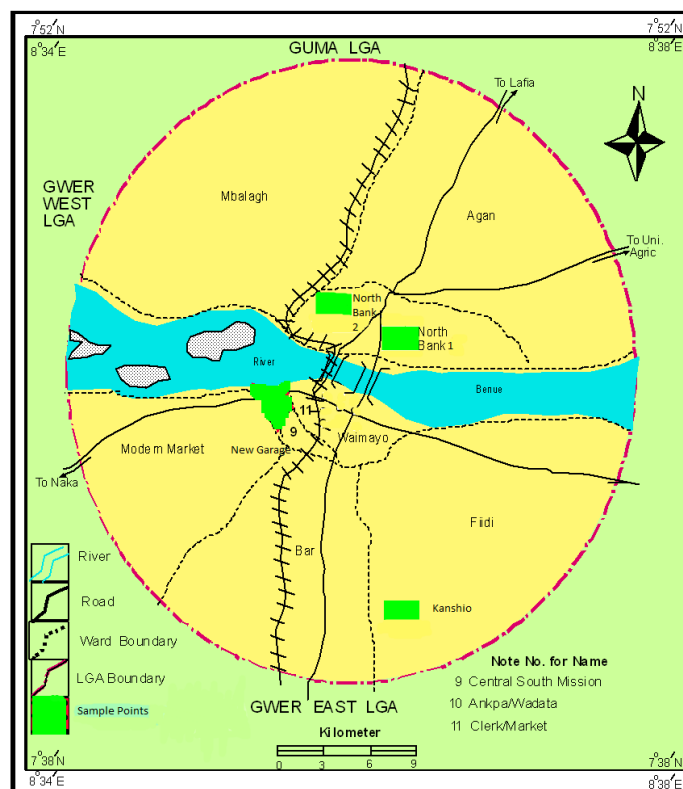


Figure 1: Makurdi, the study area showing the location of the automobile mechanic sites (sample points).

Source: Geographic Information System (GIS) Laboratory, Benue State University, Makurdi.

Makurdi is situated in the Benue Valley on the bank of river Benue. The town is strategically located on the North-South transportation network by road and by rail respectively, between Nasarawa and Enugu States with the total land area of about 810 square kilometer (National Population Commission, 1999). What is known as Makurdi today has been in existence since 1912. It started as a typical village composed of scattered Tiv compounds and Jukun fishermen settlement. With the advent of colonialism, Makurdi became a centre of river trade, a railway town and an administrative town. It became a provincial headquarters of Benue Province in 1927, when it was transferred from Abinsi. Following the Local Government reforms of 1970, Makurdi became the headquarters of Makurdi Division. In 1976, following the creation of Benue State out of the Benue Plateau, Makurdi doubles as the State headquarters (capital) as well as the headquarters of Makurdi Local Government Area. The rail road and the trunk 'A' road that connect the Eastern states to the North and the North-East making Makurdi a major cross road centre. Makurdi has a population of 226,198 a density of 323 persons per square kilometres as of 1991, the National Population Census data figures, has a population of 300, 377 with a density of over 400 persons per square kilometres as of the 2006 National population census data figures and the highest in the state (Nyagba, 1995).

#### *b. Methodology*

The study randomly collected data from internally Displaced Peoples' (IDPs) camps within Makurdi, the study area. Data collection was done through the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire had two (2) sections; section A covered socio-demographic characteristics (age, household size, occupation and income) of respondents and section B covered access to sanitation, hygiene and health facilities, means of livelihood, and impact of the farmers-herders conflict on socio-economic well-being of women. Data collected is presented in tables, charts, and graphs for easy understanding. The choice of the tools is in line with the objectives and the overall aim of the study.

### **IV. Results and Findings**

#### *a. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

The critical socio-demographic characteristics of respondents considered in the study include; gender, level of education, age, income, occupation, family size, level of involvement into farming and major crop cultivated.

##### *i. Age*

The result of age of the respondents is presented in Table 4.3. In the result, 114 respondents (38%) were in the age category of 18 – 25years, 85 (28.3%) respondents were in the age group of 26 – 35years. Meanwhile, the age category of 46 years and above had 59 respondents representing 19.7% and 34 (11.3%) respondents.

##### *ii. Level of Education*

The result of educational attainment of respondents is presented in Table 4.2. The result shows that 150 respondents representing 50.0% acquired secondary education, 84 representing 28.0% acquired primary education and 43 respondents representing 14.3% had no formal education. Meanwhile, 23 respondents (7.7%) acquired tertiary education. The result implies that the respondents have different levels of educational attainment.

##### *iii. Estimated Income*

The result of income of the respondents is presented in Table 4.4. The result shows that 112 respondents representing 37.3% have annual income of about N51,000 – 100, 000 and 82 respondents representing 27.3% have estimated annual income of about N100, 000 and above. The result further shows that income groups of less than N30,000 – N 50, 000 and less than N30, 000 have 70 (23.4%) and 36 (12.0%) respectively. It can be inferred from the result that the respondents are mostly low-income earners.

