

Farmer -Herdsmen Conflicts In The South East Of Nigeria: Implications For National Development.

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Abstract

This paper explores the multi-faceted and growing farmer-herdsmen conflicts in South East Nigeria, focusing on their causes, socio-economic effects as well as significant implications for national development. Through both an expository and analytical research methods, this paper "unpacks" the plurivocal drivers behind these conflicts: environmental degradation; resource scarcity; population dynamics, governance deficits. It also explores the catastrophic repercussions on food security, human safety, economic stability, and social cohesion in those communities. Recent empirical work and theoretical approaches like Eco-Violent Theory and the Human Security Framework inform this research in demonstrating why these localized tensions aggravate ethnic and religious frictions — undermining people's security and overall national security whilst endangering Nigeria's strides towards sustainable development. The results emphasize the immediate conflict drivers and long-term systems that require additional intervention. It also offers practical recommendations for policy-makers and community leaders, the public and private sectors to support peacebuilding initiatives, resource management and inclusive development as panacea to the lingering conflicts both in the South East and other parts of Nigeria.

Keywords ; Farmer-Herdsman, Conflicts, South East, Development, Food, and Security, ..

1. Introduction

The protracted and spiraling conflicts between nomadic pastoralists (largely Fulani herdsmen) and agrarian communities (farmers) have become one of Nigeria's most formidable internal security challenges. Though such clashes are not new to Nigeria, their intensity, geographical scope and socio-economic impact have significantly increased in recent years especially in the South East section of Nigeria.¹ Imports of Fulani also strained social relations and domestic governance, but for generations farmer-herdsmen clashes appeared to be quixotic contestation over pasture grazing rights that were adjudicated through local conflict resolution processes. However, modern dynamics have conspired through a mixture of environmental, demographic, conomics and governance factors to generalize these local struggles into a broad-based complex and violent phenomenon with national developmental outcomes.² The South East which is known for its agricultural economy and densely populated was a new region to these conflicts, but over the years they have become pronounced. This region, which includes Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states, was once largely insulated from the intensity of such clashes compared with the Middle Belt. But the southward movement of pastoralists in response to a desertifying north and climate change; expanding agricultural frontiers; and perceived marginalization has pushed the crisis to the forefront in some parts of South East.³ The consequences are lethal, from massive loss of lives and displacement of communities to critically hitting agriculture productivity resulting in food insecurity and increasing ethnic and religious cleavages.⁴ This paper scrutinizes the complex nature of farmer herdsmen conflicts in South East of Nigeria

¹ Hyginus Banko Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria: Assessing the Dangers", Wilson Center, October 3, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/svnp-research-paper-okibe..>

² Ibrahim Abdulganiyu Jawondo et al., "Socio-Economic Impact of Land Cultivators-Herders Conflict in Isi-Uzo and Uzo-Uwani LGAs, Enugu State, Nigeria," *Journal of Leadership and Development* 1, no. 1 (2025): 91–102, <https://jppssuniuyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/SOCIO-ECONOMIC-IMPACT-OF-LAND-CULTIVATORS-HERDERS-CONFLICT-JLD.pdf>.

³ Chukwuemeka J. Ohadiugha and Nuhu D. Gado, "The Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria: A Quest for Appropriate Policy," *International Journal of Business and Management Review* (2025), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chukwuemeka-Ohadiugha/publication/387891613_The_Farmer-Herder_Conflict_in_Nigeria_A_Quest_for_Appropriate_Policy/links/67dc1f5935f7044c924da081/The-Farmer-Herder-Conflict-in-Nigeria-A-Quest-for-Appropriate-Policy.pdf.

⁴ Moses U. Nnam, "Violent Herder–Farmer Conflicts and Human Security in Nigeria: A Focus on Food Security," *Development in Practice* (2025), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09614524.2025.2573963>.

and their implications for national development. It aims to break down the key drivers of these conflicts, examine their socio-economic consequences in the communities impacted by violence, and how these localized crises erode broader national development priorities. This study contributes to an emerging understanding of the conflict dynamics in a region that is commonly absent from national discussions on this topic through synthesizing existing literature and empirical evidence. The paper finally concludes that the resolution of these tensions are fundamentally not only an issue of security but a key requirement for lasting peace and stability, as well as inclusive national development in Nigeria.

