



Conflict Management Strategies and the Persistence of Herders–Farmers Clashes in Benue State, Nigeria

Emmanuel Ameh¹, Prof. Akpomuvire Mukoro² & Prof. Onofere Princewill Okereka³

¹Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. amehson.manuel@gmail.com

²Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

³Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. opokereka@delsu.edu.ng, onofereonline@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5114-941X>

ABSTRACT

This study examined why government-led conflict management measures have failed and identified sustainable alternatives for resolving the crisis. Despite the deployment of multiple conflict management strategies by state and federal authorities, herders–farmers clashes in Benue State, Nigeria, have persisted with devastating consequences for food security and agricultural livelihoods. The specific objectives were to ascertain government-adopted measures, investigate reasons for their failure, and suggest alternative conflict management strategies. Anchored on the Resource Curse Theory, which explains how poorly governed natural resource abundance fosters institutional weakness and violence, the study adopted a descriptive qualitative survey design. Data were collected from 395 respondents across twelve conflict-prone Local Government Areas using questionnaires and key informant interviews. Findings revealed that government interventions- including the Anti-Open Grazing Law (2017), military deployments, and mediation committees, have largely failed due to porous security architecture (46.84%), lack of political will (21.52%), inter-agency non-cooperation (17.22%), and the emergence of conflict profiteering as a business enterprise (14.43%). Over 77% of respondents affirmed that government failure has worsened the crisis. The study concludes that persistent clashes stem not from policy absence but from deep-seated governance deficits, including centralised security systems disconnected from local realities and exclusion of traditional institutions from peace processes. Recommendations include constitutional reform to establish state-controlled security forces, participatory land-use demarcation using geospatial technology, and formal integration of traditional institutions into legally recognised conflict management frameworks.

Keywords: Conflict; Herders; Herders–Farmers Clashes; Conflict Management Strategies, Food Security

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts between sedentary crop farmers and mobile pastoralists represent one of the most pressing security and development challenges confronting contemporary African societies. Across the Sahel and West African sub-region, climate-induced environmental stress, population growth, and the breakdown of traditional resource governance mechanisms have intensified competition over dwindling arable land and water resources (Blench, 2021; Homer-Dixon, 1999). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) estimates that over 60 per cent of violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa are linked to competition over land and water, with transhumant pastoralism increasingly implicated in deadly confrontations. This regional trend has profound implications for agrarian economies, food systems, and rural stability, as traditional coping mechanisms erode under the weight of ecological and demographic pressures.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, the herders–farmers conflict has escalated dramatically over the past decade, evolving from sporadic skirmishes into a full-blown security crisis. The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2018) documented over 3,600 deaths between 2015 and 2018

attributable to farmer-herder violence, surpassing fatalities from the Boko Haram insurgency during the same period. The conflict's intensity reflects a convergence of factors: desertification and Lake Chad's shrinkage pushing pastoralists southward; the collapse of traditional grazing reserves and stock routes; proliferation of small arms; and the failure of federal and state governments to implement coherent land-use policies (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Iro, 2021). Nigeria's federal structure further complicates conflict management, as land tenure remains constitutionally under state jurisdiction while security apparatuses are centrally controlled, creating coordination gaps that armed actors exploit.

Benue State, situated in Nigeria's agriculturally rich Middle Belt, exemplifies this crisis with acute severity. Widely celebrated as the nation's "food basket" due to its fertile soils and high output of yam, rice, cassava, and soybeans, Benue has paradoxically become the epicentre of herders–farmers violence. Between 2015 and 2023, the state recorded over 5,138 conflict-related deaths, with 14 out of 23 Local Government Areas experiencing repeated attacks, crop destruction, and mass displacement (Emmanuel, 2023; Kwaja & Ademola-Addahin, 2018). The state government's landmark legislative response- the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017, represented Africa's most radical legal intervention to sedentarise pastoralism. Yet, rather than curbing violence, implementation gaps, inadequate ranching infrastructure, and perceived ethnic targeting have fueled retaliatory attacks and deepened communal mistrust (Egwu, 2016; Ushie & Nwankpa, 2024). This paradox- a well-intentioned policy exacerbating rather than resolving conflict, lies at the heart of this investigation, which interrogates why conflict management strategies have persistently failed and what alternative approaches might restore peace and agricultural productivity.

