Assessing the Causes and Impacts of Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict on Food Security in Ekiti State, Nigeria

Ojuawo Olakunle Olaniyi*

Department of Peace and Security Studies,Faculty of Multidisciplinary Studies,Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100601277

Received: 04 July 2026; Accepted: 09 July 2026; Published: 17 July 2026

ABSTRACT

Herder–farmer conflict has become a major threat to agricultural production and food security in Nigeria. This study assessed the causes and impacts of the herder–farmer conflict on food security in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A mixed-methods design was adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected through 600 structured questionnaires, of which 540 were retrieved, and through five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with key stakeholders. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and Chi-square analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that competition over land and other natural resources, socio-cultural differences, and weak institutional responses were the major drivers of the conflict. The conflict significantly reduced agricultural production, displaced farming households, increased food shortages and food prices, and limited household access to food, thereby undermining food security. Guided by Resource Scarcity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Human Security Theory, the study concludes that sustainable solutions require community-based conflict resolution, sustainable land-use management, climate adaptation, agricultural resilience, and strengthened institutional collaboration. These measures are essential for promoting peaceful coexistence and improving food security in conflict-affected communities.

Keywords: Herder–farmer conflict; Food security; Agricultural productivity; Resource scarcity; Human security; Ekiti State.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, conflict between herders and farmers has become a growing global challenge, particularly in regions where agricultural land and water resources are increasingly scarce. Across Asia, Latin America, and especially Sub-Saharan Africa, clashes over land use between herders and sedentary farmers have intensified due to population growth, environmental degradation, climate change, and weak institutional frameworks for land governance (FAO, 2016). This has forced more herders to migrate farther south and settle permanently in states such as Ekiti, Delta, Anambra, Imo, and Ebonyi, as well as other southern states (Abass, 2022; Blench, 2010). The Ekiti State government estimates that over 500,000 cattle are currently being grazed in the state, mostly owned by Fulani herders from outside the state (Dipe, 2018). Herders often allow their cattle to graze on crops in farmland along their grazing routes, angering crop farmers and sparking conflict. In addition, the lack of clearly defined cattle grazing routes and land ownership rights in many rural areas of Ekiti makes resolving these disputes difficult (Ofem & Ajayi, 2018). The resulting disruptions to farming, income losses, food supply shortages, and forced migration caused by these attacks gravely undermine household and community food security within the state (Olaniyan et al., 2021).

These conflicts not only disrupt rural livelihoods but also threaten food security and social stability in many developing countries. The incessant clashes between herders and farmers have escalated dramatically across

several states in Nigeria in recent years, becoming a major threat to national security, stability and food supply (Abass, 2022; Bello, 2013; Agbegbedia, 2013). This conflict has been particularly intense in Ekiti State, located in the southwest region of the country, in recent years. Ekiti State is an agrarian state, with most of its citizens engaged in crop farming, making the incessant attacks by herders a significant risk to the state's food supply and agricultural output (Ajayi & Buhari, 2020).

The historical trajectory of herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria, is deeply rooted in a series of transformative events that shaped the region's socio-economic and political landscape. As scholars have noted, understanding the historical context is crucial for unravelling the complexities of contemporary conflicts (Buhari & Ediagbonya, 2023; Smith, 2000). Ekiti State, situated in the southwestern part of Nigeria, has a rich agricultural history, with farming traditionally serving as the backbone of the local economy. However, post-colonial shifts in land use, population dynamics, and governance structures altered the once-harmonious coexistence of sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. During the 1970s, Nigeria experienced an oil boom that influenced urbanisation patterns and demographic shifts. This period marked a significant turning point, increasing pressure on arable land as people migrated to urban centres in search of economic opportunities. This, in turn, intensified competition between farmers and herders for available resources, setting the stage for conflict.

Historical grievances related to political marginalisation, unequal resource distribution, and perceived injustices played a significant role in shaping conflicts. Political decisions, including the allocation of grazing reserves and control over natural resources, fueled resentment and competition between different ethnic groups in Ekiti State. The historical grievances arising from changes in land tenure, economic shifts and political decisions continue to exert a profound influence on contemporary herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Ekiti State. The enduring impact of these historical factors is evident in ongoing disputes over land ownership, boundaries, and access rights, contributing to persistent conflicts (Buhari & Ediagbonya, 2023). Consequently, conflicts between herders and farmers often become entangled with broader political and identity-based grievances, further complicating efforts to resolve them.

Nevertheless, the Ekiti State government has embarked on intervention measures to curb the issue of herdsmen-farmers conflict in the state, which are yielding positive results. On August 29, 2016, a former governor of the state, Mr Ayodele Fayose, signed the Anti-Grazing Bill into law, which the Ekiti State House of Assembly had earlier passed. The Law, which was titled “Prohibition of Cattle and Other Ruminants Grazing in Ekiti”, came into effect on August 30, 2016. The law explained how cattle grazers will conduct themselves within the state. The governor made efforts to set up a mechanism which facilitates its implementation through the establishment of the “Ekiti State Grazing Marshal”, which was charged with the responsibility of arresting violators and ensuring restriction of cattle movement between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. (Ekiti State Anti-grazing Law, 2016). Moreover, the state government decided that herders should be required to purchase land for grazing, as their economy depends on the well-being of their cattle, just like any other enterprise (Onyekakeyah, 2018). The enactment of the Anti-grazing Law and its implementation were widely applauded by farmers and local people in Ekiti State, as they gave farmers the confidence to continue their farm work without fear of being killed, thereby increasing food production in the state. However, their counterparts under the aegis of *the Jamu Nate Fulbe Association of Nigeria and the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria* faulted the decision (Faleti, 2016).

While the reviewed empirical evidence provides useful lenses for examining key drivers of environmental change, migration pressures, unclear land rights, and ethno-religious tensions that are escalating herder-farmer clashes in Ekiti State, some gaps in the literature remain. Most scholarly materials focus extensively on proximate triggers such as seasonal transhumance patterns, crop damage incidents, and retaliatory attacks, without sufficiently exploring remote drivers and structural factors that enable local conflicts (Fisher, 2019). Beyond noting environmental change and ambiguous land tenure, the field lacks a systemic power analysis of the deep-rooted catalysts of this crisis, including governance deficiencies, flawed development policies, historical inequality, and ethnic exclusion dynamics that shape farmer-herder antagonism (Olaniyan *et al.,* 2021). Relatedly, few studies adopt an integrated approach synergising insights across theories and disciplines to enable

a holistic, robust analysis of the multidimensional Ekiti farmer-herder conflict. More so, while there is a growing body of literature on the herders/farmers conflict in Nigeria, there is also a dearth of empirical studies specifically focusing on its implications for food security in Ekiti State. Existing research tends to overlook the nuanced dynamics of the conflict within the context of food production and agricultural livelihoods in the state. Therefore, conducting a comprehensive study that assesses the causes and impact of herdsmen-farmers' conflict and food security outcomes in Ekiti State will fill this significant research gap and contribute to the existing knowledge base on this critical issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Herder–Farmer Conflict

Herder–farmer conflict refers to recurrent disputes and violent confrontations between pastoral livestock keepers and sedentary crop farmers over access to and control of natural resources, particularly land, water, and grazing routes. Although competition over these resources has long existed, the frequency and intensity of the conflict have risen sharply in Nigeria due to climate change, desertification, rapid population growth, shrinking grazing lands, and weak institutional mechanisms for managing resource disputes (Blench, 2010; Abbass, 2022). Consequently, what were once seasonal disputes have evolved into protracted security and development challenges with significant implications for agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and national food security.

Scholars have examined the herder–farmer conflict from multiple perspectives. Agbegbedia (2013) frames it as a struggle over land and other productive resources, driven by incompatible interests, whereas Bello (2013) contends that mounting pressure on agricultural land has intensified competition between pastoralists and farming communities. Similarly, Olaniyan et al. (2021) attribute the conflict's persistence to the interplay of environmental pressures, weak governance, demographic change, and socioeconomic inequalities. Beyond resource competition, the conflict has increasingly taken on ethnic, religious, and political dimensions, complicating peaceful resolution in many affected communities.

In Nigeria, the southward migration of Fulani pastoralists from the north, driven largely by desertification, declining pasture, and water scarcity, has intensified interactions with predominantly agrarian communities in the Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria (Blench, 2010; Dimelu et al., 2021). In Ekiti State, disputes over crop destruction, unrestricted grazing, cattle rustling, and access to water resources have frequently escalated into violent clashes, resulting in loss of life, property damage, displacement of farming households, and disruption of agricultural activities (Ajayi & Buhari, 2020; Agbegbedia, 2021).

The consequences of the herder–farmer conflict extend beyond security concerns. Persistent violence has reduced agricultural productivity, discouraged investment in farming, disrupted food supply chains, increased food prices, and weakened household livelihoods, thereby posing serious threats to food security and sustainable rural development (Abbass, 2022; Olaniyan et al., 2021). Within the context of this study, herder–farmer conflict is therefore conceptualised as violent competition between pastoralists and crop farmers over scarce natural resources, with significant implications for agricultural production and household food security in Ekiti State.

Concept of Food Security

Food security is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond the mere availability of food to include sustained access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, and culturally acceptable food required for an active and healthy life. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 1996), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to adequate food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and productive life. This definition remains the most widely accepted because it recognises that food security encompasses not only food production but also equitable distribution, accessibility, utilisation, and stability.

The concept of food security is built on four interrelated dimensions: food availability, food accessibility, food utilisation, and food stability (FAO, 2008). Food availability refers to the adequate supply of food through domestic production, imports, or food assistance. Accessibility concerns the ability of individuals and households to obtain sufficient food through income, markets, or other means. Food utilisation emphasises the nutritional quality of food, proper preparation, and adequate health conditions for effective nutrient absorption. Food stability requires that these three dimensions remain consistently available over time, without significant disruption from economic crises, environmental shocks, or violent conflicts.

In Nigeria, food security is increasingly threatened by insecurity, climate change, environmental degradation, and persistent herder–farmer conflicts, particularly in agrarian communities where agriculture is the primary livelihood (Abbass, 2022; Bello, 2013). Violent conflicts often destroy farmland, displace farming households, disrupt agricultural production, and reduce access to local markets, thereby undermining household food availability and affordability. These conditions contribute to declining agricultural output, rising food prices, loss of rural incomes, and increased vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition.

Within the context of this study, food security is viewed as the ability of households in Ekiti State to consistently produce or access sufficient, safe, and nutritious food despite the challenges posed by the herder–farmer conflict. The study, therefore, examines how the conflict affects agricultural productivity and household food security by disrupting farming activities, reducing food availability, and weakening rural livelihoods.

Causes of Herder–Farmer Conflict

The herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria is driven by a complex interplay of environmental, socioeconomic, political, and institutional factors rather than a single cause. Although competition over land and water resources remains the immediate trigger, broader structural conditions, including climate change, rapid population growth, weak governance, and unclear land tenure systems, have intensified the frequency and severity of the conflict (Blench, 2010; Abbass, 2022; Olaniyan et al., 2021).

One of the principal drivers of the conflict is resource scarcity caused by environmental degradation and climate change. Desertification, declining rainfall, shrinking grazing lands, and worsening water scarcity in northern Nigeria have significantly reduced pasture availability, prompting many Fulani pastoralists to migrate southward in search of grazing resources (Blench, 2010; Dimelu et al., 2021). This seasonal and, in many cases, permanent migration has intensified competition for land and water in agrarian communities, such as those in Ekiti State, where crop farming is the dominant economic activity.

