

Farmers-Herders' Conflict and Agricultural Development in Benue State.

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Abstract: Political leaders often introduce agricultural strategies and policies with the aim of boosting agricultural development in Benue State and other States in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the conflict that occurs between farmers and herders has constituted a major threat to the development of the agricultural sector in Benue State. This study examined the phenomenon of farmers-herders' conflict and agricultural development in Benue State, 2010-2022. An objective of this study was to examine the effect of the farmers-herders' conflict on agricultural development in Benue State. The theory of eco-violence which focuses on the competition over scarce ecological resources guided this study. Also, qualitative research design which relied on data sourced from secondary sources such as archival materials, textbooks and journals were employed for this study. Data were content analysed. This paper showed that over the years, being that Benue is an agrarian State, many agricultural policies and programmes have been introduced by successive governments in the State to boost agriculture and possibly grow the economy. Unfortunately however, the farmers-herders conflicts amidst many challenges have posed as obstacles to the actualisation of substantial agricultural development in Benue State. The anti-social actions of herders have made some analysts to refer to them as "social misfits". As a matter of fact, this paper argued that despite the existence of a law to guide and regulate pastoralists-farmers relationship in Benue State, herders-farmers' conflicts and related killings have continued to persist. The resultant effect of this is the gradual erosion of agro-investors' confidence, growing fear of farmers to venture into farming and a decline in agricultural development in the State. This study therefore, recommends a collaborative and holistic approach in curbing the pastoral-farmers' conflicts as well as the robust formulation and implementation of agricultural policies and programmes that will trigger agricultural development in Benue State.

Keywords: Conflict, Farmers-herders' conflict, Agricultural development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Farmers-herders' conflict in Benue State, known as the food basket of the Nation has been an undesirable conflict that constitutes a clog in the wheel of agricultural development. This conflict between farmers and herders is increasingly posing socio-economic challenges in most part of Nigeria today. Udosen, (2021, p. 26) corroborated this when he stated that, "Nigeria as a nation State today is under a severe internal socio-economic and security threat occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency and farmers-herders conflicts even as the threat has special economic, political and environmental dimensions". Unfortunately, this has been a discouraging factor to some agro-investors as insecurity is one

of the greatest scare of investors in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Investment, especially in the agricultural sector is a catalyst for economic growth in many nations of the world today. Put differently, investing in the agricultural sector is highly desired especially taking cognisance of the importance of food to human survival.

In Benue State, the farmers and herders clashes which has wrecked great havoc in many areas affects not just productivity in the agricultural sector but also constitutes a setback to investments and investors. The trespass of Fulani on farmlands does not make economic or food security sense. It can be likened to the Bible passage which talked about robbing Peter to pay Paul. Farmers are often deprived of their reward for labour and investment for the survival and interest of Fulani herdsmen and their cattle. The farmers sometimes become indebted to individuals or groups that lent them monies to invest in farming. Suffice to say agricultural activities hardly thrive when there is a high rate of insecurity that jeopardises agricultural production. The agricultural sector is a critical sector that requires state of emergency if anything seems to be an obstacle to its successful operation as hunger triggers irrational provocation.

The gravity of the farmers-herders' conflict in Benue State has had and still has lots of devastating effects. The magnitude of killings and destruction of property that is associated with the farmers-herders' conflict shows that we have lost our humanity as human beings. In fact, the farmers and herders conflict became and still is a negative advertisement of Benue State which has great tendency of discouraging investors, demoralising farmers and drastically reducing agricultural production in Benue State and elsewhere. Suffice to say that the conflict between farmers and herders is a great impediment to agricultural development. Consequently, this prompted the State government to formulate a law in 2017 putting restriction on open grazing of cattle as trespassing of herders and their cattle on farmlands was one of the primary cause of the conflict. However, opposition of the law saw the herders and members of Myetti Allah flagrantly violating or disregarding the open grazing prohibition law of the Benue State government. The result of these actions is seen in the continuous killings, especially of the locals, years after the enactment of the open grazing prohibition law of Benue State government. It is however unfortunate that some elites and political leaders sacrifice the drive for nation building and agricultural development on the altar of emotions and

sentiments. Such leaders lack objectivity in their analysis and approach towards resolving the farmers-herders' conflict.