2. Contextual Analysis of Farmer-Herdsman Conflicts in the South East of Nigeria

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework: Understanding the Causes of Farmer-Herdsman Conflicts in South East Nigeria The constant rise of resource based violence such as farmer-herdsman conflicts necessitate better understanding of the dynamics that explains this phenomenon and prevalence of such resources-based violence particularly where livestock rearing is more pronounced, hence this theoretical framework. This paper utilizes the Eco-Violent Theory (EVT) as its primary theoretical construct, supplemented with aspects from the Human Security Framework and the Frustration-Aggression Theory.

2.1.1 Eco-Violent Theory (EVT)

Thomas Homer-Dixon has, to a large extent, popularized what is known as the Eco-Violent Theory — the notion that environmental scarcity can induce violent conflict.⁵ In the context of farmer-herdsman conflict, EVT offers a powerful perspective through which to understand dwindling natural resources—particularly arable land and water—as a significant driver of conflict. As populations expand and environmental destruction increases, the per capita amount of renewable resources available decreases, fueling competition — and violence — according to the theory.⁶

Pastoralists in Nigeria, for example, have been forced south due to increased desertification and climate change in the north — triggering conflicts between herders and farmers fighting for land.⁷ This migration places them in direct competition, and often conflict with sedentary farming communities in the South East region of Madagascar, where land is already coming under pressure from an increasing population and agricultural expansion. Overgrazing of farmlands by cattle and contamination of water sources by herders are direct symptoms of this resource scarcity that leads to violent reactions from farmers whose livelihoods are jeopardized.⁸ EVT helps us understand why these intensifying and more violent conflicts, which the data reveal earlier, are reminiscent of those once sporadic and local since both northern and southern ecologies are reaching their ecological carrying capacity.

2.1.2 Human Security Framework

The "Human Security Framework" expands the traditional state-centered perspective of security to include the safety and well-being of individuals. It emphasizes freedom from fear and freedom from want, focusing on shielding people against key and widespread threats to their lives, livelihoods and dignity.⁹ Farmer-herdsman conflicts directly corrode human security as they threaten food security, the physical safety of individuals, economic stability and social unity. Loss of lives, displacement of communities and destruction of property after such traumatic events and disruption to agricultural activities are all serious violations affecting the human security of impacted people.¹⁰

In the South East, the clashes have induced a palpable fear that has made many farmers vacate their farmlands thus threatening their major source of livelihood as well as food insecurity. The framework shows that without effective protection from the state and resolution of the underlying causes of all of these conflicts, people are left vulnerable, trapped in a cycle of violence and insecurity that prevents their human development.¹¹

2.1.3 Frustration-Aggression Theory

It pulls from the Frustration-Aggression Theory, introduced by Dollard et al that postulates frustration aggression¹². This theory can explain the violent reactions from both farmers and herders when their basic/ultimate needs and goals are blocked in the context of farmer-herdsman conflicts. The tearing down of crops and what can be reasonably referred to as

⁵ Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). 45.

⁶ Jawondo et al., "Socio-Economic Impact of Land Cultivators-Herders Conflict," 91–102.

⁷ Elizabeth A. Adams, Antoine Thill, and Edward D. Kuusaana, "Farmer–Herder Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: Drivers, Impacts, and Resolution and Peacebuilding Strategies," *Environmental Research Letters* 18, no. 12 (2023): 123001, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ad0702/meta>.

⁸ Adewale Mathew Ogungbenro, "Enhancing Food Security in Rural Communities: A Comprehensive Examination of Farmers-Herdsman Conflicts in Oyo State, Nigeria," *Kwararafa Security Review* (2024).

⁹ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Nnam, "Violent Herder–Farmer Conflicts and Human Security in Nigeria." 35

¹¹ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria." 21

¹² John Dollard et al., *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1939). 21

farmland by grazing cattle is a major pain to farmers and poses great risk in terms of prospects contributing to economic sustainability and food security. This frustration can be directed as aggression at herders and their cattle.¹³

In contrast, herders find themselves frustrated by shrinking grazing lands, obstructed cattle routes and hostility from farming communities. When they are denied access to necessary food and water sources for their livestock, so some of these farmers can be aggressive, even too aggressiveness towards them or like violent confrontations. This theory highlights the psychological aspect of these conflicts, where unfulfilled needs and perceived grievances perpetuate a cycle of violence through retaliation.¹⁴

2.2 Empirical Review

The related empirical literature on conflicts between farmer and herdsmen in Nigeria has burgeoned, due to the increasing frequency and national significance of the issue. The majority of these studies focused on the Middle Belt while in recent times, there has been growing attention directed at the context in which violence occurs occurring within South East region of Nigeria. This review consolidates findings from at least fifteen studies released no earlier than 2019, elucidating core themes, drivers, and repercussions and as well identifying existing gaps.

