

Original Research

Challenges Of Security Intervention in Combating Armed Conflict in Benue State - Nigeria.

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***Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.*

Abstract

Security is a foundational concept of the sovereign state. Most understandings of security are yet to question security, but just sought to explore how a state provides protection. Even though the invocation of security gives an issue the air precision, distinguishing it from other issues, it remains without further specifications an ambiguous term. Benue State has a history of armed conflict that includes herder-farmer-clashes, military operations, militia and other violent incidents. The height of the armed conflict in Benue State is recognizably the Fulani herdsman and farmers violent engagement. Historically, the dispute between the Fulani Herdsmen and indigenous farmers of Benue is said to have started in the early 1800s. In Nigeria, Benue State is awarded the tag "Food Basket of the Nation" because of her people natural inclination to extensive crops farming that brings out largest quantity of food production for distribution and feeding of that the entire population in the country. The violent conflict between herders and farmers which has become a symbolic security threaten Benue State and Nigeria has been recognized and reported to have dynamic causes that are associated with political, economic, agricultural, and territorial expansion motives. The study is anchored on resource course Theory and Resource course theory to explain the security challenges of managing farmers-herdsmen conflict in Benue State The paper used both primary data collected from the field and secondary data. The research therefore recommend that Conflict management committees set up by government should collaborate with farmers' and herdsman's unions and associations in creating comprehensive awareness and compliance with designated stock routes. The collaborations should be at State, Zonal, Local Governments, and Village/Community levels through jointly established committees. Traditional and local leaders should ask for support to established grazing and farming practices, rules and regulations while governmental agencies/ministries responsible for agriculture, lands, geographical information systems, forestry and natural resources should ensure proper delineation and regular revision of stock routes. There is need for viable NGOs on farmer-herdsmen conflict management, especially in

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the areas of awareness, education, prevention, and amelioration. Furthermore, nongovernmental organizations should support livestock-centered livelihoods including cattle herding, not only in conflict mitigation but also in the support of grassroots innovations and in influencing favorable national policies.

Keywords: Security threat, challenges, armed conflict, dynamic, security agency, establish committee

Introduction

Armed conflict has remained one of the most pressing challenges confronting Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt region where Benue State is located (Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021). The state has consistently witnessed violent clashes between farmers and herdsman, resulting in widespread insecurity, destruction of property, and loss of lives (Dieng, 2021). These conflicts are deeply rooted in competition over scarce resources such as land and water, exacerbated by environmental changes, population pressures, and socio-political dynamics (Bala & Tar, 2021).

Security interventions by both state and non-state actors have been deployed to mitigate the crisis, yet the persistence of violence underscores the complexity of the problem (Rohner, 2024). The Nigerian government, through military and paramilitary forces, has attempted to restore peace, but these interventions often face challenges such as inadequate resources, weak institutional frameworks, and lack of community trust (Fabre, 2023). International organizations and regional bodies like ECOWAS have also emphasized the importance of cooperative security measures, but implementation remains inconsistent (Gawi & Abdullahi, 2024).

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict are severe, with displacement of thousands of people, disruption of agricultural activities, and deterioration of health and social services (Debarre, 2022). Women and children are disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of poverty, malnutrition, and psychological trauma (Bendavid et al., 2021). Moreover, the continuous cycle of attacks and reprisals has threatened national unity, undermined governance structures, and weakened the legitimacy of state institutions (Charbonneau, 2021).

Benue State thus represents a microcosm of Nigeria's broader security dilemma, where interventions are challenged by structural, environmental, and socio-political factors (Maitra, 2024). Understanding these challenges is critical for designing effective strategies that not only address immediate violence but also tackle the root causes of insecurity (Ugwu et al., 2024). This research therefore seeks to examine the challenges of security intervention in combating armed conflict in Benue State, Nigeria, with a view to providing insights into sustainable peacebuilding and conflict management (Almakhzoumi & Alhunieti, 2024).

