

**THE IMPACT OF FARMERS-PASTORALISTS CONFLICT ON THE  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BENUE STATE: A CASE  
STUDY OF GWER WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA**

**BY**

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## CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned, certify that this research work was carried out by **Caroline Bidemi AKINWALE** with Matriculation Number **SSC2105651** in the Department of Political Science nt, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin.

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to Almighty God for his help and provision throughout my academic journey.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher give all thanks to God almighty for preservation, wisdom, guidance and for giving me the strength, and might to complete my academic journey in the University of Benin and to complete this project work.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the impact of farmers–pastoralists conflict on the socioeconomic development of Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The research was motivated by the increasing frequency and severity of violent clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists, which have disrupted livelihoods and undermined development in Benue, the “Food Basket of the Nation.” Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 399 respondents through structured questionnaires, with 120 valid responses analyzed using SPSS. Findings reveal that the major causes of the conflict include environmental degradation, shrinking grazing land, population growth, destruction of farmland, and poorly defined land boundaries. The conflict has significantly reduced agricultural productivity, disrupted food security, and negatively affected education, healthcare, and the local economy. Schools and health facilities have been destroyed or abandoned, while displacement and insecurity have eroded social cohesion and livelihoods. The study also found that conflict resolution strategies such as the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, community dialogue, peace building initiatives, NGO interventions, sensitization campaigns, and traditional leadership involvement have been employed with varying degrees of effectiveness. It concludes that while legislative frameworks are important, sustainable peace requires integrated approaches that combine policy, grassroots dialogue, and inclusive governance. The study recommends strengthening traditional and institutional conflict resolution mechanisms, promoting sustainable land-use practices, and enhancing government and community collaboration to mitigate the conflict and foster socioeconomic development in Gwer West.*

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The relationship between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists in Nigeria has historically been symbiotic, with exchange and cooperation being common. However, due to increased competition over scarce resources such as land and water, climate change, and weak conflict resolution mechanisms, these interactions have turned violent (Adisa, 2022). Benue State, known as the "Food Basket of the Nation," has been severely affected by such conflicts, particularly in Gwer West where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy.

Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists have increasingly become a significant challenge to socioeconomic development in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt region where land and water resources are contested. Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation," has witnessed frequent and sometimes violent clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. These conflicts have had far-reaching implications for agricultural productivity, social cohesion, and overall development (Adisa, 2022).

The root causes of these conflicts are multifaceted, ranging from environmental factors, such as desertification and climate change, which push pastoralists further south in search of grazing land, to socio-political and economic issues including land tenure insecurity,

population growth, and weak conflict resolution mechanisms (Tonah, 2019). In Benue State, and particularly in Gwer West Local Government Area, these issues are exacerbated by the increasing scarcity of arable land, government inaction, and perceived ethnic and religious undertones.

Gwer West, a predominantly agrarian local government area, has experienced recurrent clashes that have led to significant loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of populations, and disruption of farming activities. These incidents have not only affected the immediate victims but have also crippled the local economy, disrupted education and health services, and led to increased poverty and food insecurity (Okoli & Atelhe, 2022). The cyclical nature of these conflicts has created a climate of fear and mistrust, which hinders cooperative economic activities and development planning.

Moreover, the conflict has placed a strain on local governance structures and security agencies, which are often under-resourced and ill-equipped to mediate or prevent violence. The resultant insecurity deters both local and foreign investments, further limiting the economic growth potential of the region (Ofuoku & Isife, 2019). Additionally, women and children are disproportionately affected, with increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, limited access to education, and breakdown of family units.

Scholarly attention has been directed towards understanding the patterns and causes of these conflicts, yet there remains a gap in literature regarding their specific socioeconomic impacts on localized communities such as Gwer West. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the multidimensional impacts of the farmers-pastoralists conflict on the socioeconomic development of Gwer West, with the goal of informing more effective conflict resolution and development strategies.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The recurring conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria have emerged as one of the most pressing security and development challenges, particularly affecting states like Benue. Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation," has seen its agricultural productivity, social cohesion, and overall economic development severely threatened by these violent clashes (Okoli & Atelhe, 2017). In Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA), these conflicts have escalated dramatically in recent years, leading to widespread displacement, destruction of farmland, loss of livelihoods, and deepening poverty.