Suffice to say at one point or the other, agricultural policies have been introduced by successive governments both in Benue State and Nigeria at large, with the aim of boosting the agricultural sector and ensuring high yield of food production. Noteworthy is the fact that these policies and programmes may have yielded result in some areas though they hardly ever achieve the purposes that necessitated their formulation in its entirety.

Benue State is known for production of crops such as rice, yams, cassava, groundnut, oranges, mangoes etc. These crops from Benue State which are naturally tasty and nutritious are produced not just for local consumption within the State but sometimes exported to other States and even other countries.

In his opinion, Soludo (2004, p. 678) argued that:

Despite the dominant role of the petroleum sector as the major foreign exchange earner, agriculture remains the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. In addition, to contributing the largest share of GDP, it is the largest non-oil export earner, the largest employer of labour, and a key contributor to wealth creation and poverty alleviation, as a large percentage of the population derives its income from agriculture and related activities.... Over the years the rate of growth in agricultural production has stagnated and failed to keep pace with needs of a rapidly growing population, resulting in a progressive increase in import bills for food and industrial raw materials.

Over the years, Nigeria and indeed, most Nigerians have generally had a penchant for consumption of foreign goods and services with minimal interest in local production and this has been a great challenge to the nation's economy. This is because dependence on foreign goods or food stifles local productive capacity, encourages redundancy and denies the State the opportunity to boost its internal revenue generation.

It has been argued that there is no food security without constitutional backing. Suffice to say with the introduction of some agricultural policies by successive governments in Benue State, there has been some level of improvement in the area of food production but unfortunately, this has not completely translated to availability of food on the table of the common man as there are still cases of hunger and starvation in the land. It is interesting to note here that Benue State is a rural or agriculturally-based economy as it is endowed with a lot of agricultural opportunities.

This paper examines farmers-herders' conflict and agricultural development in Benue State. It is interesting to note that this area of study has generated a lot of research. Be that as it may, current thinking, particularly in the light of the Benue State experience since the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition law seems to focus on how to totally end the farmers-herders' conflict related killings and improve

agriculture as the State relies on agriculture to boost her economy.

The problem

Government has not done well to live up to its expectation in the area of security of lives and property. When there is failure of a person, group or organisation to live up to expectation and diligently carry out expected or well defined functions, it becomes a problem that can reproduce more problems. Government, the world over, has the statutory obligation of ensuring that lives within its geo-political space enjoy the security and comfort that is due them. Unfortunately, the case of Benue State and many other States in Nigeria is worrisome. This is because; the security being expected by the majority of the masses is more of an illusion. Security rather seems to be an exclusive reserve of the elite who have the wherewithal to pay for it. Majority of citizens are left to seek ways to provide security for themselves. This probably, is the reason why majority of farmers in Benue State are confronted with the farmers-herders' conflict without an appreciable security response to bail them out.

Consequently, the farmers-herders' conflict has great consequences on the development of agriculture in Benue State. A major effect of this conflict is the drop in food production which has triggered a hike in food prices. Sadly too, the conflict has killed the zeal of some agro-investors as fear of massive agricultural loss mounts. No investor wants to gladly embrace losses even when they know that business or investment is about taking risks. Furthermore, some of the agricultural policies introduced in the State have not produced the desired result. It is important to also note that the farmers-herders' conflict have adverse consequences which has brought more ruin or harm than good in Benue State. One of such is the increase in humanitarian crisis. The number of internally displaced persons (mostly farmers) residing in IDP camps call for worry.

This study focuses on the challenge of developing the agricultural sector in the face of farmers-herders' conflict.

The objectives guiding this study will be highlighted at this point.

Objectives of the Study

1. Ascertain the effect of the farmers-herders' conflict on agricultural development in Benue State.
2. Examine the impact of agricultural policies on the growth and development of agricultural sector in Benue State.
3. Examine State response concerning the farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State.

Research Questions

1. How has the farmers-herders' conflict affected agricultural development in Benue State?
2. In what ways have recent agricultural policies made significant impact on the Benue State economy?

3. What is the State response concerning the farmers and herders' conflict in Benue State.?

Theoretical Framework

The theory underpinning this study is the theory of Eco-violence developed by Homer-Dixon (1999). The theory of eco-violence focuses on the competition over scarce ecological resources, which prompts violent conflict between two or more groups. This theory of Eco-violence basically seeks to clarify the linkage that exists between environmental factors and violent conflicts especially when there is scarcity or shortage. A strong relation exists between environmental resources and conflict in every human society. A reason for this could be because naturally, man selfishly seeks to appropriate the freebies of nature for himself. The eco-violence theory simply argues that ecological resources are inadequate and desired by many who struggle and compete to get their share thereby resulting in violent conflict.