The lingering armed conflict in Benue State perpetuated by the herders-farmers engagements, unknown gunmen, banditry, kidnapers, and militia aggression has made the State to become the epicentre of violence and disorderliness. The federal and Benue State government concerted efforts adopted to bring peace and stability is living much to be desired. The population of Benue State is thinning gradually and the security of lives and property is not guaranteed, decline food production and social cum economic development has expose the people of Benue State to the sphere of existential threat. Apparently, the prospects of ensuring the restoration of peace and stability is predictably and strangely appears bleak. This is undoubtedly making the future of the armed conflict to remain progressing unabated. In fact, the multiplier effect of this foreseeable reality represent a picture of the loss of the internally displaced person hope of return to their ancestral homes

as their land has been taken over by the invading herders and bandits. There is persistent pressure on the government to channel developmental funds to mitigate the suffering of the IDPs, in terms creation of new accommodation, and other welfares needs other than rural development to curtail the rural-urban drift.

Research questions

- i. How have security agencies (military, police, DSS, NSCDC) intervened in armed conflict in Benue state?
- ii. To what extent have security agencies interventions impacted the reduction of armed conflicts in Benue state?

Objectives of the Paper

The insight into the hydra-violent phenomenon of armed conflict in Benue State with its negative effect on the population and the nation and with the view to further research to assess the effectiveness of security agencies intervention to end the situation. The objectives are to

- i. To assess the impact of military intervention in armed conflict in Benue State,
- ii. To analyze the extent of security agencies intervention in the lingering armed conflict situation in Benue State.

Literature review

Conceptual clarification Security

In simple words, there is nothing within the term “security” that sets the limits of that specification (Buzan, 1991). For Buzan (1991), security issues encompass a whole domain, rather than just a fixed point, and for that, it cannot be defined in any general sense (Buzan, 1991). This domain used to be focused on threat, use, and control of military force (Walt, 1991), but has now expanded to include economic, environmental, societal issues as well as military and political concerns (Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021). It has moved beyond an exclusive focus on states to include the security of individuals, communities, regions, etc. (Dieng, 2021).

According to Talukder (1982), security means protection and preservation of minimum core values of any nation political independence and territorial integrity (Fabre, 2023). Adedoyin (2011) sees security as measures ensuring peaceful co-existence and development at large (Charbonneau, 2021). Security can be referred to as the condition or feeling of safety from harm or danger, the defense, protection, and preservation of core values as well as the absence of threat to acquired values (Francis, 2006; Bendavid et al., 2021). These definitions of security have all approached security from a nation-state’s perspective towards ensuring national security (Rohner, 2024).

Security has been seen by analysts and researchers to be aggregable into sectors (Debarre, 2022). According to the works of Buzan, ole, and Wilde (1998), five major sectorial securities were identified including Military, Political, Economic, Societal, and Environmental (Tanca, 2023; Gawi & Abdullahi, 2024).

Armed Conflict

According to Nnoli (2003), armed conflict and its multi-dimensional consequences has been an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity, and overall economic development of Nigeria (Jain et al., 2022). Violence provoked by conflicts has often turned the people’s intention from creative production to creative destruction (Maitra, 2024). Violence, according to the World Health Organization, means the intentional use of physical

force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, and deprivation (WHO, 2002; Sever et al., 2023). Armed violence in Nigeria has been a matter of great concern as the country is characterized by a lot of violent crimes and conflicts (Ugwu et al., 2024; Thompson, 2023)

Causes of Herdsmen Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

(a) Environmental Factors: Conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have existed since the beginning of agriculture and have increased or decreased in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental, and other factors (Charbonneau, 2021). Environmental security scholar Thomas Homer-Dixon emphasized the role of resource scarcity and competition as the primary, though not the only cause of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Blench, 2010; Bala & Tar, 2021).

Resource scarcity is induced by many factors and is not without consequences (Fabre, 2023). This type of scarcity is essentially a decline in the availability of or access to natural resources (Debarre, 2022). It is usually induced by climatic and environmental factors such as climate change, acute drought, environmental degradation, freshwater depletion, desertification, erosion, extreme heat, and loss of wetland (Sever et al., 2023; Ugwu et al., 2024).