Population growth and expanding agricultural activities have further intensified pressure on available land. As farming communities continue to cultivate previously unused areas, traditional grazing routes have become increasingly obstructed, leading to frequent encroachment by migrating cattle onto cultivated farmland. Crop destruction, restricted access to water sources, and competition over natural resources often trigger violent confrontations between farmers and pastoralists (Bello, 2013; Agbegbedia, 2013).

Institutional and governance challenges have also contributed to the persistence of the conflict. Weak enforcement of land-use regulations, the absence of clearly designated grazing reserves, ambiguous land tenure arrangements, and limited capacity for conflict prevention have undermined peaceful resource management (International Crisis Group, 2017; Abbass, 2022). These governance deficiencies encourage self-help responses and retaliatory violence, thereby prolonging communal tensions.

Beyond environmental and institutional factors, the conflict has increasingly taken on ethnic, religious, and political dimensions. Identity differences between predominantly Fulani pastoralists and indigenous farming communities often reinforce mistrust and prejudice, transforming disputes over natural resources into broader communal conflicts (Fisher, 2019; Olaniyan et al., 2021). In some instances, cattle rustling, rural banditry, and the proliferation of small arms have further complicated the security environment and intensified violence.

Government interventions, including the establishment of grazing reserves, proposals for cattle colonies and ranching, and anti-open-grazing laws enacted by several states, have sought to reduce tensions. However, differing political interests, uneven implementation, and resistance from key stakeholders have limited the effectiveness of these measures (Onyekakeyah, 2018; Ekiti State Anti-Grazing Law, 2016). Consequently, the persistence of the herder–farmer conflict reflects the interaction of ecological pressures, governance weaknesses, identity dynamics, and ineffective policy responses rather than any single causal factor.

Impacts of Herder–Farmer Conflict on Food Security

The persistent herder–farmer conflict has become one of the major threats to food security in Nigeria, particularly in agrarian states such as Ekiti, where agriculture constitutes the primary source of livelihood. The conflict has disrupted farming activities, destroyed agricultural assets, displaced rural households, and weakened local food systems, thereby reducing food availability and access to nutritious food (Bello, 2013; Abbass, 2022; Olaniyan et al., 2021).

One of the most significant consequences of the conflict is the decline in agricultural productivity. Violent attacks often destroy crops, farmlands, irrigation facilities, and farm infrastructure, forcing many farmers to abandon cultivation due to insecurity. Reduced access to farmland lowers crop output and household income, thereby limiting farming households' capacity to meet their food needs (Ajibade et al., 2021; Ofem & Ajayi, 2018). In communities repeatedly affected by violence, agricultural production has continued to decline, increasing dependence on external food supplies.

The conflict has also contributed to the widespread displacement of farming households and the disruption of rural livelihoods. Fear of attacks compels many residents to leave their communities, resulting in the loss of labour, farmland, and productive assets. Displacement further limits access to markets, agricultural inputs, and employment opportunities, increasing poverty and household vulnerability to food insecurity (Akinrefon et al., 2022; Oluwatobi et al., 2022). Consequently, many affected households experience reduced purchasing power and difficulty accessing sufficient and nutritious food.

Another important consequence is the disruption of food supply chains and local markets. Insecurity restricts the movement of farmers, traders, and agricultural commodities, leading to food shortages and rising market prices. Higher transportation costs, reduced agricultural production, and damaged rural infrastructure further contribute to food inflation, making food less affordable for low-income households (Babarinsa et al., 2023; Obisesan & Oluwafemi, 2022). These conditions undermine not only food availability but also food accessibility, particularly among vulnerable rural populations.

Beyond its immediate economic effects, the herder–farmer conflict poses broader challenges to sustainable rural development. Persistent violence discourages agricultural investment, weakens community resilience, and diverts government resources from agricultural development to security operations. These cumulative effects reduce the capacity of rural communities to recover from conflict and sustain long-term food production. Therefore, improving food security in conflict-affected areas requires not only enhanced agricultural support but also effective conflict prevention, community-based peacebuilding, climate adaptation measures, and strengthened rural governance.

Government and Institutional Responses to Herder–Farmer Conflict

Successive governments in Nigeria have implemented various policies and institutional measures to address the persistent herder–farmer conflict. These interventions have included the establishment of grazing reserves, proposals for cattle colonies and ranching systems, the enactment of anti-open-grazing laws, the strengthening of land administration, and community-based conflict-resolution initiatives. The primary objective of these measures has been to reduce competition over natural resources, improve livestock management, and promote peaceful coexistence between pastoralists and farming communities (Ogbeide, 2017; Onyekakeyah, 2018).

One of the major policy instruments is the Land Use Act of 1978, which vests land administration in state governments and provides the legal framework for land allocation and management. Although the Act was intended to facilitate equitable access to land and promote national development, ambiguities over land ownership, customary land rights, and grazing access have continued to fuel disputes between pastoralists and farming communities (Ezeomah, 2010). Consequently, many scholars advocate reforms that provide clearer land-use regulations and establish well-managed grazing reserves or ranching systems to minimise resource-based conflicts.

Several state governments have also introduced legislative measures to regulate open grazing. In Ekiti State, the Prohibition of Cattle and Other Ruminants Grazing Law (2016) was enacted to prohibit uncontrolled grazing, regulate cattle movement, and establish enforcement mechanisms through the Ekiti State Grazing Marshal (Ekiti State Anti-Grazing Law, 2016). While many farming communities welcomed the legislation as a means of protecting lives, farms, and agricultural production, some pastoral groups expressed concerns about its implementation and implications for their traditional livelihoods (Faleti, 2016). This demonstrates that legislative measures alone may not provide sustainable solutions unless accompanied by dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and viable alternatives such as ranching.

Beyond government policies, educational and research institutions play a key role in generating evidence-based solutions to the conflict. Research into climate adaptation, sustainable livestock production, land management, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding can provide valuable policy guidance to address the structural causes of the conflict. Similarly, collaboration among government agencies, traditional institutions, civil society organisations, farming associations, and pastoral groups is essential for promoting dialogue, strengthening local dispute-resolution mechanisms, and fostering long-term peaceful coexistence.

Overall, existing interventions have achieved mixed results, yet the persistence of the herder–farmer conflict indicates that isolated policy measures are insufficient. Sustainable solutions require an integrated approach that combines effective land governance, climate adaptation, agricultural resilience, community participation, and inclusive peacebuilding to address both the immediate and underlying drivers of the conflict.

Empirical Review and Research Gap

Empirical studies of the herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria have consistently identified environmental degradation, climate change, resource scarcity, weak governance, and population pressure as major drivers of the rising incidence of violent clashes between pastoralists and farming communities. Blench (2010) attributes the southward migration of Fulani pastoralists to desertification and diminishing grazing resources in northern Nigeria, while Dimelu et al. (2021), using electronic cattle-tracking technology, demonstrate that climate-induced migration has intensified competition for land and water across southern Nigeria. Similarly, Abbass (2022) argues that environmental pressures have transformed traditional pastoral migration into violent resource conflicts, thereby increasing insecurity in agrarian communities. Collectively, these studies suggest that ecological changes have significantly altered pastoral mobility patterns and intensified competition for scarce natural resources.

Beyond environmental factors, empirical evidence indicates that institutional weaknesses and socio-political dynamics substantially contribute to the persistence of the conflict. The International Crisis Group (2017) links the escalation of violence to weak governance, ineffective regulation of grazing routes, and inadequate land administration. Likewise, Awogbade and Dudafa (2017) found that increased pastoral migration was associated with rising communal violence in North-Central Nigeria, while Ajayi and Buhari (2020) observed that disputes over farmland ownership and grazing access frequently trigger violent confrontations in Ekiti State. These findings demonstrate that although resource scarcity often initiates conflict, governance failures, land-tenure challenges, and identity-based tensions largely determine its intensity and duration.

Several studies have also examined the implications of the herder–farmer conflict for agricultural production and food security. Bello (2013) reported that persistent violent conflicts significantly reduced household income,

agricultural productivity, and food availability among affected farming communities. Similarly, Olaniyan et al. (2021) found that displacement, restricted access to farmland, and declining agricultural production contributed to seasonal food shortages in conflict-prone communities. Studies by Ofem and Ajayi (2018), Agbegbedia (2021), and Babarinsa et al. (2023) further reveal that repeated attacks on farming communities have destroyed crops, disrupted rural markets, increased food prices, and weakened household livelihoods. Although these studies establish a clear relationship between violent conflict and food insecurity, they largely focus on agricultural losses rather than providing a comprehensive assessment of household food security outcomes.

Empirical evidence further suggests that effective policy and institutional responses remain essential to sustainable conflict management. Sule and Bolarinwa (2022) emphasise the need for reforms in land administration, grazing management, and rural governance to reduce resource-based conflicts. Similarly, Abbass (2022) and the International Crisis Group (2017) advocate integrated approaches that combine improved land-use policies, climate adaptation, agricultural resilience, and community-based conflict resolution. Collectively, these studies argue that security interventions alone are insufficient and that long-term peace depends on addressing the structural drivers of conflict through inclusive and sustainable policy measures.

Despite these significant contributions, important gaps remain in the existing literature. Most previous studies have focused on the causes, security implications, or agricultural consequences of the herder–farmer conflict, with relatively little attention to its effects on household food security in Ekiti State, particularly using a mixed-methods approach. Furthermore, few studies have integrated Resource Scarcity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Human Security Theory to provide a comprehensive explanation of both the causes of the conflict and its implications for food security. This study addresses these gaps by examining the causes and impacts of herder–farmer conflict on food security in Ekiti State, Nigeria, using a mixed-methods research design to provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship between conflict and household food security.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The persistent conflict between Fulani pastoralists and crop farmers has emerged as one of the most significant security and development challenges facing Nigeria. It has adversely affected agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and food security, particularly in agrarian communities where farming is the primary source of income and sustenance (Abbass, 2022; Bello, 2013). Scholars attribute the persistence of the conflict to a combination of environmental degradation, competition over scarce natural resources, climate change, weak institutional governance, and ethno-religious divisions (Blench, 2010; Dipe, 2018; Olaniyan et al., 2021). Given the multidimensional nature of the herder–farmer conflict, no single theory fully explains its causes and consequences. Consequently, this study adopts Resource Scarcity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Human Security Theory to explain the structural drivers of the conflict, the role of identity in its escalation, and its implications for food security in Ekiti State.

Resource Scarcity Theory

Resource Scarcity Theory, primarily advanced by Homer-Dixon (1994, 1999), holds that violent conflicts are likely to arise when rising demand for scarce natural resources outstrips supply. The theory contends that environmental degradation, climate change, rapid population growth, and unequal access to renewable resources such as land and water intensify competition among resource users, particularly in societies where livelihoods depend heavily on natural resources and governance institutions are weak (Homer-Dixon, 1999). In Nigeria, desertification, declining pasture, and shrinking water sources in the northern region have compelled many Fulani pastoralists to migrate southward in search of grazing land and water (Blench, 2010; Abbass, 2022; Dipe, 2018). Consequently, heightened competition over farmland and water resources has intensified conflicts between pastoralists and indigenous farming communities in Ekiti State, leading to crop destruction, loss of livelihoods, reduced agricultural productivity, and food insecurity (Agbegbedia, 2013; Olaniyan et al., 2021). Thus, the theory offers a useful explanation of how environmental pressures and resource competition contribute to the emergence of the herder–farmer conflict and its implications for food security. However, the theory has

been criticised for emphasising environmental scarcity while paying limited attention to political institutions, governance failures, and identity-related factors that also shape conflict dynamics (Peluso & Watts, 2001). This limitation warrants integrating Social Identity Theory and Human Security Theory to explain the conflict's multidimensional nature.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986), explains how individuals derive their identity from membership of social groups based on ethnicity, religion, culture, or other social affiliations. The theory holds that individuals naturally categorise themselves and others into "in-groups" and "out-groups," often leading to prejudice, discrimination, and hostility when group interests are perceived to be threatened (Fisher, 2019). Such perceptions become more pronounced where competition exists over scarce resources, thereby increasing the likelihood of intergroup conflict.