Causes and Drivers:

A number of studies point to environmental degradation and climate change as major drivers. How water scarcity — a direct output of climate change in her body of work — becomes the primary driver for conflicts that are displacing and uprooting these warriors into new territories was something Ogungbenro chronicled widely. Adams et al. also offered a review of the environmental conditions that drive herder migration and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Nigeria where desertification and drought play an important role (also see here). One of them is population growth, which has resulted in the opening up of more land for agriculture thereby reducing grazing reserves and cattle route leading to increased interaction and conflict.¹⁵

Shocks to the system including on the economic front, like farmlands and crops being destroyed, are repeatedly listed as short term levers. Crop destruction as a result of cattle grazing has been listed among the leading causes of conflicts in Isi-Uzo and Uzo-Uwani Local Government Areas of Enugu State (Jawondo, Ojo et al. 2018). This economic loss often leads to violent clashes as farmers try to fend off threats to their livelihoods. At the same time, the spread of illegal arms has changed these conflicts from traditional quarrels into extremely deadly engagements. Ogbette and colleagues highlighted the increasing sophistication of weapons used by herders, leading to higher casualty rates and a raise in overall violence.¹⁶

Socio-Economic Impacts:

The consequences of these conflicts are felt well beyond their geographic boundaries, impacting food security, safety for people, and economic stability. Nnam appraised the devastating effects of herder-farmer violent clashes on human security, with special emphasis on food security in Nigeria. The study said that agricultural activities come under extreme stress due to these conflicts, resulting in lower crop yields, higher food prices and pervasive food insecurity. In Anambra State, Chinedu and Benjamine supported these findings by explaining how livestock herdsmen activities endangered the safety of farmers and food production as a consequence of agricultural output reduction.

Lives lost, displacement, is a horrible outcome. Okibe also stated that the herder-farmer clashes have been responsible for more deaths in Africa than terrorism and has caused millions of internally displaced persons, especially in states like South East. Jawondo and colleagues' study within Enugu State noted similar patterns of widespread dislocation of residents and loss of livelihoods. They maintained a broader socio-economic development perspective that enabled them to show how these clashes hinder economic growth and social welfare.

Implications for National Development

These conflicts greatly impact Nigeria's development, threatening fundamental peace and security as well as economic growth. Ohadiugha and Gado spoke on the recent emergence of farmer-herder conflict in the South East, its effects on socio-economic life and national development, stressing that appropriate policies are urgently needed for its intervention. Adejumo described the conflict as a structural problem with far-reaching consequences, pointing to the seizure of illegal weapons and persistent insecurity. The political aspect alone is also key, as Okibe notes how these struggle fuel ethnic and religious tensions (and help feed secessionist ideologies in the South East) and threaten national unity and security.

¹³ Jawondo et al., "Socio-Economic Impact of Land Cultivators-Herders Conflict," 91–102.

¹⁴ Peter E. Oli and John Akerjiir, "Reprisal Attacks and the Farmer-Herders Conflict in Nigeria," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 1–15.

¹⁵ John Akerjiir, "The Overwhelming Climate Change Induced Migration of Herders and Its Implications for Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria," *International Crisis Group* (2018).

¹⁶ John Ogbette, Chika Attama, and Chidi Okoh, "Mass Media Reportage and Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria," *Journal of African Studies*. 12, no. 1 (2021): 45–60.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution:

There are a number of studies to explore peace building and conflict resolution strategies. The literature is diverse, with some research examining traditional mechanisms, whilst others argue for modern approaches. The efficacy of different interventions — from community conversations to government policies on ranching — is an open debate. But a common thread is that in order to be successful, multi-stakeholder approaches must involve local communities, traditional leaders, government agencies and civil society organizations.¹⁷

Gaps in Literature

Despite the large body of literature, there are still some gaps including for South East. These ones are very general, allusions to what is causing it, and the effects of it in general but not putting a precise focus on highlighting the individual socio-cultural and political dynamics that exists in these South East states. Indeed, the connection between conflicts between farmers and herdsman, which has been largely attributed to the disagreements over land rights, and the emergence of secessionist forces in Nigeria such as IPOB and ESN in the South East deserves stronger academic inquiry beyond what Okibe provides. Moreover, there is little evidence on what works in terms of peacebuilding initiatives that are context specific to the South East. Most crucially, an overall understanding of how these conflicts will impact the development of human capital in this region and their economic future are still evolving.