(b) Population Explosion:

Another major cause of the violence is population explosion of both humans and livestock, which is based on the hypothesis of Thomas Malthus (1798) on eco-scarcity and population pressure entitled *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, in which he proposed that population and resources are initially in equilibrium, but while populations grow exponentially, food production increases only linearly (Fabre, 2023). According to him, population grows exponentially, while food production grows in arithmetic progression (Rohner, 2024). More so, population growth will reduce the availability of natural resources because population grows faster than food supply, and poor people will impoverish the soil and natural resources by overuse, and this will induce competition and conflict over means of existence (Jain et al., 2022).

(c) Expansive Use of Land for Non-agricultural Purposes:

The expansive use of land and water for non-agricultural uses also often reduces the resource base available to pastoralists and farmers (Debarre, 2022). In response to this, it is not uncommon to see herdsmen grazing along the streets, and sedentary farmers cultivating on grazing routes, which often stimulate conflict from crop damages by herds, destruction of farm properties, and escalation into violence (Bala & Tar, 2021).

(d) Unfavorable Ecological Changes: Scarcity of water, land, and harsh weather in the North East and North West part of Nigeria is a major factor that necessitates the migration of pastoralists to the Middle Belt, where the ecology is more favourable to their herding business because of a more favourable climate and access to water by the existence of River Niger and Benue (Sever et al., 2023; Ugwu et al., 2024).

(e) Unregulated Transhumance:

Pastoral migration from one geographical location to another in search of a more favourable climate and resources is often referred to as transhumance, which according to the Centre for Democracy and Development (2015) is a system of animal production characterized by seasonal and cyclical migration between complementary ecological areas as a means of adapting to unfavorable conditions (Tanca, 2023). Despite the many advantages of transhumance, this system of cattle rearing usually brings the herders and their retinue of cattle herds into contact and competition over land, water, and grazing routes, which usually end up in non-violent and violent conflict with local communities (Shettima & Tsar, 2008; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Dieng, 2021). These communities are predominantly sedentary farmers and fishermen and are always bent on asserting their exclusive right to land tenure and land inheritance (Charbonneau, 2021).

(f) Land Ownership System:

The mysticism and inclination to land ownership in Nigeria is also a major cause of the conflict (Fabre, 2023). The indigene-settler syndrome is always a factor necessitating conflict over land use, especially when there exists a deliberate deprivation or perceived marginalization of one group in the allocation and utility of land and access to water (Gawi & Abdullahi, 2024). As a result of transhumance, pastoralists from the North East and North West part of Nigeria who migrate to the Middle Belt in search of forage and water inevitably become hosts and settlers and are often seen as strangers, settlers, or foreigners (Maitra, 2024).

(h) Boko Haram Attack and Coerced Migration of Herdsmen:

Incessant attacks and the conquest of some of the North East and North West part of Nigeria by the Boko Haram sects have forced pastoralists to migrate downwards to more peaceful and safer North Central regions for the safety of their herds and in order to prevent cattle ranching, which is now a common practice in Northern Nigeria (Thompson, 2023). This uneasy relocation usually stirs up aggression and hostile behaviour in the host communities, leading to further loss of herds by the pastoralists and crops by the farmers (Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021).

(i) Cost Minimization:

The calculated attempt of the pastoralists to minimize cost by bringing their herds downward to the south, where there is ready access to pasture and market, has over the years generated serious disturbance for the host communities (Dieng, 2021). This movement often exacerbates tensions between pastoralists and sedentary farmers, leading to disputes over land use and resource allocation (Charbonneau, 2021). The economic motivation behind such migration highlights the intersection of livelihood strategies and conflict dynamics in Nigeria (Gawi & Abdullahi, 2024).