The theory is particularly relevant to the herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria, where ethnic and religious identities often intensify disputes over land and grazing resources. In Ekiti State, the predominantly Fulani Muslim pastoralists and Yoruba Christian farming communities differ in ethnicity, religion, language, and livelihoods, fostering mutual suspicion and reinforcing negative stereotypes (Agbegbedia, 2013; Awogbade & Dudafa, 2017). Consequently, disputes over crop destruction, grazing encroachment, or access to water often escalate into broader communal conflicts characterised by ethnic and religious tensions rather than remaining simple resource disputes (Olaniyan et al., 2021; International Crisis Group, 2017).

Social Identity Theory, therefore, complements Resource Scarcity Theory by explaining why competition over scarce resources escalates into violent confrontation. While resource scarcity provides the structural conditions for conflict, social identity shapes perceptions of threat, mistrust, and hostility that intensify violence between competing groups. Nevertheless, the theory has been criticised for emphasising group identity while paying insufficient attention to environmental pressures, governance failures, and economic inequalities that also contribute to conflict. For this reason, it integrates Resource Scarcity Theory and Human Security Theory to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the causes and impacts of the herder–farmer conflict in Ekiti State.

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory emerged from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (1994) as a people-centred approach to security that extends beyond the traditional focus on state security. The theory holds that genuine security encompasses protection from chronic threats such as hunger, poverty, disease, environmental degradation, and violent conflict. It ensures that individuals have access to sustainable livelihoods and a decent quality of life (UNDP, 1994). It identifies food security, economic security, environmental security, personal security, and community security as interrelated dimensions of human well-being. The theory is particularly relevant to the herder–farmer conflict in Ekiti State because its consequences extend beyond the loss of life and property to include declining agricultural productivity, displacement of farming households, disruption of rural markets, crop destruction, reduced household income, and rising food prices. These conditions undermine the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food, thereby threatening household food security and sustainable livelihoods (Abbass, 2022; Dipe, 2018; Olaniyan et al., 2021). Human Security Theory, therefore, offers a broader perspective on how violent conflict affects not only physical safety but also the socioeconomic well-being of rural communities.

Although Human Security Theory has been criticised for its broad scope and the difficulty of empirically measuring its multiple dimensions (Paris, 2001), it remains a useful framework for analysing the wider developmental consequences of violent conflict. In this study, the theory complements Resource Scarcity Theory and Social Identity Theory by explaining how competition over scarce resources and identity-based tensions translate into food insecurity and livelihood deprivation among farming households in Ekiti State.

Integrative Value of the Theories

The integration of Resource Scarcity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Human Security Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the causes and impacts of the herder–farmer conflict in Ekiti State. Resource Scarcity Theory explains how environmental degradation, climate change, and intensifying competition for scarce land and water resources create the structural conditions for conflict. Social Identity Theory complements this perspective by showing how ethnic and religious identities intensify mistrust, prejudice, and hostility, thereby transforming resource disputes into violent communal confrontations. Human Security Theory extends the analysis by highlighting the broader implications of the conflict for agricultural production, rural livelihoods, and household food security. Collectively, these theories provide a holistic explanation of the factors driving the herder–farmer conflict and justify the analytical framework

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the causes and impacts of the herder–farmer conflict on food security in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This approach enabled triangulation of data by combining structured questionnaires with Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly publications, government reports, policy documents, and other relevant literature to complement the primary data.

The study was conducted in the Ido-Osi and Ikole Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Ekiti State. The two LGAs were purposively selected for their recurrent herder–farmer conflicts, which have led to loss of life, destruction of farmland, displacement of farming households, and disruption of agricultural activities. These areas have recorded several violent incidents between farmers and pastoralists, making them suitable for investigating the relationship between conflict and food security.

The target population comprised farmers, Fulani herders, market women, security personnel, members of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), political office-holders, traditional rulers, and relevant government officials within the selected LGAs. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, Ido-Osi and Ikole LGAs were purposively selected due to the prevalence of herder–farmer conflicts. Second, communities within the selected LGAs were randomly selected. Third, stratified sampling was used to ensure adequate representation of stakeholder groups, while purposive sampling was used to select respondents with relevant knowledge and experience of the conflict.

A total of **600 structured questionnaires** were administered, comprising 100 respondents each from farmers' associations, Fulani herders' associations, market women associations, security agencies (Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps), members of NULGE, and political office holders, traditional rulers, and government officials. Of the 600 questionnaires administered, **540 were successfully retrieved**, representing a **90% response rate**, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis.

To complement the quantitative data, five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with key stakeholders. Two FGDs were held in Ido-Osi LGA and three in Ikole LGA, with each session comprising four to six participants. Participants were purposively selected for their direct experience of and knowledge about the herder–farmer conflict. The qualitative data provided contextual explanations that enriched the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

The questionnaire was developed from the study objectives, research questions, and relevant literature on herder–farmer conflict and food security. It comprised sections on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, the causes of the conflict, its impacts on agricultural production and household food security, and conflict management strategies. To ensure face and content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in Peace and Security Studies and Research Methodology, whose observations informed necessary revisions before final administration.

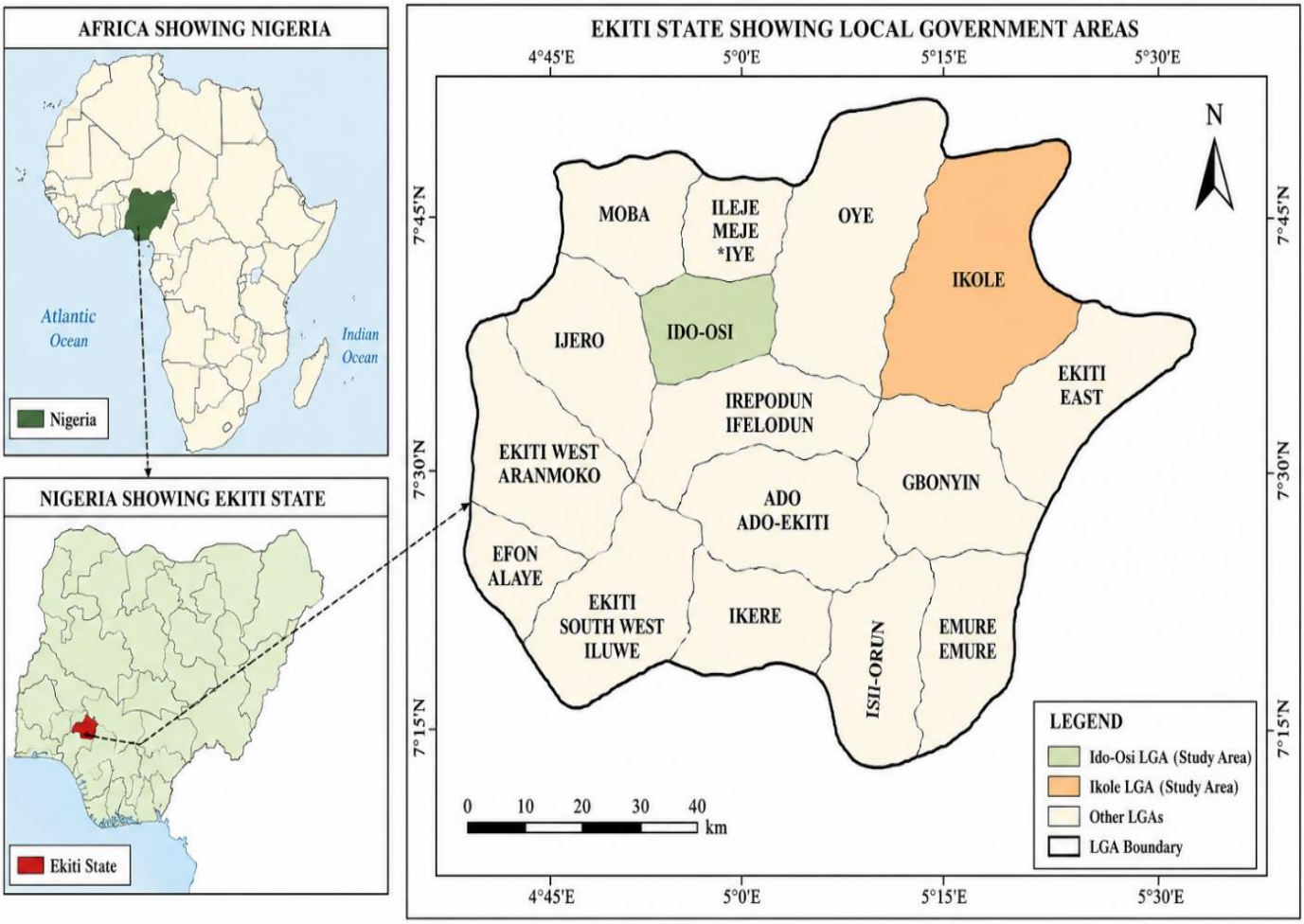
A pilot study was conducted to assess the instrument's reliability. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78, indicating an acceptable level of reliability for the study. Standardised procedures were followed throughout data collection to ensure consistency in administering the questionnaires and conducting the FGDs.

Participation in the study was voluntary. The purpose of the research was clearly explained to all participants, and informed consent was obtained before the questionnaires were administered and the FGDs were conducted. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and all information obtained was used strictly for academic purposes.

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, summarised the data, while Chi-square analysis was used to assess significant relationships among the study variables. Qualitative data from the FGDs were transcribed, coded, and thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and perspectives on the causes and impacts of the herder–farmer conflict on food security.

adopted in this study.

MAP OF EKITI STATE, NIGERIA SHOWING THE STUDY AREAS (IDO-OSI AND IKOLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS)



Source: Adapted from the Office of the Surveyor-General of the Federation (OSGoF) administrative boundary data, 2019 and modified by the author, 2024.