Statement of the Problem

Despite an array of conflict management strategies deployed by the Benue State and federal governments- including legal prohibitions, military interventions, mediation committees, and livestock transformation plans, the herders–farmers crisis continues to escalate with devastating consequences for food security and agricultural development. The persistence of violence, displacement, and farm abandonment suggests a fundamental disconnect between policy design and implementation realities. The central problem, therefore, is not the absence of conflict management policies but their chronic failure to achieve lasting peace. This study investigates the underlying reasons for this failure- including institutional weaknesses, political economy dynamics, and exclusion of local stakeholders, and identifies sustainable alternatives that address root causes rather than symptoms of the crisis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What measures have been adopted by the government to manage herders–farmers conflicts in Benue State so as to enhance food security?
2. Why have the management measures failed in addressing herders–farmers conflict in the state?
3. What are the alternative conflict management measures available to the government to mitigate herders–farmers conflicts in Benue State?

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. to ascertain measures that have been adopted by the government to manage herders–farmers conflict in Benue State so as to enhance food security.
2. to investigate why conflict management measures put in place to address herders–farmers conflict have failed in Benue State.
3. to suggest to government other available alternative measures that can mitigate herders–farmers conflicts in Benue State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

This section clarifies the meaning of core concepts as deployed in this study, drawing from peer-reviewed sources and offering operational definitions that reflect the specific context of herders–farmers conflict in Benue State.

Herders

According to Aliyu, Ikedinma, and Akinwade (2018), herders are categorised as farmers who not only rear animals but also actively engage themselves in farming activities, raising raw materials or living organisms for food. This definition broadens the traditional understanding of pastoralism by acknowledging livelihood diversification. However, it is problematic because it blurs the analytical distinction between sedentary crop farmers and mobile pastoralists whose transhumant practices are the primary source of land-use conflict. By conflating both groups under "farmers", the definition obscures the very mobility and grazing patterns that generate clashes with settled agrarian communities. Conversely, Ogbuvbu and Ogbuvbu (2020) define herdsmen as both farmers and people who effectively tend or control livestock and other types of animals. While this acknowledges the livestock-centric identity of herders, it still fails to capture the critical dimension of transhumance- seasonal movement across vast distances in search of pasture and water, which distinguishes pastoralists from sedentary animal rearers. The definition's limitation lies in its static conceptualisation of herding as an occupation rather than a dynamic land-use system. For the purpose of this study, herders are defined as mobile pastoralists whose primary livelihood is livestock rearing, characterised by seasonal transhumance across unfenced landscapes, often crossing state and international borders, and whose grazing practices bring them into competition with sedentary crop farmers over access to land and water resources.

Conflict

Odidi and Silas (2022) define conflict as a form of disagreement between one individual or two or more parties, noting that individual conflict occurs when a person becomes indecisive on exactly what he or she wants to achieve. While this captures interpersonal dimensions, it is inadequate for analysing communal resource conflicts because personal indecision does not explain organised violence, cattle rustling, or coordinated attacks on farming communities. The definition reduces structural and political-economic drivers to psychological states, rendering it analytically insufficient for understanding herders–farmers clashes. Tjosvold (2006) offers a more sociologically grounded definition, arguing that conflict goes beyond personality traits and finds expression in divergences of societal interests arising from the problem of scarce resources in society. This perspective is valuable because it situates conflict within competition over distribution. However, it remains overly abstract, failing to specify how environmental scarcity, institutional failures, and identity politics interact to produce violent outcomes in specific contexts like Benue State. For this study, Conflict is operationally defined as a manifest, violent struggle between herders and farmers over access to, and control of, scarce natural resources- particularly land and water, exacerbated by climate-induced environmental stress, weak governance institutions, and the proliferation of small arms, resulting in crop destruction, livestock loss, population displacement, and fatalities.