In his argument, Homer-Dixon (1999) opined that, scarcity arises when there is a decline in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and access to resources. Homer-Dixon further argued that this can cause a reduction in economic productivity. Homer-Dixon and Blitt (1998) again argued that there is a dependence on four major environmental resources (fresh water, cropland, forests and fish) fundamental to crop production by people in many developing countries. They further posit that conflict is triggered when there is shortage or depletion of these resources due to many reasons. Those affected by the depletion or scarcity are further forced to migrate to new lands. Unfortunately, some of these migrating groups engage in ethnic conflicts with local residents of the new areas they migrate to (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

People often put up some form of resistance when they perceive any threat to their livelihood. Anifowose and Enemu (1999) aver that struggle usually ensues for scarce resources. While on his part, Mafaje (1995) argued that, the desire to ensure the necessary condition for social reproduction lead people into fighting. For Tonah (2006) hostility over economic resources causes conflict between different economic groups.

It is imperative to add that Africa, like many other continents of the world suffer the challenge of climate change. (Okereke, 2014). Unfortunately, many consequences arise due to this climate change. Suffice to say climate change is a global challenge with many negative impacts and it leads to conflict between farmers and herders. Boyd (2014) argued that, climate change causes development challenges and has the tendency to aggravate the challenge of food security.

The centrepiece of the theory of eco-violence is that as groups desperately seek to survive, the competition for available scarce resources is likely to spark violent conflict among groups who feel their economy is threatened (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014, p. 80). Unfortunately, the antagonism between groups (farmers and herders) has ripple effects which include

constituting impediment to agricultural development in Benue State. In other words, this theory is apt for this study, as it shows that contention between farmers and herders arise as each group seeks to gain access and control land/water especially in the dry season for their activities and survival with this struggle causing more harm than good to a large number of people.

Relevance of the theory to this study: This theory is relevant to this study as it exposes some of the causes of the farmers and herders' conflict which constitutes setback to the agricultural sector and hinders development of same. The theory of eco-violence, in relation to this study, talks about land degradations that arise due to climatic conditions and other factors leading to conflict. Consequently, the challenge of eco-violence is not only in the area of conflict but equally causes a decline in the agricultural sector. To Odoh and Chilaka (2012, p. 112), "Nigeria as a part and parcel of the world is not immune to climate change hazards. Climate change in Nigeria has over time disrupted the normal functioning of the ecosystem that interacts with humans, and affects how they access certain vital resources for their survival".

It is imperative to state here that, an understanding and appreciation of the above will give operators of power the foresight to know where and how to tackle the issues of the farmers and herders conflict and further adopt measures that will engender food security.

II. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive and qualitative research design was adopted for this study. The study mainly depended on secondary sources of data such as internet sources, books and academic journals, newspaper reports and so on. Data were content analysed qualitatively through logical presentation.

III. DISCUSSION

Agricultural Development in Benue State

Agriculture improves food security when the right agricultural policies are formulated and consequently implemented and when the citizens (both the leaders and the led) have a positive approach and attitude towards agriculture and the development of the nation at large (Allen & Ogbe, 2022, p. 35). Formulation of viable agricultural policies in a stable and secured society encourages investment and can consequently revamp and accelerate development of the agricultural sector.

Agriculture had been the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before the discovery of crude oil in the 1950s which progressively led to the decline in the sector. Benue State has however remained an agrarian State despite what looks like a switch of revenue generation at the national level. Put differently, Benue State economy has always been largely dependent on the agrarian sector. The agricultural vision of Benue State government is that Benue State will be "a State where agriculture is strategically positioned and the people

equitably food and nutrition secure providing sufficient raw materials for industrialization and contributing to robust socio-economic development objectives” (BSGN, 2020, p. 16). Consequently, the stipulated goal of the Benue State government in the area of agriculture is to “develop and modernize agriculture in Benue State to become the driver of accelerated economic development, investment, food and nutrition security, food sovereignty and prosperity” (BSGN, 2020, p. 16). Furthermore, the objectives among others include “the promotion of agricultural investment to promote the delivery of effective, interventions that will ensure rapid agricultural acceleration across Benue State” (BSGN, 2020, p. 16).