Consequences of Herdsmen Farmers Conflict

(a) Loss of Life and Human Insecurity

One of the major consequences of the perennial conflict, attacks, and counter-attacks between herdsmen and farmers in Northern Nigeria is the massive death toll of many innocent lives and actors involved in the conflict (Olayoku, 2012; Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021). The Institute of Economics and Peace (2015) rated the Fulani militant as the fourth most deadly terrorist group in the world in the 2014 Global Terrorism Index Report, which recorded the dramatic increase in the attacks by Fulani Militants from 2010 to 2013 as 80 deaths to a skyrocketing increase in the death toll to 1,229 in 2014 alone (Thompson, 2023). On the 25th of April, 2016, seven villages in Ukpabi-Nimbo town, a border town in Uzo Uwani in Enugu State, were attacked by over 500 heavily armed Fulani herdsmen who killed over 48 villagers and left many injured (Ikenwa & Adeyemi, 2016; Dieng, 2021). Also, between February and July 2016, 604 farmers and locals were killed in Agatu, Guma, Logo, and Tarkaa local government areas of Benue State (Binniyat, 2016; Rohner, 2024). Similarly, 11 villagers were killed and two villages burnt down because of what Binniyat (2016) calls a vengeance mission of the herdsmen on Godogodo chiefdom in Jema'a local government area in Southern Kaduna State (Charbonneau, 2021). Also, in Plateau State, a First-Class Traditional Ruler, Sir Lazarus Agai, his driver, and policemen were killed on the way from his farm on 17th October 2016 (Owuamanam, 2016; Fabre, 2023).

(b) Loss of Cattle and Farm Crops

Another severe consequence is the loss of cattle to conflict and bandits, as many herds are lost during the conflict to angry farmers and bandits who take advantage of the conflicts to steal cattle from the pastoralists (Bala & Tar, 2021). On the side of farmers, destruction of crops in the farms and harvested products by angry mobs of pastoralists has also been reported (Debarre, 2022). The negative effect of this is huge loss on both sides, with the ultimate result of loss of income or capital and food insecurity (Ugwu et al., 2024).

(c) Destruction of Properties

Another effect of this conflict is destruction of farm properties and farm irrigation equipment, farming tools, houses, and cars by angry herders who usually carry out organized violence as retaliatory acts on the farming communities (Maitra, 2024).

(d) Threat to National Unity

The persistent attacks by the herdsmen have drawn the attention of Nigerians to the threat they pose to national unity (Gawi & Abdullahi, 2024). In line with this conception, the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, on the 26th of April 2016, clamoured for deliberate and proactive actions to end the incessant farmers and herdsmen clashes spreading across the country, noting that if not properly checked, they could divide Nigeria (Ovuakporie & Agbakwuru, 2016; Tanca, 2023).

(e) Displacement

Another lethal effect of this conflict is the displacement of people from their homes and communities for safety reasons (Djadi, 2016). This has become the persistent effect of the clash between herdsmen and farmers in North Central Nigeria (Sever et al., 2023). Djadi (2016) reported that over 20,000 people have fled the wave of attacks since 2010 (Almakhzoumi & Alhunieti, 2024).

Prospect of managing security challenges in Benue State.

There are several mechanisms proposed for solving or managing security challenges or conflict in Benue state . These range from third party intervention; use of standing committees or ad-hoc groups within the country or region; use of dignified leaders, head of states within the region who are mentors and are perceived wise with dept of understanding (Koffi, 2010). In emphasizing on the importance of African solutions from within Africa, Kasomo (2010) reveals that religion can also be used to arrest or mitigate conflicts in Africa.

Composite Security Management Strategies for FHC (Composite SMS)

In the course of this research work, the researcher has identified various security management strategies (Rohner, 2024). These have been obtained from the works of other researchers on the subject matter (Fabre, 2023). Baba and Chaminda (2017) concluded that promotion of religious tolerance as well as the establishment of effective mechanisms for conflict resolution and management were found to be part of the effective strategies for resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria (Dieng, 2021). Consequently, they recommended that forums and congresses for promoting religious tolerance and harmony among Farmers and Herdsmen be established in the six states across the North Central Region of Nigeria (Charbonneau, 2021). They also recommended that existing traditional institutions across the region should be empowered to effectively resolve and manage conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen (Bala & Tar, 2021).