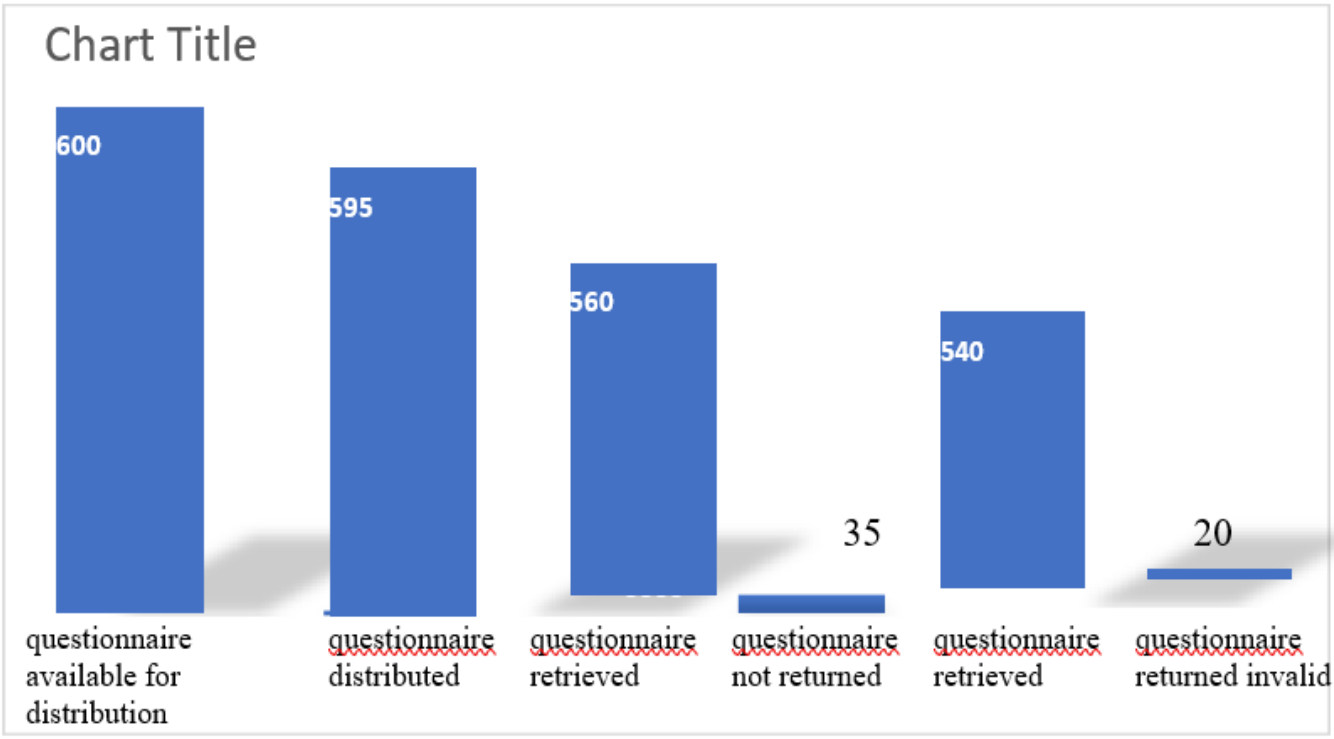
DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the data analysis and discussion of the study's findings.

Table 1: Showing the distribution of the questionnaire

Total of Questionnaires	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Total number of questionnaires available for distribution	600	100
Total number of questionnaires distributed	595	99
Total number of questionnaires not returned	35	7
Total number of questionnaires returned	560	93
The total number of questionnaires returned is invalid	20	3
The total number of questionnaires returned is valid	**540**	**90**

Figure 1. Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaires



Source: Field Survey (2024)

The table above provides a breakdown of questionnaire administration for the study. A total of 600 structured questionnaires (100%) were prepared for the survey, indicating the total number of potential respondents targeted in the study. This sample size suggests an all-inclusive effort to gather data from a wide range of participants, potentially including farmers, residents, policymakers, and others directly impacted by the herdsmen-farmers conflict from the chosen study area. However, 540 (90%) of the questionnaires were successfully retrieved, indicating a high retrieval rate that reinforces the validity of the study.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Sex

Sex	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	300	56
Female	240	44
Total	**540**	**100**

Age

Age (Years)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
18–25	55	10
26–35	80	15
36–45	99	18
46–55	170	31
56 and above	136	25
Total	**540**	**99***

Educational Level

Educational Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Primary School	220	41
Secondary School	200	37
Higher Education	120	22
Total	**540**	**100**

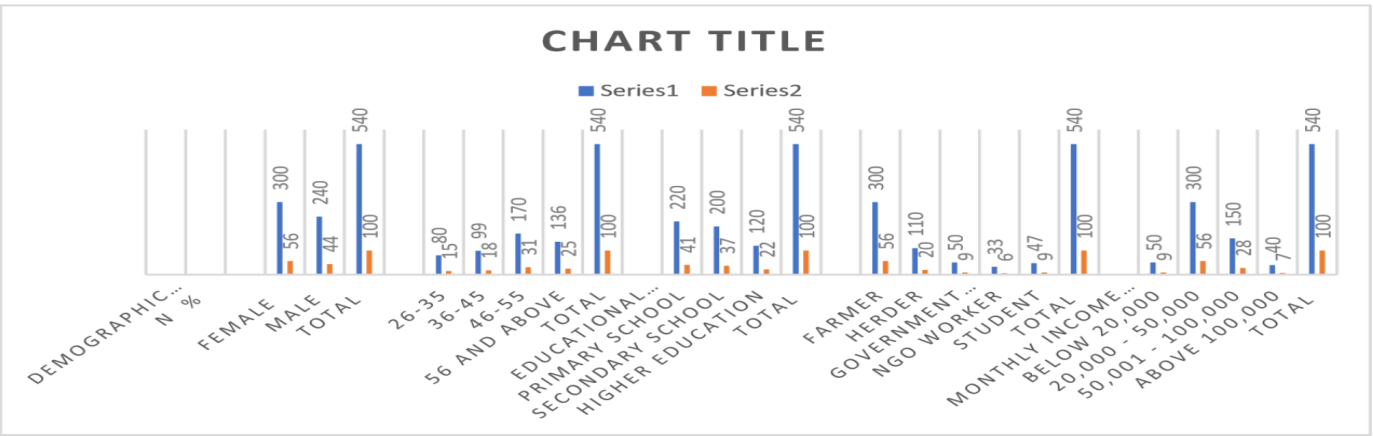
Occupation

Occupation	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Farmers	300	56
Herders	110	20
Government Officials	50	9
NGO Workers	33	6
Students	47	9
Total	**540**	**100**

Monthly Income (in Naira)

Monthly Income	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Below ₦20,000	50	9
₦20,000–₦50,000	300	56
₦50,001–₦100,000	150	28
Above ₦100,000	40	7
Total	**540**	**100**

Figure 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents



Source: Field Survey (2024)

The Table above presents the demographic characteristics of respondents in the selected study area. The table is analysed as follows:

Sex Distribution:

Male respondents (56%) outnumber Female respondents (44%). This suggests greater male involvement in either farming or areas affected by the conflict, which could indicate gendered dimensions of these conflicts' impacts, such as on food security and household management.

Age Distribution:

The largest age group is 46-55 (31%), followed by those aged 56 and above (25%). This indicates that middle-aged and older individuals are predominantly involved or affected, which could be linked to the fact that these age groups are more likely to be farmers-herders with experience and landholdings. Younger respondents, especially those aged 18-25 (10%), are relatively less involved. This could reflect the migration of youths to urban areas or a general disengagement from agriculture, further impacting food production.

Educational Level:

The majority have primary education (41%), followed by secondary education (37%), with only 22% having higher education. However, most respondents have some form of education that might influence their ability to adapt.

Occupation:

Farmers (56%) formed the majority, indicating that the conflict disproportionately affects those directly involved in food production. The herders (20%) represent a significant minority, which underscores the direct relationship between the two groups and the conflict. Other occupations, such as government officials (9%) and NGO workers (6%), reflect the involvement of external bodies in conflict management or mediation efforts. The students (9%) suggest that the younger population may be indirectly affected, particularly in terms of food security and family livelihoods.

Monthly Income:

Most respondents earn between ₦20,000.00 and ₦50,000.00 (56%), placing them in a low-income bracket, particularly given Nigeria's economic conditions. This highlights their vulnerability to economic shocks caused by the conflict, such as reduced food production, higher prices and lower incomes. A small percentage (7%) earn more than ₦100,000.00, indicating limited financial resilience among most respondents. This economic fragility exacerbates the conflict's impacts, making it harder for affected communities to recover or adapt.

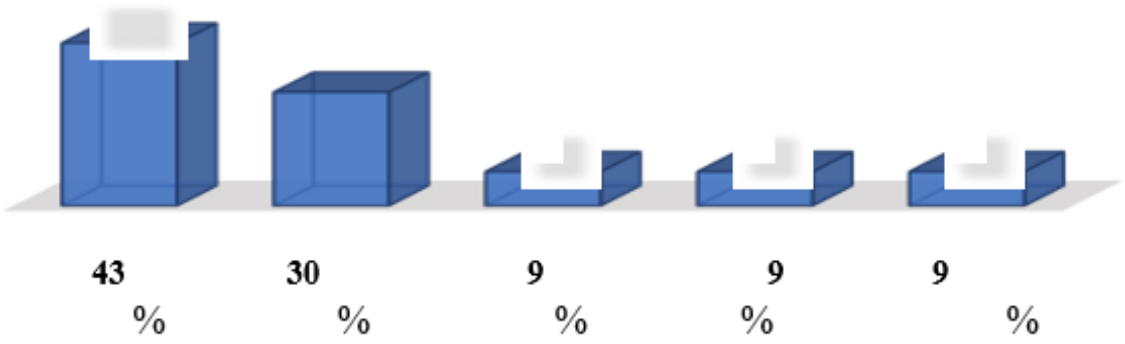
Research Objective One: To analyse the drivers of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State

Table 3: Respondents' Perceptions of Resource Competition as a Driver of the Herders–Farmers Conflict

Table. Respondents' Perception of Resource Competition as a Driver of Herders–Farmers Conflict (N = 540)

No.	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Resource competition is a major driver of the herders–farmers conflict in Ekiti State.	43	30	9	9	9

Figure 3 Respondents' Perceptions of Resource Competition as a Driver of the Herders–Farmers Conflict:



Source: Field Survey (2024)

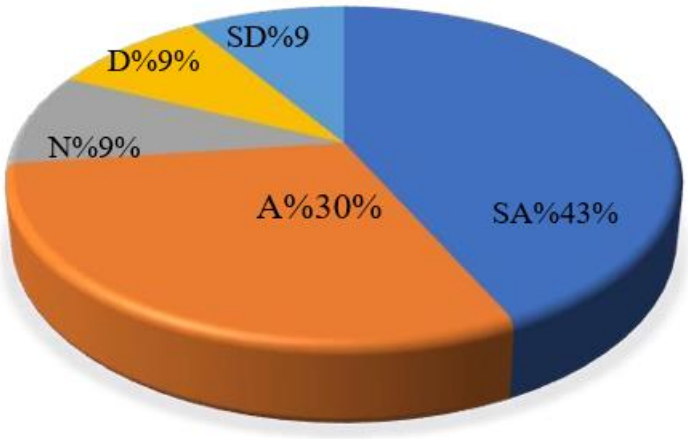
The data in the table and figure above support the statement that 'resource competition is a major driver of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State.' The response distribution shows that an overwhelming majority (73%) of respondents either strongly agree or agree that resource competition is a major driver of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State. Conflicts typically arise when herders encroach on farmland in search of pasture, a trend exacerbated by environmental changes such as desertification and population pressures. Only 18% of respondents (combining D and SD) dispute the impact of resource competition. This reinforces the view that competition for scarce resources is a significant contributor to conflict in the region. The small percentage of neutral responses (9%) suggests that most people have strong opinions about the issue, reflecting its importance to their lives and livelihoods. In the context of food security, resource competition that leads to conflict negatively affects agricultural productivity, as frequent disputes can disrupt farming activities, reduce crop yields, and displace farmers. This can worsen food shortages and undermine efforts to achieve sustainable food security in Ekiti State.

The focus group discussion also identified resource competition as a critical driver of the ongoing herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State. Key points raised by participants included the scarcity of land and water. They noted that competition for scarce resources such as land and water is a primary cause of conflict. Farmers need land for cultivation, while herders seek grazing areas for their livestock. The shrinking availability of these resources, driven by environmental degradation, population growth, and climate change, exacerbates tensions between the two groups (FGD).