##### *iv. Occupation*

The result of occupational distribution of respondents is presented in Table 4.5. According to the result farming has 244 respondents representing 81.3%, artisans have 21 respondents representing 7.0% and 14 (4.7%) of the respondents were civil servants. Meanwhile, 11 respondents representing 3.7% were retirees and 10 (3.3%) were into business. It can be inferred from the result that the respondents were predominantly farmers with just a few engaging in other occupations.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.**

Age group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 25	114	38.0
26 – 35	85	28.3
46 and above	59	19.7
36 – 45	42	14
Total	300	100
Level of education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary	150	50.0
Primary	84	28.0
Primary	84	28.0
No formal	43	14.3
Tertiary	23	7.7
Total	300	100
Estimated Annual Income	Frequency	Percentage
N51 – 100, 000	112	37.3
N100, 000 and above	82	27.3
N30 – 50, 000	70	23.4
less than N30,000	36	12.0
Total	300	100
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Farming	244	81.3
Artisans	21	7.0
Civil servants	14	4.7
Business	11	3.7
Retirees	10	3.3
Total	300	100
Household size	Frequency	Percentage
9 – 12	152	50.7
5 – 8	102	34.0
13 and above	33	11.0
5 – 8	13	4.3
Total	300	100
Source: Field work, 2024		

*b. Impact of Farmers-herders Crises on Means of Livelihood*

The study also considered the impact of the farmers-herders' crises on respondents' means of livelihood. The impact of the crises on farm size is presented in the following paragraphs. The result of the impact of farmers-herders' crises on respondents' means of livelihood is presented in Table 2. The result shows that 120 respondents representing 49.2% had farm sizes of about 2 hectares, 86 respondents representing 35.2% used to cultivate 1 hectare of land. Meanwhile, 21 respondents representing 8.6% owned farm sizes of about 3 hectares and 17 respondents representing 7.0% had farm size of less than 1 hectares. On whether the respondents are still farming, 233 respondents representing 95.5% were still farming while 11 respondents representing 4.5% were no longer farming. Furthermore, the result shows that due to the conflict, 209 (8.6%) respondents have gone farming in different locations other than their communities and 24 (10.4%) respondents were still farming in the same community. The

other respondents who were artisans however said they still ply their trade in their new places of abode, but the conflict has negatively impacted their means of livelihood. It can be inferred from the result that majority of the respondents have been negatively affected as their farm size has reduced and some have even stopped farming. More so, the crises have led some respondents to look for farmlands outside their community.

*c. Impact of the Farmers-herders Conflict on Access to Sanitation and Hygiene Facilities*

The study also examined the impact of the farmers-herders' crises on access to sanitation and hygiene facilities in the study area. The result of the impact of the crises on access to sanitation and hygiene facilities is presented in Table 2. The result shows that 152 respondents representing 50.7% no longer have access to sanitation and hygiene facilities due to the conflict and 90 respondents representing 30.0% irregular access to sanitation and hygiene facilities. More so, 58 respondents only have access to sanitation and hygiene facilities once in a long time, particularly when donors come to visit the camp where they stay.

*d. Impact of the Farmers-herders Conflict on Socio-economic Well-being of Women*

The result of the impact of farmers-herders' conflict on the socio-economic well-being of women in Makurdi Local Government Area is presented in Table 2. The result shows that, shows that of the 210 respondents (70.0%) admitted that they have lost shelter, which is very important, and their continuous stay in Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) camp has denied them a lot of things including good means of livelihood and income to handle their daily needs. Also, 69 respondents representing (23.0%) said their dignity as women and humans has been compromised due to the conflict as they have lost their means of livelihood and therefore depend so much on other people for survival. Meanwhile, 21 of the respondents admitted that their socio-economic well-being has been impacted negatively by the farmer-herders' conflict, however, the impact is minimal, (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Impact of Farmers-herders Crises on Respondents' means of livelihood**

Farm size	Frequency	Percentage (%)
2 hectare	120	49.2
1 hectare	86	35.2
3 hectares	21	8.6
Less than 1 hectare	17	7.0
Total	244	100
Still farming after the conflict		
Yes	233	95.5
No	11	4.5
Total	244	100
Present farm location		
Outside the community	209	89.6
within the community	24	10.4
Total	233	100
Income before the conflict (N)		
51,000 – 100,000	112	37.3
100,000 and above	82	32.2
30,000 – 50,000	39	28.8
1,000 – 29,000	11	3.4
Total	244	100
Income after the conflict		
N 30,000 – 50,000	128	52.5

51,000 – 80,000	59	24.1
N 100,000 and above	46	18.9
No longer into farming	11	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>
Access to sanitation and hygiene facilities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No access	152	50.7
Irregular access	90	30.0
Once in a long time	58	19.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nature/ degree of impact of the crises		
Loss of livelihood	210	70.0
Compromise well-being	69	23
Minimal impact	21	7.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
Source: Field work, 2024		

## V. Conclusion

The study found that the women in the study area lack access to basic necessities. This situation negatively affects their socio-economic well-being. This is a serious setback in the drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals' target for 2030. The study found that the respondents cut across different age groups but majority are in the active productive age groups (18 – 25, 26 – 35, and 36 – 45). Only a few (14%) fell in the group of 42 years and above. This result implies that the farmers-herders' conflict has negatively impacted women in the study area by truncating their productivity. From their income to means of livelihood, and access to sanitation and hygiene facilities, there has been a shift to the negative side of the divide. This scenario is in direct contrast to the expectations of the SDGs. To enhance the socio-economic well-being and safety of women, they must first return to their homes where their lives are better off as compared to that in the Internally Displaced Peoples camps. Their means of livelihood must also be protected in order to enhance their economic viability. Furthermore, women must be provided good and regular access to hygiene and sanitation facilities for their social, economic and general well-being. In view of the foregoing, it is recommended that the open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law be fully implemented. Lastly, women should be given priority attention as they are more vulnerable in crises situations.

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