3. Factors Influencing Farmer-Herdsman Conflict in South East Nigeria

There has also been an escalation of farmer-herdsman conflicts in Nigeria's South East, which appears to be driven by a complex interplay of environmental, socio-economic and governance factors. Although some causes are at the national level, how they manifest in the South East tends to have its own unique touch.

3.1 Factors Related to Environment & Climate Change

The southward migration of pastoralists is driven fundamentally by climate change and desertification in Nigeria's northern regions. As traditional grazing areas and water resources dry up in the Sahelian belt, herders are forced to transfer their livestock to greener pastures further south in the South East.¹⁸ This ecological push factor increases the competition for resources in destination communities. Ogungbenro pointed out that dwindling water supplies is a major catalyst, causing tensions to increase as both farmers and herders compete for access to those sites, often leading to contamination of water points by cattle.¹⁹ Change compels migratory responses, which upset previous ecological and social equilibria.

3.2 Socio-Economic and Demographic Pressures

Land resource demand is pushed up by population growth among both pastoralist and agrarian communities. Expanding farming populations and agriculture frontiers overrun traditional migratory corridors and reserves, with pastoral space fast diminishing.²⁰ Such expansion is accompanied by destruction of farmlands and crops due to grazing cattle, which Jawondo and colleagues identified as the main immediate cause of conflict in Enugu State.²¹ Such attacks undermine farmers' livelihoods and frequently contribute to retaliatory strikes and escalated violence. By contrast, herders are under rising pressure to get enough pasture for their enlarging herds — a resentment that heightens competition for land.

3.3 Governance Deficiencies and Fragile Institutions

Lack of effective governance and weak institutional frameworks for land management and conflict resolution are key drivers of the persistence and escalation of these conflicts. More traditional processes of dispute resolution, which used to be critical for managing farmer-herdsman relations, have largely eroded or are overwhelmed with the volume and nature of modern conflicts.²² The weakness of statutory and local governments to enforce land use laws, to delineate clear grazing reserves, or to provide adequate protection for both farmers and herders leaves a void that often results in self-help and violence. Ohadiugha and Gado described the constant pressure on their land and its resources, highlighting the publication of grazing reserves as an urgent need; they lamented that there is a national policy on grazing or land use.²³

¹⁷ Gbenga P. Adejumo, "Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Security Management in Nigeria: A Study of Oyo State," *Nigerian Defence Academy Journal of Peace and Security Studies* (2024), https://ndajpsps.com.ng/wp-content/articles/published_paper/volume-2/issue-2/O13Yzkn5.pdf.

¹⁸ Adams, Thill, and Kuusaana, "Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa." 23

¹⁹ Ogungbenro, "Enhancing Food Security in Rural Communities."

²⁰ Akerjiir, "The Overwhelming Climate Change Induced Migration of Herders."

²¹ Jawondo et al., "Socio-Economic Impact of Land Cultivators-Herders Conflict," 91–102.

²² Adejumo, "Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Security Management in Nigeria." 21

²³ Ohadiugha and Gado, "The Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria." 34

3.4 The Spread of Arms and Criminality

The combination of freely available and easily proliferated illegal arms has taken what were localized conflicts to highly lethal confrontations. Ogbette and her colleagues observed that herdsmen now rely increasingly on advanced weapons, which greatly accelerate casualty rates and otherwise make the conflicts much more violent.²⁴ Such militarization of the conflict environment creates additional barriers for peaceful resolution, and it engenders a climate of fear and insecurity. Additionally, criminals occasionally take advantage of the pre-existing tensions through cattle rustling, kidnapping and other criminal activities thereby fragmenting the conflict dynamics beyond recognition with it being almost impossible to identify one form of sympathizer from the other as Mr. Jibril (2016) nicely points out.