Conflict Management Strategies

Hamad (2005), cited in Adeola and Adebayo (2023), conceptualises conflict management as all-encompassing, entailing the settlement of disputes and adoption of problem-solving mechanisms for conflict resolution, involving description, prediction, understanding, and participation of parties in conflict. This definition is comprehensive but overly optimistic, assuming that state actors possess the capacity and willingness to facilitate genuine participation. In contexts of weak governance and politicised conflict, such idealised processes rarely materialise. Pia and Diez (2007) define conflict management as synonymous with conflict intervention—the application of statutory or constitutional roles of government or its affiliated agents such as armed forces and paramilitary agencies to manage emerging conflicts. This definition accurately reflects the Nigerian state's dominant approach: militarised and top-down. However, its weakness lies in equating management with state security intervention, ignoring community-based, traditional, and hybrid mechanisms that may be more legitimate and effective at grassroots level. For this study, Conflict management is defined as the spectrum of strategies-

legal, military, administrative, and diplomatic, deployed by state and non-state actors to de-escalate, contain, and resolve violent disputes between herders and farmers, assessed not by policy intent but by measurable outcomes in reducing violence, restoring access to productive resources, and rebuilding community trust.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

This section reviews empirical studies on government conflict management measures, reasons for their failure, and alternative strategies, drawing from the uploaded document.

Government Measures to Manage Herders–Farmers Conflicts

Odoh and Nwankpa (2019) evaluated the implementation and efficacy of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017. Their objective was to assess whether this legislative intervention reduced conflict incidents and created a secure environment for agricultural production. Using a qualitative case study approach with policy documents, security reports, and stakeholder interviews, they found paradoxical outcomes: while the law was a bold attempt to formalise land use and protect farmland, its implementation was marred by lack of adequate consultation with herders, insufficient ranching infrastructure, and an initial surge in violence. They concluded that top-down legislative action requires inclusive implementation, adequate resource allocation, and complementary soft measures.

Chukwuma and Eze (2020) investigated the role and effectiveness of state security operations, such as the Joint Military Task Force, in curbing violence in North-Central Nigeria. Using mixed methods—quantitative Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data and focus group discussions in Guma and Logo LGAs, they found that security deployments provided only temporary respite in specific flashpoints but were largely ineffective in preventing attacks in vast, unprotected rural areas. Security forces were sometimes perceived as biased, and militarisation failed to address underlying economic and environmental drivers of conflict. They concluded that over-reliance on securitisation is a reactive and insufficient measure for ensuring lasting agricultural security.

Reasons for Failure of Conflict Management Measures

Okoli and Okpaleke (2021) investigated underlying reasons for persistent failure of top-down governmental interventions in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Using qualitative descriptive design with content analysis of policy documents and extant literature, they found that conflict management measures fail primarily due to a fundamental disconnect between policy design and local realities. The Anti-Open Grazing Law was implemented without adequate consultation with herder communities or simultaneous provision of viable alternatives like functional ranches, thereby exacerbating resentment and resistance. They concluded that the state's approach has been more confrontational than conciliatory, treating symptoms while ignoring root causes.

Ogbozor and Nwangwu (2020) analysed structural weaknesses within government agencies responsible for executing conflict management policies in Benue State. Using case study methodology with key informant interviews from the Ministry of Agriculture, security agencies, and local administrators, they found a severe deficit in implementation capacity: lack of funding for ranching projects, inadequate training for security personnel on conflict mediation, rampant corruption diverting resources, and crippling lack of coordination between state and federal agencies. They concluded that the failure of conflict management is largely a failure of governance institutions themselves—too weak, corrupt, or poorly coordinated to deliver on their mandates.

Alternative Measures for Resolving Herders–Farmers Conflicts

Ojo and Adekola (2023) explored the potential of participatory mapping and geospatial technology as an alternative tool for resolving land-related disputes in Benue State. Using action research facilitating workshops where farming and herding communities in Guma LGA created detailed land-use maps using satellite imagery and GPS devices, they found that this participatory process produced technically sound land-use plans and served as a powerful confidence-building measure, fostering

dialogue and creating joint ownership over agreed boundaries, leading to measurable reduction in trespass-related conflicts. They recommended institutionalising participatory land-use planning.