Historically, relationships between farmers and pastoralist were largely symbiotic and regulated through traditional institutions and negotiated agreements (Tonah, 2016). However, factors such as population growth, environmental degradation, desertification in the northern regions, and the proliferation of small arms have intensified competition

over land and water resources (Blench, 2017). As a result, Gwer West LGA has become a flashpoint for violent encounters between settled farming communities and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. The destruction of crops, loss of cattle, and loss of lives have compounded social tensions, weakened communal ties, and undermined peacebuilding efforts.

The socioeconomic consequences of these conflicts are profound. Farming, the mainstay of the local economy, is disrupted, leading to food insecurity, inflation of food prices, and reduced household incomes (Abbass, 2012). Infrastructure such as schools, health centers, and markets have also suffered from targeted attacks and neglect, further entrenching underdevelopment. Additionally, the persistent insecurity discourages private investment and strains government resources, as significant funds are diverted to security operations and humanitarian assistance rather than developmental projects.

Despite the increasing scholarly attention to the national dimensions of the farmers-pastoralists conflict, there remains a notable gap in localized studies focusing specifically on Gwer West LGA. Most existing research tends to generalize findings across wider areas without acknowledging the unique historical, cultural, and environmental dynamics of specific localities (Ofuoku & Isife, 2019). Therefore, a targeted investigation into the impact of these conflicts on the socioeconomic development of Gwer West is essential for formulating effective, context-specific conflict mitigation and development strategies.

In light of the foregoing, this study seeks to assess the extent to which the farmers-pastoralists conflict has impeded the socioeconomic development of Gwer West LGA. It aims to provide empirical evidence on how livelihoods, education, healthcare, and local governance have been affected, thereby offering critical insights for policymakers, peacebuilders, and development practitioners.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to assess the impact of farmers-pastoralists conflict on the socioeconomic development of Gwer West LGA. The specific objectives include:

1. To identify the causes of farmers-pastoralists conflicts in Gwer West.
2. To examine the effects of these conflicts on agriculture and food security.
3. To evaluate the impact on education, health, and local economy.
4. To analyze coping and conflict resolution strategies employed by affected communities.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the main causes of farmers-pastoralists conflicts in Gwer West?
2. How have these conflicts affected agricultural productivity and food security?
3. In what ways have education, health, and the local economy been impacted?
4. What strategies are used to cope with and resolve these conflicts?

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is confined to Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria, and focuses specifically on the impact of farmers-pastoralists conflict on the socioeconomic development of the area. The study examines various dimensions of the conflict including causes, frequency, intensity, and consequences on agricultural productivity, economic livelihoods, social cohesion, access to education and health services, and migration/displacement patterns.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant as it explores the growing crisis of farmers-pastoralists conflict in Benue State, with a focus on Gwer West Local Government Area. The findings will provide a better understanding of how this conflict affects key aspects of socioeconomic development such as agriculture, trade, education, healthcare, displacement, and community relations.

It is particularly relevant to policymakers, government agencies, security institutions, and development partners seeking sustainable solutions to conflicts in agrarian communities. By highlighting the root causes, patterns, and consequences of the conflict, the study offers evidence-based recommendations that can inform policy reforms, peacebuilding efforts, and conflict resolution strategies.

Additionally, the study contributes to academic literature by offering a localized perspective on the broader national issue of resource-based conflict in Nigeria. It will also serve as a reference for future researchers interested in rural development, conflict management, and inter-group relations.

## **1.7 Operational Definition of Terms**

### **Conflict:**

Refers to any form of disagreement, confrontation, or violence arising between two or more parties in this case, between farmers and pastoralist — over the use and control of land, water, and other natural resources.

### **Farmers-Pastoralists Conflict:**

this refers to the recurring disputes and violent clashes between crop farmers and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralist (pastoralists) in Gwer West LGA of Benue State, typically over land use, grazing rights, crop destruction, and water resources.