Table 4: Respondents' Perceptions of Cultural Differences as a Driver of the Herders–Farmers Conflict

No.	Statement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
2.	Contributions of Cultural differences to the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State	43	30	9	9	9

Figure 4: Respondents' Perceptions of Cultural Differences as a Driver of the Herders–Farmers Conflict



Source: Field Survey (2024)

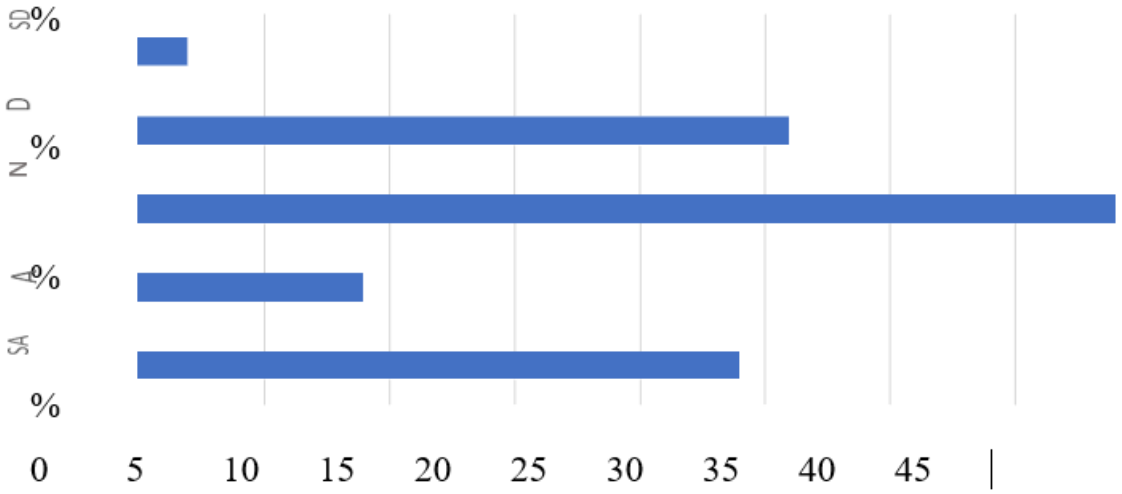
73% of respondents either strongly agree (43%) or agree (30%) that cultural differences significantly contribute to the herders-farmers conflict. This indicates a strong perception among the population that cultural factors play a crucial role in exacerbating tensions between these two groups. Only 9% of respondents are neutral about the statement, while another 18% (9% disagree + 9% strongly disagree) indicate that they do not believe cultural differences are significant contributors. This suggests consensus on the impact of cultural differences, with very few respondents opposing it. The strong agreement that cultural differences contribute to conflict highlights a potential concern for food security. Cultural misunderstandings or differences could lead to conflicts that disrupt agricultural activities vital to food production in Ekiti State.

Also, the focus group discussion concluded that cultural differences significantly contribute to the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State. Participants highlighted that contrasting lifestyles, values and practices between herders (primarily Fulani) and local farmers (predominantly Yoruba) create tension. Key points raised included differing land-use practices, communication barriers, clashing values and traditions, distrust and stereotypes, and a lack of effective conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Table 5: **Respondents' Perceptions of Inadequate Government Intervention in the Herders–Farmers Conflict**

No.	Statement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
3.	Lack of effective government intervention is a key factor in the escalation of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State.	24	9	39	26	2

Figure 5: Respondents' Perceptions of Inadequate Government Intervention in the Herders–Farmers Conflict



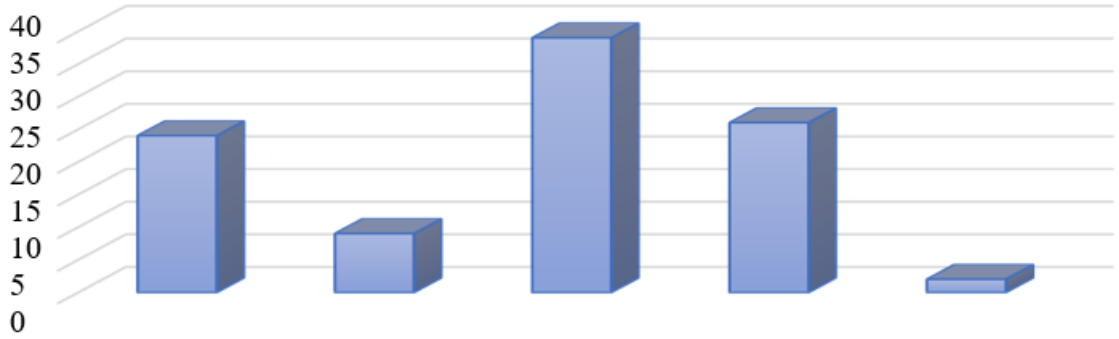
Source: Field Survey (2024)

A significant portion of respondents (24%) strongly agree that the lack of effective government intervention is a key factor in escalating the herders-farmers conflict. In comparison, 9% agree, indicating that a substantial number affirm that inadequate government action contributes to the conflict. A noteworthy 39% of respondents remain neutral. This suggests uncertainty or ambivalence about whether government intervention exacerbates the conflict. This neutrality may reflect a lack of awareness or differing perspectives on the issue. On the other hand, 26% disagree and only 2% strongly disagree, indicating that a significant portion of the population does not primarily attribute the escalation of the conflict to government intervention.

Table 6: **Respondents' Perceptions of Environmental Changes as Drivers of the Herders–Farmers Conflict**

No.	Statement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
4.	Environmental changes such as drought and desertification are significant drivers of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State.	24	9	39	26	2

Figure 6: Respondents' Perceptions of Environmental Changes as Drivers of the Herders–Farmers Conflict



Source: Field Survey (2024)

The combined percentage of respondents who strongly agree (24%) or agree (9%) with the statement (33%) indicates that a minority believes environmental changes are significant drivers of conflict. A larger portion of respondents are either neutral (39%) or disagree (26%), suggesting a lack of consensus on the role of environmental factors in the conflict. The substantial 39% neutral response indicates uncertainty or indifference among respondents regarding the relationship between environmental changes and the conflict. The 26% who disagree and 2% who strongly disagree suggest that a notable segment believes environmental changes are not significant drivers of the conflict. This could point to other factors (for instance, socio-economic issues, policy failures or ethnic tensions) being seen as more pertinent to the conflict.

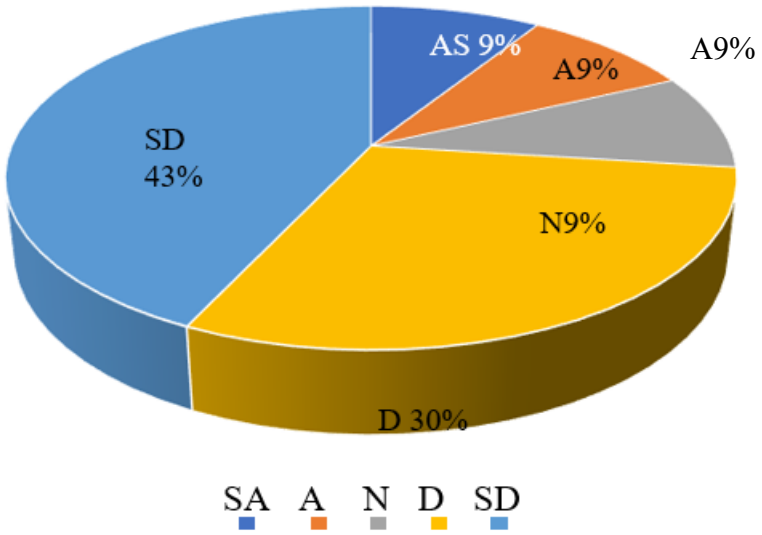
However, the focus group discussion highlighted that environmental changes, particularly drought and desertification, are significant drivers of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State. Participants agreed that these environmental challenges reduce the availability of arable land and water resources, forcing herders to migrate southward in search of grazing land. This migration often leads to encroachment on farmland, causing tension and competition over limited resources. The discussion concluded that resource scarcity, driven by prolonged dry seasons and advancing desertification, exacerbates the conflict as herders and farmers struggle to sustain their livelihoods. The groups' consensus was that environmental changes not only intensify the conflict but also create a cycle of violence and displacement, affecting the local economy and social cohesion in the affected communities.

The perception that environmental changes are not widely recognised as significant drivers could imply that stakeholders in food security may not prioritise addressing these issues in their strategies. If environmental factors such as drought and desertification are indeed contributing to the conflict, the lack of recognition could hinder effective policy responses to mitigate their impacts on food security.

Table 7: Respondents' Perceptions of the Influence of Land-Use Policies on the Herders–Farmers Conflict

No.	Statement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
5.	Lack of proper land-use policies are primary drivers contributing to the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State.	9	9	9	30	43

Figure 7: Respondents' Perceptions of the Influence of Land-Use Policies on the Herders–Farmers Conflict



Source: Field Survey (2024)

A significant majority of respondents (73%, a combination of 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree') do not believe that a lack of proper land-use policies is a primary driver of the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State. Only 18% (a combination of 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree') feel that land-use policies are a significant factor in the conflict.

In addition, the focus group discussion concluded that the lack of proper land-use policies is a primary factor contributing to the herders-farmers conflict in Ekiti State. Participants highlighted that inadequate and poorly implemented land-use regulations have led to disputes over land access and use, often resulting in violent clashes between herders and farmers. Key points raised during the discussions include the absence of clear land demarcation and boundaries, which have exacerbated tensions as herders encroach on farmland, leading to the destruction of crops and livelihoods; weak enforcement of existing policies; and socio-economic pressures, such as population growth and environmental degradation, which intensify competition for land and further complicate the herders-farmers relationship.

The lack of consensus on the role of land-use policies suggests that respondents may view other factors as more critical in the herdsmen-farmers' conflict. This perception can shape how food security issues are addressed, potentially leading policymakers to overlook land-use policy reforms that could mitigate conflicts and enhance agricultural productivity. If the majority believe that land-use policies are not a significant contributor to the conflict, this may indicate a disconnect between the agricultural and pastoral communities regarding land management practices. This disconnect can exacerbate tensions and negatively affect food security, as conflicts disrupt farming activities and lead to food shortages. The data suggest a need for a thorough re-examination of the underlying causes of the herdsmen-farmers' conflict beyond land-use policies.