3.5. Ethnic and Religious Elements

Although essentially resource-based, the South East conflicts have also taken on increasing ethnic and religious overtones. The largely Muslim Fulani herders are often seen by some of the predominantly Christian Igbo farming communities as invaders, which has fueled the politicization and ethnicization of the conflict.²⁵ This narrative is especially sensitive in the South East, a region with a history of secessionist agitations and strong ethnic identities. Okibe pointed out that these tensions are a symptom of problems leading to civil war, which creates ethnic and religious identities, pushed most especially by the Islamification of Nigeria which then reinforces a feeling of marginalisation and adds fuel to secessionists fire making it a great threat to National unity and stability²⁶. This blurring of purpose makes it difficult to disentangle resource competition from ethnic and religious identities, hindering peacebuilding efforts and deepening societal divides.

4. Socio-Economic Impacts of Farmer-Herdsmen Conflicts

The socio-economic implications of the herder-farmer clashes in the South East of Nigeria have wreaked relative havoc on the lives and livelihoods of millions. The repercussions of this extend beyond immediate loss of lives to erode the fabric of society and growth in the region.

4.1 Agricultural Disruption and Food Insecurity

One of the most pressing and dangerous consequences of these conflicts is increased food insecurity. Grazing cattle destroys farmlands, crops and the people around their land; the direct effect is lower food production. Farmers fearing attacks often abandon their lands, also contributing to major decreases in agricultural production.²⁷ Nnam emphasized how these overall violent conflicts have huge negative consequences on human security, especially food and nutrition insecurity as a result of lower crop yields and rising food prices. In Anambra State, for instance, Chinedu and Benjamine elaborated on this notion by stating that the activities of these herdsmen pose a direct threat to the safety of farmers and food production which has led to a reduction in agricultural output consequently increasing hunger rates among affected communities. The farming cycles are disrupted and the populations engaged in farming become defunct, thereby bringing food shortages into a vicious cycle.²⁸

4.2 Casualties and Forced Migration

These armed conflicts, have elementarily human life sheds blood and many of natives becomes an internally displaced people. Okibe pointed out that these conflicts have taken more lives than terrorism in Africa, resulting in high levels of internal displacement. ¹ Whole villages have been looted and dwellers displaced, leaving them to find shelter in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or with family in safer regions. They are among the relatively few people in Nigeria whose movements since October have been documented by aid groups, such as those described in a recent report from Jawondo and her colleagues, which found widespread displacement in Enugu State: Communities being uprooted, losing their homes and belongings — as well as the networks of friends and neighbors that help them navigate life.²⁹ This displacement also leads to humanitarian crises, and access to education, healthcare and other services for millions of people are disrupted.

Economic Losses and Impoverishment.

The economic impact of the farmer-herdsmen clashes is equally enormous. Farmers face huge economic losses as crops are destroyed, livestock is rustled and the land cannot be cultivated. Herders also lose their animals to cattle rustling and vengeance killings. Obasanmi and Enoma explained the broader socio-economic development implications of such

²⁴ Ogbette, Attama, and Okoh, "Mass Media Reportage and Herders-Farmers Conflict," 45–60.

²⁵ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria." 22

²⁶ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria." 22

²⁷ Nnam, "Violent Herder–Farmer Conflicts and Human Security in Nigeria."

²⁸ Okoro E. Chinedu and Augustine V. Benjamine, "The Impact of Herdsmen Activities on Farmers' Safety and Food Security in Anambra State Nigeria (2017–2022)," *Journal Arbitrase: Economy and Business Review* 14, no. 1 (2025): 169–180, <http://paspama.org/index.php/Arbitrase/article/view/169>.

²⁹ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria." 22

conflicts, showing how they hamper economic growth and social welfare, forcing many to deeper levels of poverty.³⁰ To these economic burdens the destruction of property, including homes and businesses, adds its weight. Investment and activity is scared off from affected areas by this constant threat, strangling local economies which leads to the cycle of ongoing poverty.

4.4 Social Dislocation and Loss of Trust

The conflicts have created deep social dislocation and trust breakdown within, and between communities. The relationship between farmers and herders, once harmonious, is now defined by suspicion, fear and hostility. Samuel Thomas observed how these struggles wrench apart formerly-vibrant communities, rending social bonds and breeding deep animosities.³¹ In the absence of traditional forms of social organization and conflict resolution mechanisms, communities are left disempowered and fractured. The result is an erosion of confidence that hinders peacebuilding and ushers further violence, as people turn to self-help and even vigilantism when their state does not provide safety.