On the other hand, Turnera, Ayantundeb, Pattersona, and Patterson (2004) stated that the ability of rural communities to prevent and manage conflict is largely based on the strength of networks of communication between herding and farming interests, respected community leaders, and leaders in neighboring communities (Debarre, 2022). The Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR, 2016) reported that the inclusive approach in managing the Herders and Farmers Conflict consists of the encouragement of the practice of ranching, the review of the Land Use Act 1978 by Government to encourage agricultural activities and ensure the protection of local communities, the protection of small-

holder/peasant farmers through the establishment of farm reserves, and embarking on special interventions to protect women farmers (Tanca, 2023). Gefu and Kolawole (2011) proposed that an awareness of principles of sustainable resource management has to be created, as well as opportunities arising from mutual understanding of resource needs and from the joint, simultaneous, or consultative use of natural resources among user groups (Ugwu et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The Eco-Violence Theory

Homer-Dixon (1999) developed the theory of eco-violence which seeks to explicate the relationship between environmental factors and violent conflicts. Its basic assumption is that;

Decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth and resource access acts singly or in various combinations to increase in scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests, and fish, thereby reducing economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands, thereby triggering ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth cause deprivation conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

Competition over scarce ecological resources has been aggravated in contemporary times owing to the impacts of climate change, which has exacerbated ecological scarcity across the world (Blench, 2004; Onuoha, 2007), thereby engendering violent conflicts. Therefore, the theory offers insights into the nature and dynamics of the arable land, resource conflict and underdevelopment indications in Nigeria. The pressure over arable land and the attendant resource conflicts get worse amidst ever shrinking resources, livelihood crisis, and imminent policy deficiencies on grazing and pastoral governance by Nigerian leaders. Increasing population growth rate has continued to exert great pressure on available land resources with varying environmental and socio-economic implications (Dietz, Ruben and Verhagen, 2001; Tarhule and Lamb, 2003; Fiki and Lee, 2004).

Farmer-herdsmen conflict has remained the most preponderant resource-use conflict in Nigeria (Ajuwon, 2004; Fasona and Omojola, 2005). The necessity to provide food crop and animal, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever growing demands, has exerted more pressure on the land (Nyong and Fiki, 2005). The competition between these two-agricultural land user-groups, however, has often times turned into serious overt and covert manifestation of hostilities and social friction in many parts of Nigeria. The conflicts have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized, with reverberating consequences nationwide.

According to Haan (2002), destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation equipment and infrastructure) by the pastoralists themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers. On the other hand, burning of rangelands, fadama, blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the pastoralists.

The study aptly adopts the eco-violence theory due to its under pinning application to the farmers and herders armed conflicts which as brought about wanton destruction of lives and property, hence rendering the residents of Benue state homeless and with a bleak future that needs more to be desired.

METHODOLOGY

The paper assess the challenges and prospects viz-a-viz impact of security agencies intervention in armed conflict in Benue state from the period of 2014-2024. This has been done through the use of both primary and secondary data generated through interview and focus group discussion conducted from the three zones. ZONE A,B and C

Population of the study

The study population comprise of ten local governments across three zones namely:

Zone A: Kwande LGA, Ukum LGA, Logo LGA, Katsina-Ala LGA

Zone B: Guma LGA, Gwer West LGA, Makurdi LGA

Zone C: Aguta LGA and Apa LGA. Oju LGA

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The target population of this study will involve **692,000** Persons in the three senatorial districts or zones in Benue State. Samples in Logo will be 244,800, Guma 280,300 and Aguta 166,900, persons who are from the affected local government areas of Benue State Nigeria. The target population of this study involved security agencies and Traditional rulers in Benue State Nigeria. The State was stratified into groups, a group of Military, Police, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and the DSS.