The dependence on agriculture in Benue State has informed the introduction of several agricultural policies and programmes aimed at sustaining the agricultural status of Benue as food basket of the nation. Some of the agricultural strategies or programmes introduced in Benue State include: The Benue Advance Plan, 1999; Benue Reform Action Plan, 2003; Benue State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy Document, 2005; Our Benue Our Future, 2007; and Our Collective Vision for Benue, 2015; Benue State Development Plan, 2016-2025 (BSGN, 2020). Consequently, to take advantage of the agricultural development initiatives of the Federal government, the policies of Benue State government aligns with policies of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) such as the Agricultural Transformation Agenda, 2010 and the Agricultural Promotion Policy, 2016. There is the argument that failure to implement these policies constitutes a major challenge as well. However, to Daneji (2011) these agricultural and rural development initiatives have affected agricultural production level in Nigeria.

Agricultural policies and programmes are often introduced to reform, revamp, rejuvenate, reposition and transform the agricultural sector to a better or advantageous state. Several policies and programmes in the agricultural sector initiated by either the Federal or Benue State government have recorded some level of successes as well as failures. As a matter of fact, it has been argued that policy summersault is one challenge suffered in the agricultural sector which hampers productivity. Nigeria still depends on exportation of some food to augment the insufficient local production. Even though the federal government under the leadership of president Buhari placed a ban on exportation of some foodstuff such as rice, grains etc., it is important to note that an attempt to totally place restriction on the importation of all kinds of food could worsen the food crisis experienced in Nigeria. This is because Nigeria does not have a robust agricultural production yet.

Farmers-Herders Conflict and food security in Benue State

Benue State has been one of the flashpoints of farmers-herders’ conflict before and even after the promulgation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law in 2017. The struggle for resources and divergent interests are factors that often trigger disagreements and conflicts among

people. Human beings are selfish by nature and seek to accumulate resources for themselves at the expense of others which often breed conflict. Consequently, the actions and inactions of the parties involved (in this case, herders and farmers) in conflicts of any sort have adverse consequences that affect a few or large number of people as the case may be. This conflict becomes a threat to human survival and as Ogali (2021, p. 78) avers, “every entity has the primary objective of survival or maintenance before anything else”.

Ogbole (2021, p. 15) argued that “the insatiable lust for land is a major interest of the Fulani’s in the middle belt”. Fulani herdsman predominantly engage in rearing of cattle as a traditional means of survival and they do not toil with it. The safety of herders’ cattle is of paramount interest to them and their behavioural approach if they perceive any threat to the survival of their cattle is that of violence, confrontation and oppression. Herdsmen have often alleged that their cattle were killed by members of their host communities while the locals on their part often complain of destruction of crops by the herdsman and their cattle, raping of their women etc. These accusations and counter accusations triggers or aggravates the conflict between the two factions.

The political elites swore allegiance to protect the lives and property of the people they govern. Unfortunately, the protection of elites by the elites in every ramification seems to supersede the protection and interest of the welfare of citizens. This can be seen in the laxity displayed by some political leaders concerning the farmers-herders’ conflict and this obviously looks like a direct or indirect fight against food production which affects farmers first of all and by extension affects the nation at large.

There is a nexus between farmers-herders’ conflict and food insecurity in the sense that the farmers and herders conflict stifles agricultural production and causes or accelerates food insecurity. In other words, the farmers-herders’ conflict causes a serious setback in the agricultural sector and prevents the attainment of food security. In fact, it will not be out of place to say farmers-herders’ conflict and food insecurity are two sides of the same coin. By implication, what the above statement means is that farmers-herders’ conflict results in food insecurity while food insecurity on its part causes other challenges including conflict in the society. The rivalry between farmers and herders in Benue State has led to the multiplicity of internally displaced persons, most of who are residing in internally displaced people’s (IDP) camps. All these are a challenge to agriculture in Benue State.

Suffice to say both farmers and herders have fallen victims to the senseless attacks and counter-attacks on both parties, though it is alleged that farmers are mostly at the receiving end. Food which is seen as being sacrosanct and a basic necessity of life is scarce and limited among some families in Benue State. This is one of the challenges the sustainable development goal seeks to address.