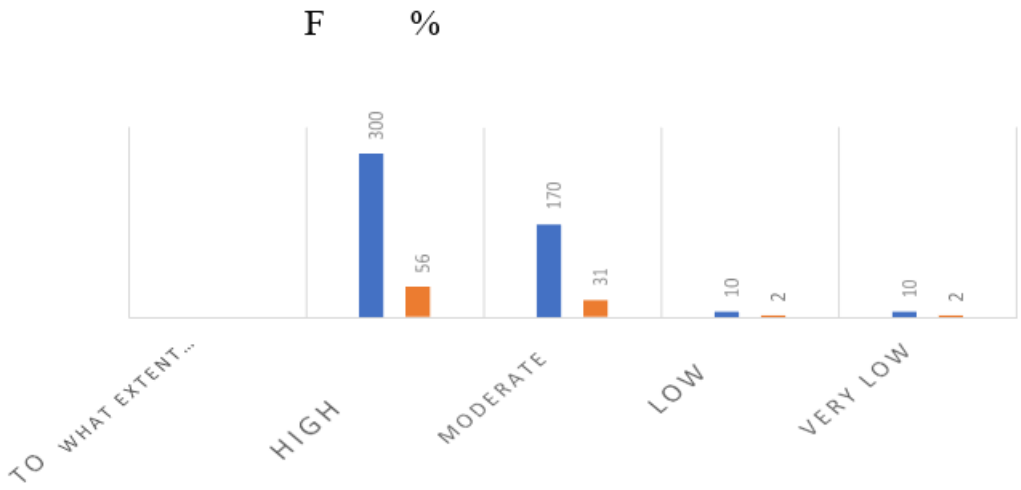
Research objective 2

Table 8: Extent of the Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on Crop Production

Statement	F	%
To what extent has the herders-farmers conflict affected crop production in your area?		
Very High	50	9

High	300	56
Moderate	170	31
Low	10	2
Very Low	10	2
	540	100%

Figure 8: Extent of the Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on Crop Production



Source: Field Survey (2024)

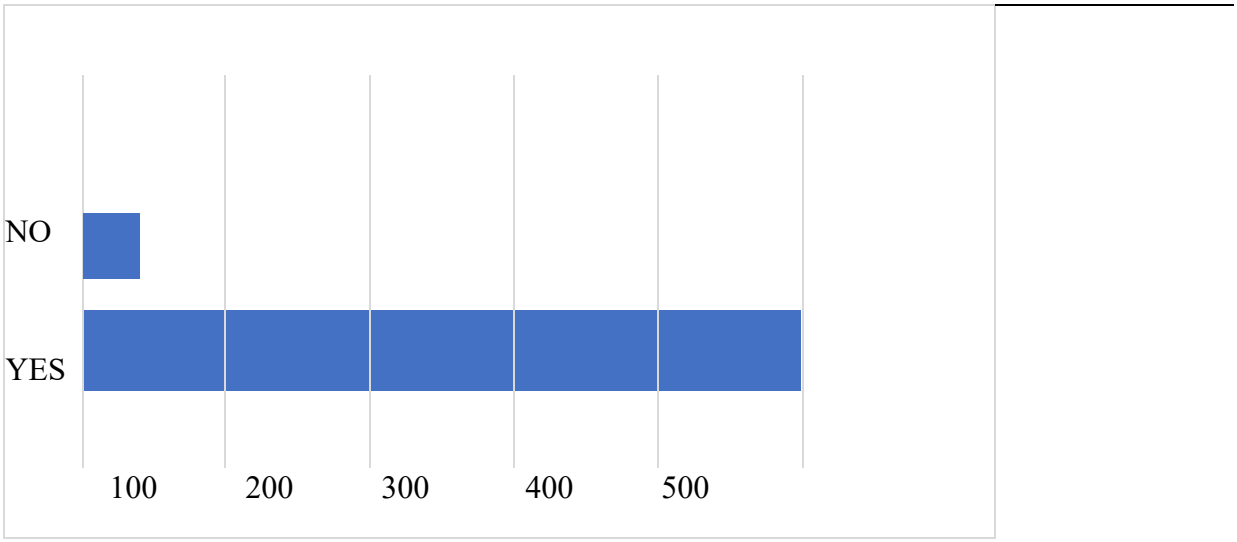
From the table above, a significant majority (56%) of respondents indicated that the conflict has a 'high' impact on crop production, suggesting that this issue is a critical concern for the agricultural community. 31% of respondents believe the impact is 'moderate,' indicating that while the conflict is affecting production, it may not be as severe as for those who reported a high impact. Only 4% of respondents, combined, report that the conflict has a low or very low impact on crop production, suggesting that most respondents are experiencing significant effects. The overwhelming perception of the herders-farmers conflicts as having a high or moderate impact on crop production underscores the challenges faced by farmers in the area. This suggests that the conflict is a major impediment to agricultural productivity, potentially leading to food insecurity and economic instability for those reliant on farming.

During the focus group discussion, participants highlighted the ongoing tensions between herders and farmers, with many expressing concerns about safety, land access and the ability to cultivate crops without fear of conflict. The group discussed potential solutions, such as conflict-resolution strategies, community dialogue, or policy interventions aimed at mitigating the impacts of these conflicts on agriculture. Overall, the survey results and focus group discussion together illustrate the pressing need for collaborative efforts to address the herders-farmers conflict and its repercussions on food production in the state.

Table 9: Household Experience of Food Shortages Due to the Herders–Farmers Conflict

No.	Statement	Yes	NO
	Have you experienced any food shortages in your household due to the herders-farmers conflict?	**500**	**40**

Figure 9: Household Experience of Food Shortages Due to the Herders–Farmers Conflict



Source: Field Survey (2024)

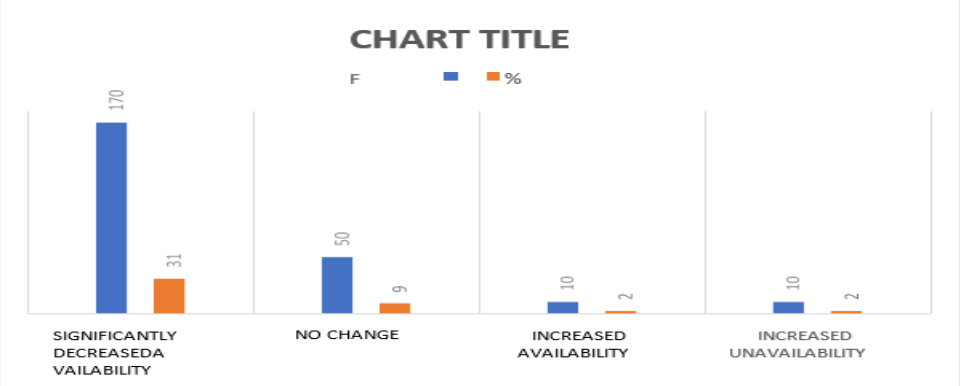
The analysis indicates that a significant majority of respondents (500 out of 540) have experienced food shortages in their households due to the herders-farmers conflict, highlighting a widespread issue affecting food security in the community. This suggests that the conflict has direct implications for agricultural productivity and food access, leading to heightened vulnerability among households.

From the focus group discussion, participants highlighted that the ongoing conflicts disrupt farming activities, increase food prices and limit access to agricultural resources. Many may have shared personal stories of crop destruction or displacement, further illustrating the conflict's impact on daily life and food availability.

Table 10: Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on the Availability of Staple Foods in Local Markets

Statement	**F**	**%**
Significantly decreased availability	170	31
Moderately decreased availability	300	56
No Change	50	9
Increased availability	10	2
Increased unavailability	10	2

Figure 10: Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on the Availability of Staple Foods in Local Markets



Source: Field Survey (2024)

The analysis of the conflict's impact on the availability of staple foods in local markets shows a clear trend. A substantial 87% of respondents reported that the availability of staple foods has either significantly decreased (31%) or moderately decreased (56%). This suggests that the conflict has had a considerable negative effect on the food supply, likely due to disrupted supply chains, reduced agricultural productivity, or heightened insecurity that limits market access. In contrast, only 9% reported no change in availability, while a mere 4% noted an increase in availability (2% each for increased availability and increased unavailability). This indicates a strong consensus among respondents about the adverse effects of conflict on food supplies, reinforcing the notion that conflict directly undermines food security.

During the focus group discussion, participants echoed similar concerns about food scarcity and its implications for the community. Many pointed out that the conflict has not only made it harder for farmers to cultivate and harvest their crops but also hindered traders' access to markets. One of the participants revealed her experience:

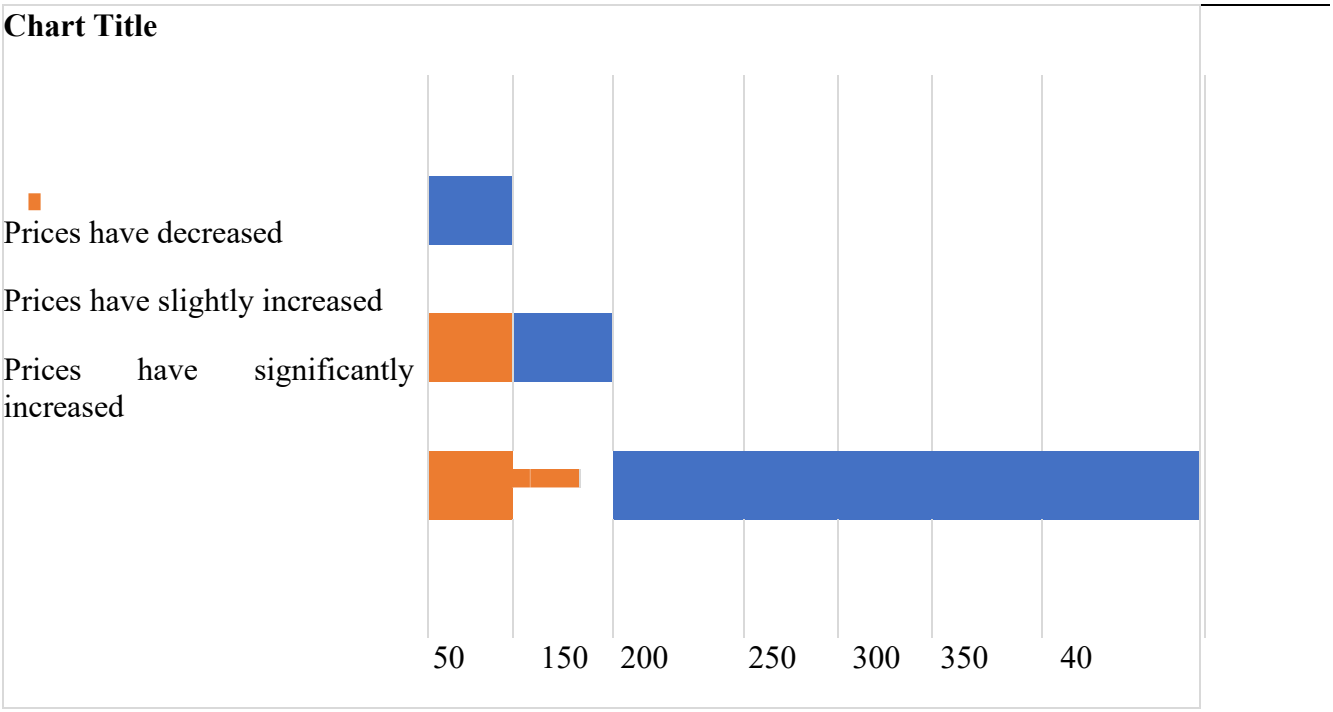
In June 2022, suspected herders macheted 4 farmers to death in Orin, Ekiti. The incident created fear among farmers, making it difficult for them to visit their farms for planting and harvesting, thereby creating a multiplier effect on agricultural output during the period (FGD).

This aligns with the data, as the majority of participants expressed concern about rising prices and limited access to essential food items, which can exacerbate poverty and malnutrition in the affected areas. The discussion emphasised the urgent need for intervention to stabilise the food supply and support local agricultural practices to mitigate the ongoing impact of the conflict.