### **Socioeconomic Development:**

This refers to the improvement in the living standards of people in terms of access to education, healthcare, income generation, agricultural productivity, infrastructure, and peaceful coexistence in Gwer West Local Government Area.

**Development:**

This denotes the positive transformation in social and economic indicators such as poverty reduction, employment opportunities, infrastructural growth, food security, and peaceful coexistence within a community or region.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Scholars such as Tonah (2006) and Okoli & Atelhe (2014) have examined the dynamics of farmers-pastoralist conflicts in Nigeria, attributing the violence to land use competition, climate change, and ethnic tensions. However, few studies have focused on localized impacts, especially in Gwer West LGA. This chapter seeks to bridge that gap by examining the direct socioeconomic consequences in a specific context.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

##### **2.1.1 Concept of conflict**

Conflict is a multidimensional, inevitable, and dynamic phenomenon embedded in the fabric of human relationships, social structures, and organizational systems. It arises from perceived or actual incompatibilities in interests, goals, values, beliefs, or needs between individuals or groups. Whether in personal, professional, societal, or international settings, conflict is not merely a disruption to harmony but a natural consequence of diversity and interaction in a complex and interconnected world.

As De Dreu and Gelfand (2017) explain, conflict is a “dynamic process that unfolds over time as individuals or groups perceive opposition to their interests or goals and act accordingly.” This perception-based view underscores that conflict is often rooted more

in subjective interpretation than in objective reality. Misunderstandings, assumptions, cultural differences, and emotional responses can all contribute to the emergence and escalation of conflict, making its management a nuanced and delicate task. Communication, therefore, becomes both a source of conflict and a critical tool for its resolution. In today's complex and rapidly evolving environments, conflict is shaped by several systemic and structural factors. These include economic inequalities, political marginalization, technological disruption, and increasing cultural and ideological polarization. Jehn and Bendersky (2020) distinguish between task conflict which involves disagreements about work-related issues and can enhance creativity and performance and relationship conflict, which is rooted in interpersonal tensions and typically undermines collaboration and morale. This distinction is crucial, especially in multicultural, interdisciplinary, or remote teams, where effective conflict management can transform potentially destructive tensions into productive dialogues (Ogunyemi, Olaleye & Okon, 2021). Moreover, the nature of conflict is deeply influenced by issues of identity, power, and justice. According to Pruitt and Kim (2021), conflicts grounded in identity or moral values tend to be more resistant to resolution because they touch on the fundamental aspects of individuals' or groups' self-conception and belonging. These identity-based conflicts are often observed in ethnic, religious, and nationalist disputes, where historical grievances, perceived injustices, and cultural narratives play a central role. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ethnic tensions in Myanmar, and racial divisions in the United States

are emblematic of how identity and power intersect to create protracted and complex conflicts.

In response to these challenges, modern conflict transformation theories have moved beyond traditional conflict resolution—which often focuses on surface-level settlement of disputes—to embrace deeper, more holistic approaches. Lederach’s (1997) influential peace building model, which emphasizes the importance of relationship-building, cultural sensitivity, and long-term social change, remains foundational. However, more recent frameworks have expanded to include systemic transformation, trauma-informed peace building, and restorative justice mechanisms that address not only the immediate manifestations of conflict but also the underlying social and psychological wounds (Van Tongeren, 2020). Additionally, the digital era has introduced new layers of complexity to the conflict landscape. With the proliferation of social media and digital communication tools, conflict can escalate rapidly, spread misinformation, and inflame divisions at unprecedented speed. Baines and O’Shaughnessy (2022) highlight how cyber conflicts—ranging from online harassment to coordinated propaganda and disinformation campaigns—are reshaping the dynamics of conflict in both domestic and international contexts. Anonymity, virality, and the erosion of gatekeeping mechanisms have made digital spaces fertile ground for both constructive dialogue and toxic polarization.

In light of these evolving dimensions, conflict should not be viewed solely as a threat to harmony or productivity. When approached with empathy, openness, and strategic

foresight, conflict offers critical opportunities for transformation. It can prompt reflection on existing norms and practices, highlight systemic injustices, and pave the way for institutional reform and stronger relationships. Conflict, in this sense, is not simply a disruption—but a mirror that reflects deeper truths about society and a gateway to sustainable change.