5. Implications for National Development

Though confined to the South East of Nigeria, farmer-herdsmen clashes have serious and far-reaching implications for national development. Conflicts of this nature erode the core needs of national stability, which include economic progress for all strata within each nation, social cohesion at various levels, political and security stability, and human capital development.

5.1 Economic Crisis and Agricultural Decline

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the Nigerian economy, accounting for a significant share of GDP and jobs. This will be especially difficult in agrarian regions like the South East where incessant conflicts are threatening this economic backbone. This not only contributes to the devastation of farmland, displacement of farmers and disruption of agricultural cycles resulting in a drastic decline in food production — worsening several stages of food insecurity levels leading up to an increase reliance on imports. This agricultural collapse affects not only rural economies, but also national economic volatility in the form of inflation and declined export potential. Obasanmi and Enoma Stress that these wars are causing social, economic stagnation in the areas concerned; they stated as follows: "These conflicts stifle socio-economic development in the affected areas as investment becomes limited or non-existent."³² The reallocation of resources for war and humanitarian assistance is putting a strain on the national budget, which could have been invested in sectors that are essential for development.

5.2 The Danger of National Security and Unity

The conflicts are a serious threat to the Nigerian nation and its territorial integrity. These clashes are becoming more lethal, and spreading over larger areas — putting into question the state's monopoly on violence, and its ability to protect citizens. As Okibe pointed out, these struggles have purportedly taken more lives than terrorism in Africa; the severity of them as a national security concern cannot be overstated. In 2018, for example, the Nigerian government estimated that there were between 200 and 300 killed in attacks by herdsmen in the first half of that year alone.¹ In addition to these conflicts being deadly enough as it is, in the South West (traditional Yoruba territory), they have aggravated longstanding ethnic hostilities as well as religious differences; and in the South East (the traditional home to the Igbo ethnic group) they have exacerbated secessionist sentiments through groups such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) alongside movements like Eastern Security Network (ESN).³³ Political polarization of the conflict exacerbates social rifts, hampers national solidarity, and creates a breeding ground for more strife that could spiral into wider civil disorder.

5.3 Impediment to Development of Human Capital

The continued large scale insecurity and displacements due to the conflicts also a major impediment on human capital development of population affected through the conflicts. Pupils are expelled en masse from schools, destroying their education opportunities and stifling their future potential. Healthcare services are lost as facilities are bombed or become unreachable due to violence. The mental and psychological toll on victims of conflict — especially women and children — can last a lifetime affecting mental health which hampers women's participation in the society. The conflicts affecting Nigeria, Ohadiugha and Gado stressed, impede the socio-economic life of the country and its development as they are

³⁰ Jawondo et al., "Socio-Economic Impact of Land Cultivators-Herders Conflict," 91–102.

³¹ John O. Obasanmi and Augustine Enoma, "The Effects of Farmer/Herder Conflict on Socioeconomic Development of Nigeria," *Saudi Journal of Economics and Business Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 118–125, https://saudijournals.com/media/articles/SJEF_64_118-125.pdf.

³² Obasanmi and Enoma, "Effects of Farmer/Herder Conflict," 118–125.

³³ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria." 32

directly impacting on human potential which is critical to national growth. A population that is ignorant, sickly, and traumatized cannot participate in or lead national development.

5.4 The Undermining of Social Cohesion and Trust

National development is rooted on social cohesion, trust and peaceful co-existence among different groups in society. Systematically undermining this foundation, the farmer-herdsmen conflicts breed deep-rooted enmity, mistrust and division among ethnic and religious lines. The collapse of usual options to resolve disputes and the inability of state institutions to deliver justice and security help erode trust where it exists. As noted earlier 17 When communities fight more than they cooperate, social capital declines and this creates a lack of collective action and cooperation that is necessary for development initiatives. As society has become more polarized along conflict lines, it has also become harder and harder to pursue national policies and programs requiring broad-based support and participation..