Table 11: Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on Food Prices

Statement	F	%
Prices have significantly increased	350	65
Prices have slightly increased	135	25
Prices have remained stable	50	9
Prices have decreased	5	1

Figure 11: Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on Food Prices



Source: Field Survey (2024)

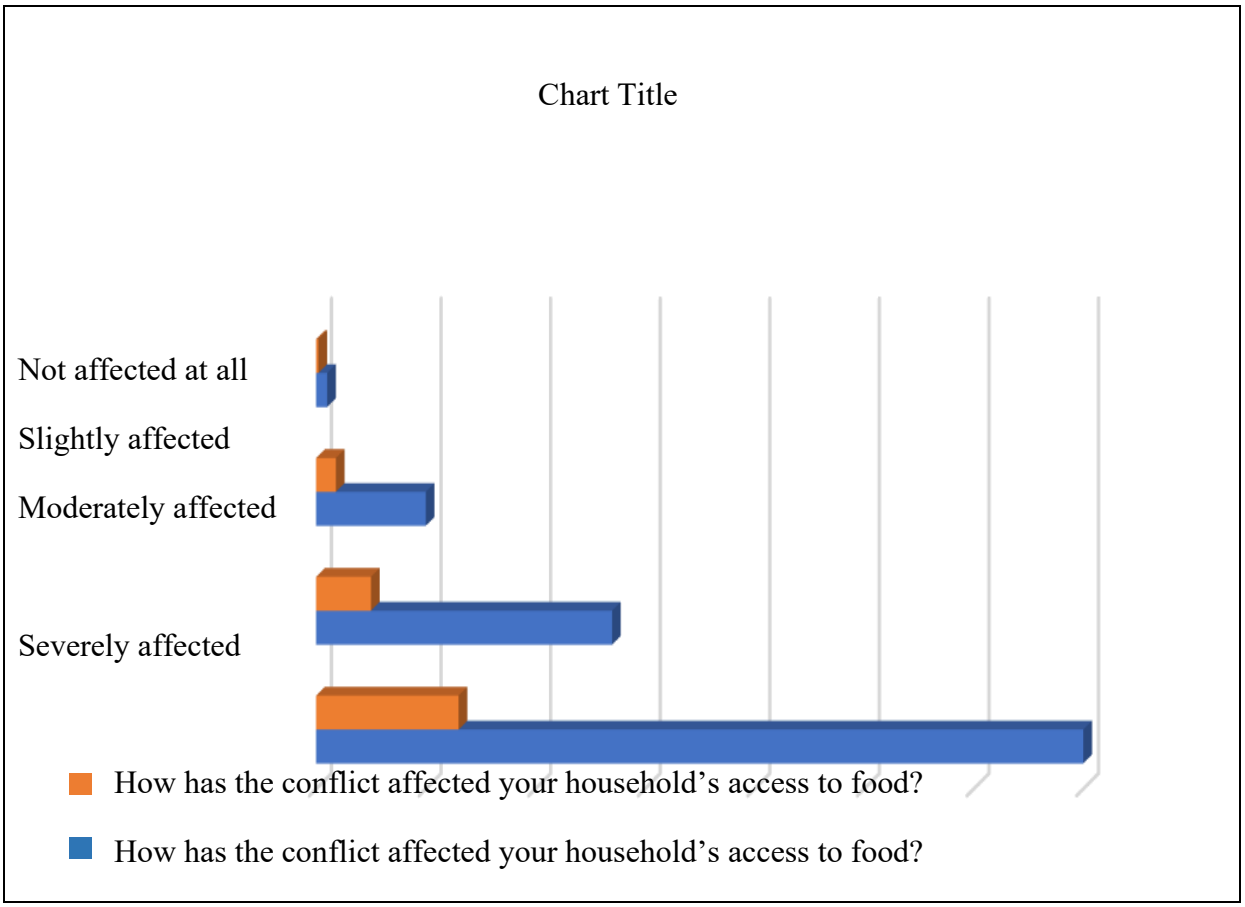
The analysis indicates a clear perception among community members of the impact of the herders-farmers conflict on food prices. A significant majority (65%) believed that prices have increased significantly due to the conflict, while 25% opined that prices have increased slightly. Only 9% felt prices had remained stable, while a mere 1% reported a decrease. This data suggests that the herders-farmers conflict is seen as a major factor driving up food prices in the community. The widespread belief that prices have risen significantly signals urgency and concern among residents about food affordability and availability, likely reflecting disruptions in agricultural production and supply chains caused by the conflict.

In the focus group discussion, participants echoed these sentiments, emphasising that the ongoing conflict has reduced agricultural output, with many farmers unable to tend their crops due to safety concerns. This disruption in farming activities has led to food scarcity and higher prices. The discussion highlighted that as food prices rise, access to essential commodities becomes more difficult for lower-income households, exacerbating food insecurity in the community. Overall, the group concluded that addressing the conflict is critical to stabilising food prices and ensuring the community's food security.

Table 12: How has the conflict affected your household's access to food?

Statement	F	%
Severely affected	350	65
Moderately affected	135	25
Slightly affected	50	9
Not affected at all	5	1

Figure 12 Impact of the Herders–Farmers Conflict on Household Access to Food



Source: Field Survey (2024)

The analysis of household access to food in the table above shows a significant impact on food security, with 65% of respondents reporting that their access to food has been 'severely affected'. The conflict has created substantial challenges for many families. An additional 25% feel 'moderately affected', suggesting that while they may still have some access to food, their situation is precarious and likely affects their overall well-being. Only 9% report being 'slightly affected', and a mere 1% claim they are 'not affected at all'. This data highlights that the majority of households are struggling with food insecurity, which can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including malnutrition and increased vulnerability.

In a focus group discussion summary, participants echoed these sentiments, sharing personal stories of how the

conflict has disrupted their livelihoods, driven up food prices, or limited their access to markets. Many expressed concerns about the long-term implications for their families, particularly children's nutrition and health. The overwhelming consensus indicated an urgent need for interventions to improve food access and address the root causes of the conflict to foster community resilience.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Causes of Herder–Farmer Conflict in Ekiti State

The findings of this study indicate that competition over land and other natural resources remains the principal driver of herder–farmer conflict in Ekiti State, with 73% of respondents identifying it as a major cause. This suggests that increasing pressure on arable land and water resources has intensified interactions between farmers and pastoralists, thereby raising the likelihood of violent confrontation. The result supports the propositions of Resource Scarcity Theory, which argues that competition over diminishing natural resources often generates conflict, particularly where institutional mechanisms for resource management are weak. The finding corroborates earlier studies by Abbass (2022) and Blench (2010), who identified environmental degradation, shrinking grazing land, and climate-induced migration as important drivers of herder–farmer conflicts in Nigeria. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that resource competition in Ekiti State has direct implications for agricultural production and household food security, thereby linking environmental insecurity with rural livelihoods.

The study further reveals that cultural differences between farming and pastoral communities constitute another significant factor underlying the conflict. A substantial proportion of respondents acknowledged that differences in cultural values, livelihood practices, and social identities contribute to mistrust and recurring confrontations. This finding reinforces the assumptions of Social Identity Theory, which explains how individuals tend to identify strongly with their social or ethnic groups, often leading to prejudice, stereotyping, and intergroup conflict. The result is consistent with the findings of Ofuoku and Isife (2009), who observed that ethnic differences between predominantly Fulani pastoralists and indigenous farming communities frequently complicate peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. In Ekiti State, these identity-based differences appear to intensify competition over land and deepen mutual suspicion, thereby sustaining the cycle of violence.

Another important finding is the perceived inadequacy of government intervention in addressing the conflict. Respondents expressed concerns about weak security responses, poor implementation of conflict management policies, and limited support for victims of violence. This finding corroborates Olaniyan et al. (2015), who argued that government responses to herder–farmer conflicts in Nigeria have largely been reactive rather than preventive. Similarly, Fiki and Lee (2004) emphasised that sustainable conflict management requires coordinated efforts among government institutions, traditional authorities, and local communities. The present study, therefore, suggests that strengthening institutional capacity, promoting inclusive dialogue, and improving land governance are essential for addressing the structural causes of the conflict. These findings also support the principles of Human Security Theory, which emphasises that sustainable peace depends not only on protecting lives but also on safeguarding livelihoods, food systems, and community well-being.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the herder–farmer conflict in Ekiti State is multidimensional, arising from the interplay of environmental pressures, socio-cultural differences, and institutional weaknesses. Addressing only one of these factors is unlikely to achieve sustainable peace. Rather, integrated interventions that combine effective land-use governance, community-based conflict resolution, climate adaptation strategies, and inclusive stakeholder engagement are required to reduce conflict and improve food security in the affected communities.

Impacts of Herder–Farmer Conflict on Food Security in Ekiti State

The findings of this study demonstrate that the herder–farmer conflict has significantly undermined food security in Ekiti State by adversely affecting agricultural production, food availability, food accessibility, and household livelihoods. A substantial proportion of respondents perceived the conflict as having a high impact on crop

production. At the same time, the majority also reported worsening food shortages, rising food prices, and reduced household access to food. These findings indicate that the conflict extends beyond security concerns, posing a major threat to sustainable agricultural development and household well-being.

The observed decline in agricultural production reflects disruptions to farming caused by recurring attacks, crop destruction, farmer displacement, and restricted access to farmland. These findings support the propositions of Human Security Theory, which argues that security should be understood not only in terms of protecting lives but also in safeguarding livelihoods, food systems, and human welfare. When farmers are unable to cultivate their land due to insecurity, agricultural output declines, household incomes fall, and food availability is threatened. This finding corroborates the findings of Adisa and Adekunle (2010), Okoli and Atelhe (2014), and Ofuoku and Isife (2009), who reported that violent conflicts in agricultural communities substantially reduce crop yields, limit farming activities, and undermine rural livelihoods. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that these production losses have broader implications for household food security in conflict-affected communities in Ekiti State.

The findings further reveal that the conflict has contributed to widespread food shortages and heightened household vulnerability. Most respondents reported a considerable decline in the availability of staple foods, and many households struggled to meet their daily food needs. These findings suggest that persistent insecurity disrupts local food supply chains and reduces rural households' capacity to produce or purchase sufficient food. They are consistent with previous studies by Adisa and Adekunle (2010) and Okoli and Atelhe (2014), which established that violent conflicts often lead to farm abandonment, displacement of farming populations, destruction of agricultural assets, and declining food availability. Qualitative evidence from the Focus Group Discussions reinforces these findings, as participants consistently identified displacement, restricted access to farms, and disruption of farming activities as major contributors to food insecurity in their communities.

Another important finding concerns the conflict's impact on food prices. The majority of respondents perceived a significant increase in food prices, reflecting the combined effects of declining agricultural production, disrupted market systems, and reduced food supply. Rising food prices not only reduce households' purchasing power but also heighten the vulnerability of low-income families, particularly those who depend on local agricultural markets for their food. This finding corroborates earlier studies indicating that violent conflicts in agricultural regions contribute to food price inflation by disrupting production and distribution networks. The present study, therefore, demonstrates that the economic consequences of the herder–farmer conflict extend beyond the agricultural sector, affecting household welfare and nutritional security.

The study also shows that household access to food has been severely affected by the conflict, with most respondents reporting significant difficulties in obtaining adequate, nutritious food. This finding aligns with Adebayo (2017) and Omotayo (2019), who observed that conflict-induced displacement, loss of livelihoods, and market disruptions significantly reduce household food access and increase vulnerability to malnutrition, particularly among women and children. Unlike many previous studies that focused primarily on agricultural production or food availability, this study demonstrates that the consequences of the herder–farmer conflict extend across multiple dimensions of food security, including availability, accessibility, and household utilisation. This provides a more comprehensive understanding of how violent conflict affects rural livelihoods in Ekiti State.

Overall, the findings show that the herder–farmer conflict has evolved beyond a dispute over land and grazing resources into a significant development and human security challenge. The interplay of declining agricultural productivity, food shortages, rising food prices, and reduced household access to food underscores the multidimensional nature of food insecurity in conflict-affected communities. Consequently, addressing these challenges requires integrated policy responses that combine effective conflict prevention, community-based peacebuilding, climate adaptation, agricultural resilience programmes, improved rural infrastructure, and strengthened institutional support for farming and pastoral communities. Such interventions are essential to enhance sustainable food security and promote peaceful coexistence in Ekiti State.