Table 1: Population and Sample Selection

S/N	Local Government Area	Population	Sample Size
1	Logo	244,800	125
2	Guma	280,300	144
3	Aguta	166,900	130
	Total	692,000	399

Source: Researchers Analysis, (2024)

Table 2: Major Problems faced by Security Agencies in Community Engagement and Collection of Oral Evidences for Prosecution as Armed Conflict intervention measures in Benue State

Security Agencies	Military (Nigerian Army)	Nigeria Police Force	Department of State Security (DSS)	Civil Defense Corps	TOTAL
Lack of Community Trust	66(66%)	80(80%)	57(58.16%)	64(66.67%)	267(67.77%)
Insufficient Resources	39(39%)	72(72%)	58(59.18%)	67(69.79%)	236(59.90%)
Inadequate Training	20(20%)	37(37%)	26(26.53%)	19(19.79%)	99(25.13%)
Bureaucratic Hurdles	22(22%)	20(20%)	24(24.49%)	36(37.50%)	102(58.89%)
Language Barrier	36(36%)	33(33%)	37(37.76%)	34(35.42%)	140(35.53%)
Security Threats to Officers	32(32%)	49(49%)	34(34.69%)	38(39.58%)	153(38.83%)
Others	11(11%)	6(6%)	8(8.16%)	11(11.46%)	36(9.14%)

The table one explained the views of people about challenges faced by security agencies in combating armed conflict in Benue state. It was expressed through percentages .The highest

percentage of 67.77 % 267 respondents) shows lack of trust by the community. Others include insufficient resources (59.90 %, 236 respondents), inadequate training (25.13 %, 99 respondents), bureaucratic hurdles (58.89 %, 102 respondents), language barriers (35.53 %, 140 respondents) and security threat (38.83 %, 153 respondents). 9.14 % (36) of the respondents gave distinct options.

Table 3: Do you agree that inability of the Security Agencies to use sophisticated gadgets is hindering the fight against Armed Conflicts in Benue State?

Security Agencies	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Military (Nigerian Army)	30(30%)	37(37%)	19(19%)	11(11%)	3(2%)
Nigeria Police Force	61(61%)	32(32%)	4(4%)	2(2%)	1(1%)
Department of State Security (DSS)	30(30.61%)	52(53.05%)	5(5.10%)	4(4.09%)	7(7.14%)
Civil Defense Corps	33(34.38%)	41(42.71%)	10(10.42%)	12(12.50%)	0(0%)
Total	154(39.09%)	162(41.12%)	38(9.65%)	29(7.36%)	11(2.79%)

The table two above shows that security agencies lack sophisticated gadget which have hampered them in combating armed conflict in the state. 39.09 % of the respondents (154) strongly agreed, 41.12 % (162 respondents) indicated agreed giving a total of 80.21 % (316 respondents) agreeing with the fact. While 9.65 % of the respondents (38) were neutral, 7.36 % (29 respondents) disagreed and 2.79 % (11 respondents) strongly disagreed indicating that only 10.15 % (40 respondents) disagreed, therefore, lack of sophisticated weapons affected security agencies in combating armed conflict in Benue state.

Table 4: Do you agree that failure of the Government to provide sophisticated equipment for effective use in the investigation/prosecution of Armed Conflict cases is alarming?

Security Agencies	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Military (Nigerian Army)	48(48%)	39(39%)	10(10%)	3(3%)	0(0%)
Nigeria Police Force	52(52%)	32(32%)	16(16%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Department of State Security (DSS)	44(44.90%)	31(31.63%)	23(23.47%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Civil Defense Corps	47(48.95%)	39(40.61%)	7(7.29%)	3(3.13%)	0(0%)
Total	191(48.48%)	141(35.79%)	56(14.21%)	6(1.52%)	0(0%)

The table three indicated that another challenge faced by security agencies in combating armed conflict is lack of modern equipment to aid investigation /prosecution of offenders of armed conflict cases n Benue state. 48.48 % (191 respondents) of the respondents strongly agreed and 35.79 % (141 respondents) agreed with that, giving a total of 84.27 % (332 respondents) strongly agreed/agreed. Only 1.52 % of the respondents (6) disagreed while none strongly disagreed. However, 14.21 % of the respondents (56) could not disagree nor strongly disagree.