In conclusion, conflict remains an inescapable element of the human experience, shaped by personal perceptions and broader socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics. Contemporary scholarship underscores the dual nature of conflict: while it can be destructive and divisive when ignored or mismanaged, it can also serve as a powerful engine for innovation, reconciliation, and social progress when navigated constructively. Effective conflict management requires not just technical skills, but also emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and a commitment to justice and equity.

### **2.1.2 Farmers-Pastoralists Conflict**

Farmers-pastoralists conflict refers to violent confrontations between agriculturalists and pastoralist, often over the use of land and water resources. Scholars have long recognized that these conflicts are not new phenomena but have evolved over time due to increasing resource scarcity, population pressures, and environmental changes (Tonah, 2016). Traditionally, symbiotic relationships existed between the two groups, regulated through customary norms and negotiated access to land and water. However, the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, exacerbated by modernization and political

interference, has led to recurrent violent clashes (Blench, 2010). Furthermore, Farmers-pastoralists conflict refers to violent confrontations between sedentary agricultural communities and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralist, primarily over access to land, water, and grazing resources. These clashes are common in regions where pastoralism and crop farming coexist, and they have intensified in frequency and severity in recent decades. Scholars agree that such conflicts are not recent phenomena; they have historical roots but have evolved in scope and complexity due to several socio-economic, environmental, and political transformations (Tonah, 2016; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

Historically, farmers and pastoralists maintained a largely cooperative and symbiotic relationship, often based on mutual economic benefit. pastoralist' livestock would fertilize farmers' fields, while pastoralists in return gained access to crop residues and water points, especially during the dry season. These relationships were governed by customary institutions and local norms, which provided structured frameworks for resource sharing and conflict resolution (Blench, 2010; Abbass, 2012).

However, these traditional mechanisms have increasingly weakened due to modernization, climate change, and shifts in land tenure systems. The introduction of formal legal frameworks, coupled with the erosion of indigenous authority structures, has undermined the effectiveness of local mediation processes. For instance, elders, chiefs, and traditional councils who once played a central role in conflict resolution have lost legitimacy or authority in the eyes of both the state and younger generations (Tonah,

2006). Moreover, rising population growth and expanding agricultural frontiers have increased pressure on available land, leading to the encroachment of farmland into traditional grazing routes and corridors. Simultaneously, desertification and erratic rainfall patterns—particularly in Nigeria’s northern Sahel region—have driven pastoralists further south into densely populated farming areas like Benue State (Adamu, 2017). This southward migration, in the absence of clear grazing policies or legal protections, has heightened tensions and created frequent flashpoints of violence (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Political interference and weak governance have also contributed to the escalation of these conflicts. Rather than acting as neutral arbiters, some political actors have been accused of taking sides often along ethnic or religious lines which exacerbates community distrust and hampers peace building efforts (Okeke, 2014). Additionally, the proliferation of small arms, coupled with the failure of law enforcement agencies to prevent retaliatory attacks, has transformed many local disputes into militarized and deadly confrontations (Chukwuma & Atelhe, 2014).

The consequences of this transformation are profound. Beyond loss of life and property, the conflict undermines food security, displaces populations, and disrupts rural economies. It also fuels broader insecurity, as criminal elements exploit the chaos to carry out attacks, cattle rustling, and banditry (Uche, 2018).

### **2.1.3 Causes of Farmers-Pastoralists Conflict**

Multiple interrelated factors are identified as causes of these conflicts. Environmental degradation and climate change have reduced available arable and grazing lands, compelling pastoralists to migrate southwards into farming communities (Adisa, 2022). Population growth has also increased land pressure, intensifying competition between farmers and pastoralist. Moreover, the weakening of traditional conflict management institutions and the proliferation of small arms have further escalated violence (Abbass, 2012).

In Benue State specifically, the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) heightened tensions, as pastoralists viewed the law as discriminatory, while farmers saw it as necessary for protecting their livelihoods (Okeke, 2020). In Gwer West LGA, these dynamics have played out violently, leading to mass displacement, destruction of farmlands, and disruption of socio-economic activities.