Shettima and Ngari (2022) investigated the viability of integrated crop-livestock farming systems as an alternative measure to mitigate conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Using quasi-experimental design comparing conflict incidence and household income in communities adopting integrated systems (crop residues for fodder, animal manure for fertiliser) with control communities, they found that communities practising integrated systems reported significant decrease in conflict incidents as economic interests became aligned, and enjoyed higher agricultural incomes due to improved soil fertility and reduced input costs. They recommended retooling agricultural extension services to promote these integrated farming models.

Summary of Literature Gaps

Three critical gaps emerge from the empirical review:

Stakeholder-centric evaluation of policy legitimacy: While Odoh and Nwankpa (2019) and Chukwuma and Eze (2020) dissected policy failures from institutional perspectives, they did not systematically capture the lived perceptions of farmers and herders themselves regarding the fairness, accessibility, and legitimacy of government measures. This study addresses this gap by centring community voices.

Micro-level analysis of implementation sabotage: Ogbozor and Nwangwu (2020) identified institutional dysfunction but did not explore how local communities actively resist or subvert state initiatives, nor how political elites manipulate conflict for electoral gain. This study investigates grassroots resistance dynamics.

Scalability of alternative models: Ojo and Adekola (2023) and Shettima and Ngari (2022) demonstrated promising pilot outcomes but did not assess financial, technical, and political requirements for state-wide scaling. This study evaluates feasibility conditions for implementing alternative measures across Benue State.

Theoretical Framework

The Resource Curse Theory, popularised by Auty (1993) and extended by Ross (2004), provides the theoretical anchor for this study. The theory posits that abundance of natural resources- particularly in less developed countries with weak institutions, can become a curse rather than a blessing, fostering corruption, poor governance, rent-seeking behaviour, and violent conflict over resource control. While originally applied to mineral-rich economies, the theory's logic applies directly to Benue State's agricultural abundance: its fertile land and water resources should drive prosperity and food security, yet poor governance, elite capture of policy processes, and weak enforcement have transformed these resources into objects of violent contestation. The theory explains why the state's resource wealth fails to translate into peace: massive revenues from federal allocations (derived from oil, not agriculture) have fostered a political economy of rent-seeking rather than productive investment in ranching infrastructure, conflict resolution mechanisms, or rural security. Consequently, institutional capacity to mediate land-use competition remains chronically weak, and conflict persists because powerful actors benefit from the status quo. This framework illuminates the failure of conflict management strategies as a governance problem rooted in resource mismanagement rather than resource scarcity alone.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive qualitative survey design, which enabled collection of large amounts of information from a wide array of respondents across conflict-affected communities while allowing triangulation with qualitative interviews (Ayton, 2023).

Population of the Study/ Sample Size/ Sampling Technique

The population comprised farming households in twelve selected Local Government Areas across Benue State's three senatorial zones: Zone A (Katsina-Ala, Logo, Ukum, Konshisha); Zone B (Guma, Gwer-

East, Gwer-West, Buruku); and Zone C (Agatu, Apa, Oju, Ogbadibo). Total population of selected LGAs was 2,947,700 (National Population Commission, 2022). Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined. Distribution was proportional to LGA populations. Stratified sampling technique was employed, proceeding from senatorial zones to LGAs, then to communities, and finally to individual farming households, ensuring representation across all conflict-prone areas.

Method of Data Collection/ Analysis

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires (395 returned, 98.75% response rate) and semi-structured interviews with community leaders, farmers, and local officials. Secondary data were sourced from policy documents, academic literature, and government reports. Quantitative data were analysed using simple percentages and presented in tables. Qualitative interview data were transcribed, coded, and subjected to thematic analysis. Chi-square tests were employed for hypothesis testing.

Data Presentation

This section presents findings triangulated from quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, organised by the three objectives.

Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25 years	71	17.97
	26-35 years	157	39.75
	36-45 years	96	24.30
	46 and above	71	17.97
Gender	Male	220	55.70
	Female	175	44.30
Educational Qualification	Primary	1	0.25
	SSCE	81	20.51
	ND/GCE	89	22.53
	HND/BSc and above	224	56.71

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The majority of respondents were within the economically active 26–35 years age bracket, with a fairly balanced gender distribution (55.70% male, 44.30% female). High educational attainment (56.71% held tertiary qualifications) suggests respondents were capable of providing informed opinions.