6. Recommendations

A multi-faceted and multi-dimensional approach will be required that encompasses security, economic, social and governance interventions in addressing the complex farmer-herdsmen conflicts in the South East of Nigeria. To build sustainable and lasting peace, allow for consistent national development, the following recommendations are critical:

6.1 Strengthen Governance and Rule of Law

Effective enforcement of land use laws and policies: The various branches of government (federal, state, local) should devise and appropriately enforce clear land use policies such as grazing routes, farmlands and settlements. This involves enforcing existing anti-open grazing laws in areas where these remain applicable, as well as establishing designated ranching systems to reduce interaction and conflict between farmers and herders. Judicial and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms — there is a pressing need for strengthening formal judicial processes as well as traditional methods of conflict-resolution. It encompasses the provision of justice for victims in a timely and fair manner, including prosecuting the perpetrators of violence, and empowering traditional leaders to help settle disputes. By providing training and equipping the local peace committees with adequate skills and resources to alleviate tensions or work toward reconciliation, they have a greater chance of succeeding.³⁴

6.2 Encourage Sustainable Resource Management

Climate change adaptation and mitigation: These underfunded investments prevent the causes of environmental degradation — with scarce resources. These programs include plantation projects, irrigation schemes and the cultivation of plants that can withstand drier climates to ease the burden on natural resources.³⁵

Water resource management Ensure equitable water resource management practices for farming and pastoral communities. That could mean creating new water sources, rehabilitating existing ones and even setting up community-led committees in charge of managing the water to rule out any potential disputes over water access.³⁶

6.3 Improve Security and Disarmament

Disarmament and illegal arms control: Double down on disarming illegal armed organizations and control of small arms and light weapons. This, in turn, necessitates strong intelligence gathering, proper border control and community involvement to detect and remove illegal firearms.³⁷

A better security footprint and information gathering: Expand the presence of state security agents who are professionally trained, equipped to work in conflict zones, given well-evolved trackers that can focus on intelligence gathering or an early alarm system. Impartial security operations protecting all citizens without regard to their ethnic or religious affiliation are essential if trust and confidence among communities affected by violence is to be ensured.³⁸

6.4 Promote Development and Economic Diversification

Assistance to impacted communities: Offer economic support and rehabilitation initiatives for conflicts-affected populations, including reimbursement for losses, supply of agricultural inputs and vocational training to diversify sources of income. It will help reposition disrupted economies and deter conflict-inclined behaviours.³⁹

³⁴ Adejumo, "Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Security Management in Nigeria."

³⁵ Adams, Thill, and Kuusaana, "Farmer–Herder Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa."

³⁶ Ogungbenro, "Enhancing Food Security in Rural Communities."

³⁷ Ogbette, Attama, and Okoh, "Mass Media Reportage and Herders-Farmers Conflict," 45–60.

³⁸ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria."

³⁹ Ogbette, Attama, and Okoh, "Mass Media Reportage and Herders-Farmers Conflict," 45–60.

Support for modern livestock management: Encourage and subsidize modern livestock management practices, such as ranching systems and feedlot systems, to minimize being nomadic and open grazing. That will take government backing, including allocating land for grazing and technical assistance, as well as financial incentives for herders.⁴⁰

6.5 Dialogue and Social Cohesion

Inter-communal dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives: Create platforms for continuous dialogue and engagement between farmer, herder communities religious leaders, civil society organizations. The discussions can counter stereotypes, establish trust and promote empathy. Community development efforts should also feature peace education programs.

Countering hate speech and misinformation: Craft plans to counter hate speech and misinformation that flare ethnic and religious tensions. Encourage answering responsibly and support stories based on common humanity and common interest—not division.

7. Conclusion

The southern Nigeria farmer-herdsmen conflicts will prove to be a major and rising problem with broad significance for national development. This has been illustrated in this paper through a multidimensional perspective on the factors behind these conflicts: environmental degradation, socio-economic pressures, governance deficits, small arms proliferation — often derailing into ethnic and religious aspects. The socio-economic consequences are devastating, exacerbating food insecurity and causing loss of lives, displacement and economic impoverishment that sap the health of communities and regional development.

Most importantly is how these localized conflicts are affecting Nigeria's national development agenda. They endanger national security and unity by inciting secessionist sentiments and exacerbating social divides. They hinder the development of human-capital formation pathways by tearing education and health to shreds, and they undermine social cohesion and trust that fuels collective action for progress. There is a need to tackle this complex crisis in full, interlinked perspectives rather than standard security responses.

They must entail strengthening governance and the rule of law, sustainable resource management, security and disarmament, economic development and diversification — but above all inter-communal dialogue and social harmony. This could serve as a blueprint to significantly prevent farmer-herdsmen clashes, pave the way for sustainable peace in Nigeria and harness its greater development roles. A failure to meet the challenge decisively risks further destabilising the country and threatening its long-run prosperity.

⁴⁰ Okibe, "Herder-Farmer Conflicts in South East Nigeria." 22