Table 5: Is there Cooperation amongst the Security Agencies and Stakeholders in their Efforts in Intervening in Armed Conflicts in Benue State?

Security Agencies	Yes	Somehow	Not Sure	Can't Say	No
Military (Nigerian Army)	49(49%)	23(23%)	18(18%)	2(2%)	8(8%)
Nigeria Police Force	64(64%)	17 (17%)	14(14%)	3(3%)	2(2%)

Department of State Security (DSS)	39(39.80%)	18(18.37%)	9(9.18%)	9(9.18%)	23(23.47%)
Civil Defense Corps	36(37.50%)	28(29.17%)	11(11.46%)	3(3.13%)	18(18.75%)
Total	188(47.72%)	86(21.82%)	52(13.20%)	17(4.31%)	51(12.94%)

The table five indicated that lack of cooperation among security agencies and stake holders affect security agencies in combating armed conflict in Benue state. 47.72 % (188 respondents) strongly agreed, 21.82 % (86 respondents) agreed giving a total of 69.54 % agreed which corresponds to 274 respondents while 12.94 % (51 respondents) disagreed. Therefore lack of cooperation among security agencies affect them in combating armed conflict in Benue state.

FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION(S)

Discussion

Group discussions were conducted across the three senatorial districts of Benue State: Zone A, Zone B, and Zone C. From each senatorial district, three local government areas (LGAs) were selected, taking into account the varying levels of insecurity and crises experienced in those regions. The survey was conducted on people who were mostly farmers and have stayed in the land of Benue State for more than 20 years. Participants included opinion leaders such as youth leaders, religious leaders, community heads, women leaders, and heads of prominent development associations from the chosen communities. The aim was to gather informed perspectives representing their respective areas.

In Zone A, discussions were held in four LGAs: Kwande, Katsina-Ala, Ukum, and Logo on 25th November 2024. Respondents from Ukum LGA (R1 and R2) identified key security issues, including conflicts over political supremacy, land, and other resources, which have escalated into frequent clashes between farmers and herders, political thuggery, and the activities of armed gangs. These conflicts often result in significant loss of life and property destruction.

Similarly, a respondent from Katsina-Ala LGA (R3) highlighted inadequate land and a weak security infrastructure as primary causes of armed conflicts. Another participant (R4) noted that the security situation in the state was "turning from bad to worse." Both R4 and R5 further attributed conflicts to rising unemployment. R6 from Katsina-Ala added that the ongoing herder-farmer crisis persists due to a lack of effective government policies to address the challenges.

In Kwande LGA, respondents R7 and R8 described the security situation as dire, characterized by armed conflicts, kidnapping, and banditry. These issues have disrupted economic activities, forced rural populations to migrate, led to extortion in local markets, abandonment of farmlands, and widespread displacement. The respondents identified inadequate farmland, the proliferation of arms, and ethnic and tribal differences as significant contributors to the insecurity in the area.

In Zone B, group discussions were held in three LGAs: Gwer West, Makurdi, and Guma on the 29th November 2024. Respondents from Gwer West (R9, R10, and R11) described the security situation as concerning. However, R10 noted a recent improvement due to government intervention. Residents in areas near state boundaries have faced persistent armed conflict, kidnapping, and criminal activities.

They identified key factors fueling these conflicts, including:

- a. Ethnic Tension: Cultural differences among tribes such as the Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, Jukun, and other minorities have significantly contributed to communal crises in the state.
- b. Farmer-Pastoralist Clashes: Prolonged competition for land and water resources has led to repeated attacks by herders over the years.
- c. Political Rivalries: Political competition often escalates into violence, with some leaders arming their supporters to gain influence, which exacerbates conflicts.
- d. Economic Factors: Economic hardships often drive unrest.
- e. Poor Government Policies: Ineffective policies have failed to address the root causes of insecurity.
- f. Arms Proliferation: The widespread availability of arms has intensified violence in the region.