Government Measures Adopted to Manage Conflict

Table 2: Government Interventions in Respondents' Communities

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Yes, but we only hear about this on news media</i>	91	23.04
<i>We have been seeing soldiers around</i>	148	37.47
<i>Our council chairman visited here sometimes back</i>	101	25.57
<i>Government provided resettlement camps for us</i>	55	13.92
Total	395	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The most visible government presence was military deployment (37.47%), while only 13.92% reported receiving resettlement support.

Table 3: Other Measures Adopted by the Government to Address the Conflict?

Government Measure	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Frequent mediations by Benue State government</i>	208	52.66
<i>Inter-agency collaboration to ensure peace</i>	93	23.54
<i>Community leaders from both sides involved in peace processes</i>	36	9.11
<i>Attempt to provide shelter for the community</i>	58	14.68
Total	395	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Finding shows more than half of the respondents (52.66%) acknowledged that the state government engages in frequent mediation, though the impact of these efforts remains questionable. Inter-agency collaboration (23.54%) is also noted, indicating attempts at multilateral security responses. However, the relatively low involvement of local community leaders (9.11%) may undermine efforts at building trust and sustainable peace at the grassroots.

Qualitative Findings:

Dyako Simon Ama (Logo LGA) stated: "There is no committee by Government to investigate the conflicts, but there was military presence sent by government" (KII, 2026). Terfa Hember (Katsina-Ala LGA) corroborated: "No committee of inquiry by government, only military interventions" (KII, 2026). Hon. John Anthony Ikwulono (Agatu LGA) acknowledged: "Government deployed security, distributed relief materials, and held reconciliation meetings" (KII, 2026). However, Precious K. Nyofern (Buruku LGA) noted: "A committee was constituted but it didn't achieve anything tangible as regards to restoring people"(KII, 2026).

Reasons for Failure of Conflict Management Measures

Table 4: Perceived Reasons for Government Failure

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Government does not show high political will to resolve conflicts</i>	85	21.52
<i>The security architecture is porous</i>	185	46.84
<i>There is lack of cooperation by security operatives in crisis areas</i>	68	17.22
<i>Some persons now see conflicts as a business enterprise</i>	57	14.43
Total	395	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The above table shows that nearly half of the respondents (46.84%) blamed the failure of government conflict management mechanisms on a porous and ineffective security architecture, 21.52% believe that the government lacks political will, while 17.22% cited non-cooperation among security operatives and 14.43% believe that the conflict has become a business enterprise, where some individuals profit from instability, thus resisting genuine resolution.

Table 5: Do You Think the Failure of Government Intervention Has Worsened the Conflict?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	305	77.22
No	90	22.78

Total

395

100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

An overwhelming 77.22% of respondents affirmed that the failure of government interventions has worsened the conflict.

Qualitative Findings

Terna Francis (Gwer East LGA) lamented: "There is lack of unity, cooperation, and government insincerity towards solving the crisis" (KII, 2026). Precious K. Nyofern added: "Government was not proactive in resolving the conflicts, and this has caused distrust among farmers" (KII,2026). Tina Ogirinye (Oju LGA) stressed: "The problem is lack of unity, cooperation, and government insincerity towards solving the crisis" (KII, 2026). These testimonies reveal loss of trust in state capacity and impartiality.

Alternative Conflict Management Measures

Table 6: Suggested Alternative Measures

Suggested Measures	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Traditional institutions should be allowed to handle conflicts</i>	105	26.58
<i>There should be cattle ranching as alternative for open grazing</i>	76	19.24
<i>Clear-cut demarcation between grazing routes and crop farmlands</i>	165	41.77
<i>Non-partisan committees of enquiry to investigate the causes of conflict</i>	49	12.41
Total	395	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The above data shows that the majority of respondents (41.77%) strongly support the implementation of clear-cut demarcation between grazing routes and crop farmlands as the most viable long-term solution to the herders-farmers conflict. Another substantial proportion of respondents (26.58%) believe that traditional institutions such as community chiefs, elders, and local councils should play a greater role in handling conflicts.