Implications of the Findings for Conflict Management and Food Security

The findings of this study have significant implications for conflict management, agricultural development, and food security in Nigeria. The evidence shows that the herder–farmer conflict in Ekiti State is not merely a security challenge but a multidimensional development issue that threatens agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and sustainable food systems. Persistent destruction of farmland, displacement of farming households, disruption of market activities, and rising food prices collectively undermine household food security and socioeconomic stability. These findings underscore the need for integrated interventions that address both the immediate drivers of violent conflict and the underlying structural conditions that sustain it.

The study further underscores the need to strengthen community-based conflict-resolution mechanisms involving traditional rulers, community leaders, farmers' associations, pastoral groups, and local government authorities. As many disputes originate at the community level, inclusive dialogue platforms and locally driven mediation processes can foster trust, reduce hostility, and promote peaceful coexistence among stakeholders. This finding aligns with contemporary peacebuilding approaches that emphasise local ownership and participatory conflict management as essential to sustainable peace.

Another important implication is the need to strengthen climate adaptation and agricultural resilience strategies. The findings indicate that competition for land and other natural resources has intensified conflicts between farming and pastoral communities. Consequently, government policies should promote sustainable land-use planning, improved grazing management, investment in irrigation systems, climate-smart agriculture, and environmental conservation to reduce pressure on scarce resources. Such interventions would not only minimise resource-based conflicts but also enhance agricultural productivity and long-term food security.

The study also highlights the need for stronger institutional responses, achieved through improved coordination among security agencies, agricultural extension services, local government authorities, and traditional institutions. Effective early warning systems, prompt conflict-response mechanisms, and consistent enforcement of land-use regulations would significantly reduce the frequency and severity of violent confrontations. Furthermore, policies that support livelihood diversification, rural infrastructure development, and social protection for conflict-affected households would enhance community resilience and reduce vulnerability to food insecurity.

Overall, the findings reinforce the argument that sustainable food security cannot be achieved without addressing the structural causes of the herder–farmer conflict. An integrated approach combining conflict prevention, inclusive governance, climate adaptation, agricultural resilience, and community participation is therefore essential to promote peaceful coexistence and ensure sustainable agricultural development in Ekiti State and other conflict-prone regions of Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. At the federal, state, and local levels, government should strengthen community-based conflict-resolution mechanisms by promoting dialogue among farmers, pastoralists, traditional rulers, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. Establishing local peace committees and strengthening existing traditional conflict-resolution institutions would facilitate early dispute resolution and promote peaceful coexistence.

2. Governments should develop and implement sustainable land-use and grazing policies that clearly delineate farming and grazing areas while ensuring equitable access to natural resources. These policies should be supported by effective enforcement mechanisms to reduce resource-based conflicts and minimise disputes over land and water.

3. Investment in climate adaptation and climate-smart agricultural practices should be prioritised to reduce the adverse effects of environmental changes that intensify competition for scarce resources. Programmes promoting irrigation, sustainable land management, improved pasture development, and environmental conservation should be expanded to strengthen agricultural resilience.

4. Security agencies should strengthen early warning and rapid response mechanisms in conflict-prone communities by improving intelligence gathering, inter-agency collaboration, and regular engagement with local communities. Prompt intervention in emerging disputes would reduce violence and minimise its impact on agricultural production and food security.

5. Government and development partners should provide targeted support to conflict-affected farming households through agricultural input subsidies, improved access to credit, extension services, and livelihood recovery programmes. These interventions would help affected households restore agricultural production and improve food security.

6. Public enlightenment programmes should be intensified to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence between farmers and pastoralists. Civil society organisations, religious institutions, traditional authorities, and the media should collaborate to implement peace education and awareness campaigns to reduce stereotypes and strengthen social cohesion.

7. Future studies should employ more advanced analytical techniques, such as multiple regression analysis or structural equation modelling, to provide deeper insights into the determinants of household food security and the complex relationships among conflict, agricultural productivity, and rural livelihoods. Comparative studies across other states and geopolitical zones would also enhance the generalisability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the causes and impacts of the herder–farmer conflict on food security in Ekiti State, Nigeria, using a mixed-methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative data. The findings reveal that the conflict is driven primarily by competition for scarce natural resources, socio-cultural differences, and weaknesses in institutional responses. These factors have intensified tensions between farming and pastoral communities, leading to recurrent violence that threatens agricultural production and rural livelihoods.

The study further establishes that the consequences of the herder–farmer conflict extend beyond physical insecurity, significantly undermining food security. The conflict has contributed to reduced agricultural productivity, destruction of farmland, displacement of farming households, food shortages, rising food prices, and declining household access to adequate and nutritious food. These findings demonstrate that the conflict is not merely a law-and-order issue but a broader human security and development challenge with far-reaching implications for sustainable agricultural development and socioeconomic stability in Ekiti State.

By integrating Resource Scarcity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Human Security Theory, the study offers a comprehensive explanation of the complex interplay among environmental pressures, identity-based tensions, and institutional weaknesses that sustain the conflict. The findings also contribute to the growing body of literature on herder–farmer conflicts by showing that the effects of violent conflict extend across multiple dimensions of food security, including food availability, accessibility, and household livelihoods. This provides important empirical evidence from Ekiti State, thereby enriching existing scholarship, which has largely concentrated on other regions of Nigeria.

The study concludes that sustainable solutions to the herder–farmer conflict require more than conventional security measures. Addressing the structural drivers of the conflict requires integrated policy interventions that promote community-based conflict resolution, sustainable land-use management, climate adaptation, agricultural resilience, and stronger institutional collaboration among government agencies, traditional

authorities, farming communities, and pastoral groups. Such coordinated efforts are essential to reduce conflict, strengthen rural livelihoods, and ensure sustainable food security in Ekiti State and other conflict-prone areas of Nigeria.

REFERENCES

1. Abbass, I. M. (2012). No retreat, no surrender: Conflict for survival between Fulani pastoralists and farmers in Northern Nigeria. European Scientific Journal, 8(1), 331–346. https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2012.v8n1p%25p
2. Adelakun, O., Adepoju, A., & Okoli, C. (2015). The dynamics of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria: Causes, consequences and interventions. Journal of Social Development in Africa, 31(2), 43–57.
3. Adebayo, O. (2017). Herders-farmers conflict and food security challenges in Nigeria. National Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution.
4. Adisa, R. S., & Adekunle, O. A. (2010). Farmers-herdsmen conflicts: A factor analysis of socio-economic conflict variables among arable crop farmers in North Central Nigeria. Journal of Human Ecology, 30(1), 1–9.
5. Agbegbedia, A. O. (2013). An assessment of the method of managing conflict between pastoralists and farmers in Benue State, Nigeria (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ibadan).
6. Ajayi, A., & Buhari, M. (2020). Herders-farmers conflict and the Nigerian economy, 2015–2020. Journal of African Political Economy & Development, 1(1), 45–60.
7. Babatope, B., & Akerele, D. (2022). Correlating cycles of violent pastoralist-farmer conflict with food security trends in Ekiti State, 1960–2020. Nigerian Journal of Agricultural Economics, 8(1), 45–54.
8. Bello, A. (2013). Herdsmen and farmers' conflicts in North-Eastern Nigeria: Causes, repercussions and resolutions. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 2(5), 129–139.
9. Blench, R. M. (2010). Conflicts between pastoralists and cultivators in Nigeria (Review paper prepared for the Department for International Development).
10. Dimelu, M. U., Salifu, D. A., & Igbokwe, E. M. (2021). Resource use conflict between farmers and herders in the South-West and South-South zones of Nigeria. Pastoralism, 11(1), 1–21.
11. Dipe, T. E. (2018). Factors underlying farmers-herders' conflicts in the South-West zones of Nigeria (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University).
12. Ekiti State. (2016). Ekiti State Prohibition of Cattle and Other Ruminants Grazing Law, 2016. https://www.ekitistate.gov.ng
13. Faleti, S. A. (2005). Theories of social conflict. In S. G. Best (Ed.), Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa (pp. xx–xx). Spectrum Books.
14. FAO. (2016). Prevalence of undernourishment. World Bank Database. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SN.ITK.DEFC.ZS
15. Fiki, M. M., & Lee, S. K. (2004). Conflict management and social network in the context of herders-farmers conflict relations in Nigeria. Journal of Social Development in Africa, 19(1), 29–42.
16. Fisher, R., & Ury, W. L. (1981). Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in. Penguin Books.
17. Gizelis, T. I., & Joseph, J. (2016). Political economy, geography, and conflict: A survey. New York University.
18. Homer-Dixon, T. (1999). Environment, scarcity, and violence. Princeton University Press.
19. Imo, C. K. (2017). The demographic implications of the clashes between nomadic herders and farmers in Nigeria. International Journal of Development Management, 12(1), 45–58.
20. Jimoh, A. A., Lawal, A. R., & Bello, Z. A. (2023). A review of farmers-herders conflict and its implications for food security, ecological systems, and the economy of Ibarapa, Oyo State, Nigeria. EPH-International Journal of Educational Research, 7(3), 15–28.
21. Obisesan, K., & Oluwafemi, A. (2022). Spikes in emergency food aid requests during waves of herder attacks: Coping mechanisms of displaced farming groups. Society and Natural Resources, 35(12), 59–77.

22. Ofem, O. O., & Ajayi, E. S. (2018). Effects of ecological factors on the occurrence and distribution of conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers in Central Nigeria. Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations, 5(1), 21–36.
23. Ofuoku, A. U., & Isife, B. I. (2010). Causes, effects and resolution of farmers-nomadic cattle herders' conflict in Delta State, Nigeria. International Journal of Anthropology, 43(1), 47–54.
24. Okoli, O., & Atelhe, T. (2014). Identifying motivators for state-pastoralist dialogue: Exploring the relationships between livestock services, self-organisation, and conflict in Nigeria's pastoralist Fulani. Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice, 14(12), 1–14.
25. Olaniyan, A., Francis, M. E., & Okeke-Uzodike, U. (2015). The cattle are "Ghanaians", but the herders are strangers: Farmer-herder conflicts, expulsion policy, and the pastoralist question in Agogo, Ghana. African Studies Quarterly, 16(2), 53–82.
26. Olaniyan, A., Francis, M., & Okeke-Ogbuafor, N. (2021). He must go: My father's land—Environmental change, land access and farmer-herder conflicts in Central Nigeria. African Studies Quarterly, 17(3), 47–69.
27. Olaoye, R., & Adekunle, O. (2021). Modelling trajectories and implications of continuing herder-farmer conflicts for agricultural resilience and hunger risk in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Sustainability, 13(3), 13–27.
28. Omotayo, A. (2019). The roles of public relations in resolving the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria. American International Journal of Social Science, 8(1), 34–46. https://doi.org/10.30845/aijss.v8n1p7
29. Omotayo, I., & Awe, O. (2022). Expanding cartography of cropland lost to recurrent herder raids: Production and hunger implications for Ekiti State. Geomatics and Environmental Management, 6(3), 56–80.
30. Onyekakeyah, L. (n.d.). What is a cattle colony? The Guardian Nigeria. https://guardian.ng
31. Smith, C. A. (2000). Nigeria: Dancing on the brink. Oxford University Press.
32. Sule, A., & Bolarinwa, K. (2022). Distortions in land use policy and farmer-herder conflict frameworks: Towards sustainable agricultural futures in Ekiti. Journal of Political Economy and Agriculture, 4(8), 21–33.