Respondents from Guma LGA (R12, R13, R14, and R15) reported similar challenges, highlighting criminal banditry, cattle rustling, extortion, destruction of property, and kidnapping. According to R12, cattle rustling stems from land encroachment and the destruction of crops by herders' cattle. Meanwhile, the destruction of property was linked to youth unemployment and competition for farmland among small-scale farmers.

In Makurdi LGA, R16 described the security situation as "quite bad," while R18 characterized it as "terrible." However, R17 observed that the situation had improved compared to previous years.

In Zone C, discussions were conducted in three LGAs: Agatu, Apa, and Oju on the 30th November 2024. Respondents from Apa (R19 and R20) described the security situation as a longstanding conflict between Fulani herders and local farmers, resulting in loss of lives and destruction of property. These conflicts are deeply rooted in the region's history and geography. Major causes include the struggle for expansive lands, competition over scarce resources, poor governance, and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms.

Respondents from Agatu Local Government Area (R21 to R25) unanimously described the security situation as severely impacted by the activities of armed gangs, commonly referred to as bandits. These groups engage in various criminal acts, including cattle rustling, looting, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom. Vulnerable communities, often lacking surveillance, are frequent targets of their attacks. Additionally, communal crises linked to competition for land and water resources were reported. The respondents highlighted ongoing clashes between Fulani herders and local farmers, noting that pastoralists have even occupied lands previously owned by the farmers. Initially, these incidents were downplayed, with the expectation they would subside, but they have instead escalated into severe unrest in recent years.

In Oju Local Government Area, respondents (R26, R27, and R28) expressed deep concern, describing the security situation as "very bad." Criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and herders-farmers clashes were prevalent in the area.

Reports from across the three senatorial districts indicated that while security agencies have made efforts to address these issues, more needs to be done, particularly to protect local farmers and travellers. Opinion leaders criticized the lack of collaboration between security agencies and residents in addressing security concerns. They noted that herder-farmer clashes have been on the rise in recent years. However, recent government interventions have provided some hope for improvement, especially for local farmers.

Conclusion

The federal and Benue State government concerted efforts adopted to bring peace and stability is living much to be desired. The population of Benue State is thinning gradually and the security of lives and property is not guaranteed, decline food production and social

cum economic development has expose the people of Benue State to the sphere of existential threat. Apparently, the prospects of ensuring the restoration of peace and stability is predictably and strangely appears bleak. This is undoubtedly making the future of the armed conflict to remain progressing unabated. In fact, the multiplier effect of this foreseeable reality represent a picture of the loss of the internally displaced person hope of return to their ancestral homes as their land has been taken over by the invading herders and bandits. There will be persistent pressure on the government to channel developmental funds to mitigate the suffering of the people to avoid rural urban migration.

Recommendations

- i. The Federal Government should re-organize the country's intelligence system and build a capable and more proactive security apparatus in country, so as to checkmate the incessant bombings, robbery, kidnapping and violent crimes/crises by hoodlums all over the country.
- ii. The government should include Peace Studies and Security Management in school curriculum at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Nigeria. This will enable Nigerian youths to appreciate the importance of peace and security in a secular state like Nigeria.
- iii. The Federal Government should formulate and effectively implement policies and programmes capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria such as poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, the dearth of infrastructural facilities, uneven development, among others.
- iv. The Government should be more proactive in the implementation and provision of infrastructure designed for farmers and herders' resource use to avoid a situation where these incessant upheavals would affect agricultural production and food security of the nation.
- v. There is need for collaboration between security agencies to avoid inter agency rivalry that will hamper their success

There is need for security arrangement between villages, community, local, state and federal levels with the responsibility of providing sensitive security information for security agencies on areas of operation, for easy identification of criminals, their sponsors and hideouts in Nigeria.

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