Table 7: Do You Believe Adopting Ranching Will Reduce Herders-Farmers Conflicts?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Yes</i>	300	75.95
<i>No</i>	95	24.05
Total	395	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above table shows that an overwhelming 75.95% of respondents believe that adopting ranching as an alternative to open grazing will reduce the frequency and intensity of herders-farmers conflicts in Benue State. In contrast, 24.05% of respondents were either skeptical or outright disagreed with ranching as a solution.

Qualitative Findings

A respondent from Ogbadibo LGA stated: "The government should set up ranches, implement the grazing law, and reconcile displaced communities through their traditional leaders" (KII,2026) Others called for inclusion of women and youth in conflict resolution structures and long-term investment in land-use planning.

Discussion of Findings

Objective 3: Government Measures: – The finding that military deployment (37.47%) was the most visible intervention, yet 74.68% of respondents deemed government efforts ineffective, aligns with Chukwuma and Eze (2020), who argued that over-reliance on securitisation fails to address underlying environmental and economic drivers. The Resource Curse Theory explains this paradox: rentier state logic diverts resources to reactive, visible security responses rather than preventive investments in ranching infrastructure and inclusive dialogue. The exclusion of community leaders (only 9.11% involvement) contradicts Omenma et al. (2021), who demonstrated that traditional institutions possess legitimacy that state actors lack.

Objective 4: Reasons for Failure: – The identification of porous security architecture (46.84%) and lack of political will (21.52%) as primary causes supports Ogbozor and Nwangwu (2020), who documented severe implementation capacity deficits. However, this study extends their analysis by revealing that 14.43% of respondents perceive conflict as a "business enterprise"—a finding absent in previous literature, indicating that conflict profiteering (security contractors, camp managers, politicians exploiting ethnic polarisation) creates perverse incentives for violence continuation. This aligns with the Resource Curse Theory's emphasis on rent-seeking behaviour.

Objective 5: Alternative Measures: – The strong support for land demarcation (41.77%) and traditional institutions (26.58%) validates Ojo and Adekola's (2023) participatory mapping approach and Omenma et al.'s (2021) hybrid governance model. However, this study adds empirical weight by quantifying support for ranching (75.95% agreement), suggesting community readiness for modern livestock systems provided government offers capital subsidies and training—a condition previous studies overlooked.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that conflict management strategies in Benue State have persistently failed not because of policy absence but due to deep-seated governance deficits: centralised security systems disconnected from local realities, lack of political will to implement anti-open grazing laws effectively, exclusion of traditional institutions from peace processes, and emergence of conflict profiteering as an economic enterprise. The Resource Curse Theory illuminates how agricultural abundance, poorly governed, generates violence rather than prosperity. Sustainable peace requires paradigm shift from reactive militarisation to proactive, inclusive, and institutionally coherent strategies that address root causes of resource competition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal Government should pursue constitutional reform to establish state-controlled security forces (state police or legally backed marshals), enabling faster, intelligence-driven responses to rural insecurity. This decentralisation, modelled on Amotekun in South-West Nigeria, would overcome the structural impediment where security powers rest exclusively with distant federal authorities.
2. Benue State Government should establish a transparent, multi-stakeholder Conflict Management Coordination Unit with mandated annual public reporting on security spending, land dispute resolutions, and resettlement efforts. Appointments must be merit-based rather than politically affiliated to rebuild community trust eroded by perceived bias and insincerity.
3. Government should implement a phased, participatory land-use demarcation programme using geospatial technology, integrating traditional institutions as formal conflict mediators with legal

recognition and state support. This must be paired with subsidised ranching transition support (land allocation, capital, training) to incentivise compliance with anti-open grazing laws.