State Response to the Farmers-Herders' Conflict in Benue State

In Nigeria, most social, economic and political problems are ambiguous, complex and challenging to resolve considering the multidimensional affiliations of the people especially in the area of tribes, religions, cultures, political parties etc. The diverse affiliations and perceptions of Nigerians remains an impediment just like the common saying that united we stand, divided we fall.

The State has a constitutional role of protecting lives and property and ensuring that its actions and inactions are for the betterment of all and sundry. The State is expected to be responsible and responsive at all times with issues that concern the citizens. Unfortunately, it can be seen that government sometimes display insincerity, consciously or unconsciously, in their response to the issues of the farmers-herders' conflict (Udosen, 2021). The Buhari led federal government has been accused of being complacent and handling the farmers-herder's conflict with levity, bias and double-standard approach. This, according to arguments, seems to be the reason behind the arrogance and boldness with which the Fulani herders operate in Nigeria and particularly in Benue State.

On the other hand, the Benue State government enacted the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Law in 2017 anticipating an end thereof, to the conflict between farmers and herders. Regrettably, the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Law, 2017 has not fully yielded the desired results as there are still spontaneous attacks allegedly carried out by herders on the host communities. Put differently, the frequency and intensity of the conflict between the farmers and Fulani herders forced the Benue State government, led by Governor Samuel Ortom, to promulgate an anti open grazing law formally known as the open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law, 2017. Considering the appellation of Benue State as "food basket of the nation", it became imperative to enact a law regulating the nefarious activities of the criminally minded herders whose interest were to kill farmers, and hamper the drive towards food security in the State.

It is pertinent to note that combined effort in tackling security challenges yields more positive results especially when all hands are on deck. This is due to the fact that security matters concern everyone and should be everybody's business. Unfortunately, people do not often treat security issues with the seriousness it deserves. There is sometimes the display of nonchalant attitude by both the leaders and even the led. There has been argument that political elite have become sentimental, allowing politics to take the center stage in matters concerning the farmers and herders' conflict. Suffice to say, politicisation of the conflict does not augur well in the interest of farmers and herders as well as the society in general. It should also be noted that citizens are sometimes scared to report whatever constitutes threats to them and the community either due to lack of confidence in the security

personnel or for fear of being attacked. All these constitute negative responses that serve as impediment to long-lasting resolutions of the conflict.

It is interesting to add here too that, the inability of the police to effectively tackle internal security issues such as the farmers and herders' conflict led to an increase in the organisation of vigilante groups with so many calling for the creation of State police. The severity and intensity of attacks on farmers is a matter of grave concern that must not be handled with "kid's glove" due to the many consequences and ripple effects that arise from the conflict such as food insecurity. Security personnel are sometimes accused of being slow in responding to security challenges or being far from their security post making it easy for attacks from notorious citizens. It is imperative to add that the attitude of some security personnel suggest that they do not feel motivated to give their best in the fight against insecurity because there is no assurance or reliable insurance for their families in the event of their death on the line of duty.

Security votes are being given to the governors to handle issues of security concern within their domain. However, some have argued that most States have done far below expectation with the security votes which some say is often unaccounted for.

SWOT Analysis of Agriculture in Benue State

SWOT is an acronym which refers to Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). A SWOT analysis of Agriculture in Benue State is relevant to this study so as to give an understanding of what constitutes the strength, weakness, opportunities to leverage on as well as threats to the development of agriculture in Benue State.

Strength

Benue State is a strong nation when it comes to agriculture which probably accounts for why the State earned the appellation as food basket of the nation. Some features stand out strong and relevant for agricultural activities in Benue State. They include rich soil and favourable climate, abundant water resources (good rainfall and the presence of one of the biggest rivers in Nigeria) etc.

Furthermore, Benue State is blessed with a good number of able bodied youths that can be involved in the transformation of the agricultural sector especially in the areas of food production, food processing and marketing of produce.

Weaknesses

Despite the advantageous features that could trigger agricultural development in Benue State, certain factors pose as weaknesses. One of such is the fact that, Benue State has not really enjoyed the privilege of good leaders who will come up with committed and deliberate strategies in the area of introducing and religiously implementing concrete agricultural blueprint. In other words, successive governments in Benue State have not really been politically-willed and

strategic enough to come up with dogged approaches at ensuring there is the formulation and total implementation of realistic agricultural policies. In fact, the drivers and operators of the system in Benue State seem to lack the drive to harness available resources that will stir the waters of agricultural development in the State.