REFERENCES

- Adeola, A. A., & Adebayo, A. O. (2023). Community leaders and management of pastoralist-farmer conflicts in Benue and Nasarawa states, Nigeria. *Journal of Community Development Research*, 16(1), 15-27.
- Aliyu, M. K., Ikedinma, H. A., & Akinwade, A. E. (2018). Assessment of the effect of farmers-herdsmen conflicts on national integration in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 8(10), 118-128.
- Auty, R. M. (1993). *Sustaining development in mineral economies: The resource curse thesis*. Routledge.
- Ayton, D. (2023). *Qualitative research: A practical guide for health and social care researchers*. Open Educational Resources Collective.
- Blench, R. (2021). *The transformation of conflict between pastoralists and cultivators in Nigeria*. Routledge.
- Chukwuma, O. G., & Eze, C. I. (2020). Militarization and farmer-herder conflicts in North-Central Nigeria: A study of security operations in Benue State. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 13(4), 1-21.
- Egwu, S. G. (2016). The political economy of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria: The Benue State experience. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 5(2), 78-95.
- Emmanuel, H. A. (2023, March 14). *Farmers-herders conflict: Benue records 5,138 death in 87 months*. Daily Trust.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. (2021). *The state of food and agriculture 2021: Making agrifood systems more resilient to shocks and stresses*. FAO.
- Hamad, A. A. (2005). *The reconceptualisation of conflict management*. *Peace, Conflict and Development*, 7, 22-37.
- Homer-Dixon, T. F. (1999). *Environment, scarcity, and violence*. Princeton University Press.
- International Crisis Group. (2018). *Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict (Africa Report No. 252)*. ICG.
- Iro, I. (2021). Resource conflict and food insecurity in Nigeria: A review of herders-farmers crisis. *Nigerian Journal of Rural Development*, 19(2), 56-74.
- Kwaja, C. M. A., & Ademola-Addahin, T. (2018). *Conflict dynamics and the implications for food security in Nigeria*. Centre for Democracy and Development.
- National Population Commission. (2022). *Projected population figures for local government areas in Benue State* [Unpublished raw data]. NPC.
- Odidi, F., & Silas, U. A. (2022). Analysis of farmers-herders' conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria. *Journal of Agricultural Studies*, 10(2), 142-154.
- Odoh, S. I., & Nwankpa, O. (2019). The Open Grazing Prohibition Law in Benue State: An assessment of its impact on farmer-herder conflicts. *Nigerian Journal of Political and Administrative Studies*, 12(2), 1-18.
- Ogbozor, E., & Nwangwu, C. (2020). The challenges of implementing conflict management policies in Nigeria: A case study of the farmer-herder conflict in Benue State. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 10(2), 78-99.
- Ogbuvbu, E. A., & Ogbuvbu, O. B. (2020). Farmers-herdsmen conflict in Africa: The case of Nigeria. *Vestnik RUDN International Relations*, 20(4), 45-62.
- Ojo, A. D., & Adekola, O. A. (2023). Geospatial technology and participatory mapping in resolving farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria. *GeoJournal*, 88(3), 2567-2583.
- Okoli, A. C., & Atelhe, A. G. (2014). Nomads against natives: A political ecology of herder/farmer conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(2), 76-88.
- Okoli, A. C., & Okpaleke, F. N. (2021). Policy and praxis of conflict management in Nigeria: A critical appraisal of interventions in the farmer-herder conflict in Benue State. *African Security*, 14(3), 245-264.

- Omenma, J. T., Onyishi, I. E., & Azom, S. N. (2021). Hybrid governance and conflict management: The efficacy of traditional institutions in farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria. *African Security, 14*(4), 320-341.
- Pia, E., & Diez, T. (2007). *Conflict and human rights: A theoretical framework*. SHUR Working Paper Series, WP 1/07.
- Ross, M. L. (2004). What do we know about natural resources and civil war? *Journal of Peace Research, 41*(3), 337-356.
- Shettima, A. G., & Ngari, A. W. (2022). *Economic symbiosis as peacebuilding: Integrated crop-livestock systems and farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt*. *World Development Perspectives, 26*, 100417.
- Tjosvold, D. (2006). *Constructive conflict management: Asia-Pacific cases*. World Scientific Publishing.
- Ushie, V., & Nwankpa, O. (2024). The Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law: An evaluation of its impact on conflict and food security. *Review of African Political Economy, 51*(179), 112-129.
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis (2nd ed.)*. Harper & Row.