Furthermore, Benue State government has not really embarked on massive investment in training as well as research and development programmes through the strengthening of research centres/institutes. This remains a setback as it impedes the discovery of improved varieties of seedlings.

Also, the unavailability of machines needed for mechanised farming is a great weakness especially in the twenty-first (21st) century when countries, the world over, are adopting mechanised farming for both local consumption and export purposes. In addition, Benue State has not been deliberate and intentional in adopting irrigation farming so as to enjoy all year round farming, despite the presence of river Benue.

High interest rates from banks and other lending institutions constitute a setback to farmers, majority of who are small holder farmers. The fear of receiving loans and being unable to pay back due to unforeseen circumstances limits the production of crops and this is worrisome.

Opportunities

Benue State is enviably endowed with untapped potentials that when fully harnessed, will lead to greater agricultural productivity.

In the area of geographical position, the State is located almost at the center (North central) of Nigeria. This is an advantage because it affords the State the opportunity to supply food to the North, East, West, South of the Nation and even beyond, with ease.

In the area of natural endowment, Benue State is fortunately blessed with a large water body known as River Benue. The water is significant enough to allow for irrigation farming especially during dry season.

Also, with the increase in population as well as some recent policies put in place by the government banning importation of some food items, Benue State is presented with the opportunity of boosting food production to meet up with the increasing demand for food.

Again, with the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) which Nigeria is bounded, Benue State, with her numerous human and natural endowments, has the potential to open up for greater investment and enhancement of agricultural activities. Put differently, as the food basket of the nation, Benue State has the opportunity to leverage on available resource for massive production so as to be better positioned to reap the benefits of robust food production and marketing both locally and internationally.

Threats

Several challenges bedevil agricultural development in Benue State. One of the greatest threats to agricultural development in Benue State is the incursion of Fulani herdsmen. Despite the enactment of the open grazing prohibition and ranching law, 2017 by the Benue State government to address the conflict between farmers and herders, the Fulani herders still invade local communities, displacing farmers and making farming activities difficult. A lot of farmers were forced to flee their ancestral homes and are being camped in internally displaced homes as a result of the terrifying reality of constant attacks from the herdsmen. This is worrisome and constitutes a major challenge to food production owing to the fact that farming activities by farmers are distorted leading to dwindling food production.

Also, corruption and misappropriation of funds and farming equipments meant to aid farmers, constitutes a threat and setback to agricultural development. Programmes and projects designed to improve Benue agriculture have been scuttled by self-seeking attitude of high ranking officials (BSGN, 2020). The actual farmers who should benefit from government's programmes are sometimes denied these opportunities due to corruption and politicisation of the process.

Socio-Economic Implications of Farmers-herders' Conflict in Benue State

The socio-economic implications of farmers-herders' conflict in Benue State are unarguably devastating. One of the critical areas being affected by the farmers-herders' conflict is in the area of decline of food production. Despite the many agricultural policies introduced by both the Benue State and Federal government, there is the continuous decline of food production. An appraisal of the agricultural sector in Benue State, taking a look at the introduced programmes and policies by both the federal and State government reveals that the objectives that drive the formulation of these programmes and policies are often not fully actualised as desired. An important fact to note is that the gradual loss of attraction of farming in Benue State is because of the continuous attacks on farmers allegedly carried out by herdsmen. Suffice to say "frequent attacks on the Nigeria farmers, have weakened the communities' growth and food security" (Udosen, 2021, p. 28). Again, the increasing number of internally displaced persons who are mostly farmers is highly worrisome. This equally increases the humanitarian crisis being experienced in the State.

There is the rising tension and suspicion between the two groups (local farmers and herdsmen). Consequently, this makes peaceful co-existence more of a mirage than a reality. In fact, the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen also have ethno-religious coloration which is unhealthy for the country's unity and development. Udosen (2021, p. 31) argued that "Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash have pitched Christians and Muslims against each other". The lines of Nigerian's national

anthem read “Arise O compatriots, Nigeria’s call obey, to serve our father’s land, with love and strength and faith....” Unfortunately, there is obviously no love in the hearts of some Nigerians which is why people attack lives and livelihood without compassion. In fact, “worrisome in the present development is the pillaging, raping, killing and kidnapping by the so-called Fulani herdsmen” (Udosen, 2021, p. 31). Even the last line of Nigerian’s national anthem which says “.....One nation bound in freedom, peace and unity” shows that Nigeria is not a nation bound in peace and unity. This is evident in the untamed attacks by some citizens who seem to prefer war over peace. Man is a product of nature and nurture; hence, it is evident that some people lack positive values which include love due to the fact that they were poorly nurtured in a system that seems to naturally allow some level of oppression. The discrimination is so great and we cannot live as one if we do not see ourselves as one.

There is the challenge of humanitarian crisis as a good number of displaced farmers are living helpless and unstable lives in the internally displaced people’s (IDP) camp. Their plights in the IDP camps is a pathetic one as they only get minimal relief materials and are exposed to deplorable conditions in the camp.

Inflation in the cost of food items is one negative trend that citizens in Benue State have had to contend with in recent times. Inflation in the cost of food items often arise when there is scarcity instead of surplus. The scarcity is not unconnected with the farmers-herders’ conflict. Unfortunately, the effect of this inflation is not only felt in Benue State but also in other parts of the country.

Also, the continuous farmers-herder’s conflict in Benue State despite the existence of a law to checkmate the conflict has a way of sending the wrong signal to other criminally minded herders who will perceive Benue State as a State with weak security powers to curtail the excesses of criminals, hence, more of them might find their way into the State to perpetuate more heinous crimes. Put differently, there could be increased invasion of notorious and criminally-minded herders not just into Nigeria but specifically into Benue State if the security apparatus does not firm-up measures to put a stringent check on the occasional attacks.

Arguments for Agricultural Development in Benue State

Several reasons account for why there should be a desperate and urgent need to develop the agricultural sector in Benue State. Some of the reasons are discussed below.

Mono-economic nature of the economy in Benue State is a vital reason why the agricultural sector in Benue State requires urgent and critical attention. A comparative analysis of the economic dependence of the 36 States of Nigeria shows that some States have several sources of revenue generation. For instance, most States in the south-south are endowed with crude oil which not only serve the States but is an advantage to the nation at large. Also States in the south-east region of Nigeria are doing well in the production and manufacture of

goods and services. The Northern States have also tremendously improved their agricultural production and are today, known for supply of foodstuff to other parts of Nigeria and beyond. Consequently, since Benue State does not have oil to depend on or have productive and manufacturing capacity, the State must do more in terms of harnessing the agricultural resources it is endowed with to ensure increased and robust agricultural production especially as the food basket of the nation.

Secondly, the world almost came to a stand still especially in the year 2020 and part of 2021 and is still struggling to recover from the effects of Covid-19. Obomanu and Ogbe (2020) argued that it became obvious that the world is indeed a global village as seen in the way the virus spread from Wuhan to other parts of the world. The onset of Covid-19 exposed a lot of deficiencies in many countries and led to the closure of borders to curtail the spread of the virus. This had great effect on countries that largely depended on other countries for things they were not producing or had limited production in. It is imperative to note that the need to improve agricultural production cannot be overemphasised so as to develop a shock absorber in case of challenges that may come up and warrant border closure. Nigeria still exports some of the goods and food consumed by its citizens and continuous dependence on external sources for these items is a risky venture should a global issue of any sort arise that may hinder importation.

Also, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) recently reached by Nigeria and some other African countries is another reason why Benue State and indeed Nigeria at large must be more intentional and proactive in all-round production of goods and services especially food production. This is because food is vital and there will always be market for it hence the need to boost its production not just for local consumption but also for exportation. Benue will be at an advantageous position and generate more revenue if the available agricultural potentials are harnessed to serve demands that go beyond the local.

Furthermore, the call for diversification is a continuous one in Nigeria because of the many challenges of ‘putting the country’s eggs in one basket’ (oil). Obomanu and Ogbe (2020, p. 46) posit that, “diversification of Nigeria’s economy should be a paramount concern and government needs to become more strategic and aggressively invest in other areas so as to minimize the over dependence on the oil sector and consequently explore the viability and productivity of other sectors”. In fact, several arguments have advanced for a return to Nigeria’s pre-oil boom era which was majorly agriculture especially with the increasing population, requiring more food supply. To this end, the Benue State government, with all its advantages, must be dogged in revitalising and stimulating agricultural production in order to cash-in on the opportunities and benefits of diversification.

IV. CONCLUSION

Nigeria in recent times particularly Benue State has become farmer-herders' conflict zone (Apenda, 2016). This conflict between farmers and herders has persisted despite measures taken by the Benue State government in the area of introducing an anti-open grazing law to bring it to a halt. The unfortunate narrative is that the attainment of food security is still far from reality due to many factors including the continuous farmers-herder's conflict. The malicious destruction of crops is not just a fight against farmers but also against the State. The herders opposed the anti-open grazing law of the State claiming that they have every right to operate in any part of Nigeria, being a Federal State. Ogali (2019, p. 790) asserts that "some of the rights being demanded by social pervers, heretics and idolaters run contrary to the fundamental principles of federalism and have the capacity to destroy federations". Unfortunately, the herders are emboldened by the actions and inactions of some political office holders who directly or indirectly energise the herders. The desire to ensure the availability of food is the quest of many successive governments in Benue State which is reflected in the introduction of different agricultural policies. Unfortunately, the numerous opportunities available in Benue State has not been judiciously utilised to actualise the dream of the Benue people. There is still hunger and starvation experienced by many citizens in Benue State despite the abundance of human and natural resources. This unarguably shows that, a lot still needs to be done by both the leaders and the led in Benue State if the dream of food security must come true. Benue State cannot become the hub of agricultural activities or attract investors to develop the agricultural sector if farmers-herders' conflict is allowed to persist.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) There can be no agricultural development if farmers are allowed to continuously stay in the internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. The government (both federal and State) must therefore team up to resolve the issues and return farmers to their homes so they can resume their occupation of farming.
- 2) Farmers in Benue State, especially the ones affected by the conflict, should be given incentives to help them bounce back again. Some farmers are already psychologically demoralised because of the destruction of property and loss of some loved ones. Providing reasonable incentive may not replace lost loved ones or their property in totality but it will give them a footing to start from somewhere again.
- 3) The agricultural policies formulated at both the State and Federal government must be flexible to reflect best international practices especially in a dynamic and globalised world of today. Technological farming is highly needed as population soars if food security must be achieved. Consequently, government should establish agricultural research institutes across the country to help in providing

reliable information on agricultural issues ranging from planting, improved crop varieties, harvesting, processing, storage and even export. The findings record by these research institutes which must be well funded and managed by professionals will be immensely valuable to policy-makers during the formulation of agricultural policies.

- 4) Considering the great value and role the agricultural sector plays in any given society, the government must ensure they adopt a holistic approach in curbing the pastoral-farmers' conflicts as well as the robust formulation and implementation of agricultural policies and programmes that will trigger agricultural development in Benue State. As a matter of fact, the problem should be dealt with from its root cause and not just its effect. The enactment of the open grazing prohibition law 2017 is a good step in the right direction that demands the collaboration of stakeholders at all level to end the conflict and make agricultural development a success.
- 5) It behoves on the leaders and authorities in charge of these groups such as the Myetti Allah Cattle Association and the Farmers Association of Nigeria, to dissuade their members from engaging in acts that are inimical to the unity and agricultural development of Benue State. They should also be educated on the dangers of food crisis that is imminent if they do not desist from engaging in conflicts.
- 6) The African continental free trade zone recently kicked off, with Nigeria as one of the countries bounded by the agreement. The trade agreement is a critical setup that demands radical investment and attention in the agricultural sector in Benue State, being the food basket of the nation and Nigeria at large. This is because Nigeria can only be at an advantageous position and a key player in the trade when the right steps are taken to achieve bountiful agricultural production that transcends local consumption to production for export purposes. In fact, besides resolving the conflict and boosting local production, Government should seek ways to promote and guarantee both local and international markets of agricultural produce.
- 7) Generally, tackling issues from the foundation is highly imperative for a sustainable result. Farming is not an occupation the younger generation find attractive again, like before. Today, white collar jobs are mostly the desire of many young people. Consequently, just like there are different clubs in primary and secondary schools such as Music club, Jet club, and Rotary club etc., it should be made mandatory for all schools (private and public) to set up farmers' club. The club can be given sophisticated and attractive names such as "Soul of the nation's club", "Survival's club" and "Indispensable club" etc. Beyond the names, members should be

introduced to evolving mechanized forms of agriculture so they don't see farming as a stressful occupation which demands a lot of human labour.

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