#### **1. Environmental Degradation and Climate Change**

One of the most critical and often overlooked factors fueling the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria is the intensifying impact of environmental degradation, which has been exacerbated by the global phenomenon of climate change. These environmental pressures are reshaping patterns of land use and migration, undermining traditional livelihoods, and creating fertile ground for conflict particularly in areas like Gwer West

Local Government Area of Benue State, where agricultural communities and migrating pastoralists now find themselves in increasingly tense and often violent interactions. The Sahel region of northern Nigeria, traditionally the primary base for nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralist communities, has been severely affected by climate variability. Over the last few decades, the region has witnessed a marked increase in desertification, land degradation, deforestation, and irregular rainfall patterns (Adisa, 2022). Prolonged droughts and the drying up of water sources—including Lake Chad, which has shrunk by over 90% since the 1960s—have significantly reduced the viability of traditional grazing lands and water points in the north. These deteriorating environmental conditions have rendered many pastoralists' ancestral territories unsustainable for livestock rearing. As a survival strategy, many pastoralist are compelled to migrate southward, in search of greener pastures and more stable water sources. This southward movement has become more frequent, intense, and permanent, resulting in the large-scale influx of pastoralists into Nigeria's Middle Belt region, including Benue State, which is widely recognized for its fertile land and rich agricultural productivity.

Benue State, however, is predominantly occupied by settled farming communities, such as the Tiv, Idoma, and other ethnic groups, whose livelihoods depend on subsistence and commercial agriculture. These communities rely heavily on fixed plots of land for farming staple crops like yam, maize, cassava, and soybeans. The geographical convergence of mobile pastoralists and sedentary farmers thus creates a high-stakes

contest over land use. Grazing cattle may trample or feed on growing crops, sometimes just days or weeks before harvest—leading to immense financial losses for farmers. In Gwer West LGA, the implications of this environmental shift are particularly pronounced. As pastoralists bring their herds into farmlands, there have been numerous instances of crop destruction, water source contamination, and trespassing on community lands. Farmers, who often invest significant labor and limited capital into land preparation and cultivation, see this incursion as both an economic threat and a violation of their territorial rights. Consequently, these incidents frequently lead to retaliatory violence, where farmers may kill or injure cattle or confront pastoralist—actions which, in turn, provoke reprisals from armed pastoralists. What was once a seasonal interaction governed by mutual understanding and traditional land-sharing customs has now devolved into a persistent and escalating cycle of mistrust, confrontation, and violence. In many parts of Gwer West, the situation has deteriorated to the point where entire communities have been displaced due to fear of attack or reprisal. Local markets have been disrupted, schools and health facilities closed, and agricultural productivity has declined significantly, threatening food security in the region.

Several socio-political and institutional weaknesses have compounded the environmental drivers of conflict. The absence of clearly demarcated grazing routes, inadequate implementation of land-use policies, and the collapse of traditional conflict mediation structures have left communities with few options for peaceful dispute resolution.

Additionally, pastoralist—many of whom are from the Fulani ethnic group—are often viewed as “outsiders” by indigenous communities, adding an ethnic and identity-based dimension to the conflict that makes it even harder to resolve. Moreover, pastoralism, by its very nature, requires access to large expanses of open land for grazing and watering livestock. In contrast, modern agricultural practices and rising population pressures demand increased land enclosure and permanent cultivation. Without sustainable land-use planning or viable alternatives such as ranching systems, the structural incompatibility between these two modes of livelihood intensifies conflict.

Climate change, in this context, acts as a threat multiplier—not the sole cause of conflict, but a significant factor that exacerbates pre-existing socio-economic tensions and institutional weaknesses. It alters migration patterns, intensifies competition over shrinking natural resources, and increases the likelihood of violent encounters between mobile and sedentary populations. As pastoralist move further into regions like Gwer West, the likelihood of violent flashpoints increases, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons, when farmlands are most vulnerable to encroachment.

## **2. Population Growth and Land Pressure**

Nigeria’s population, currently estimated at over 220 million, is projected to surpass 400 million by 2050, making it one of the fastest-growing countries in the world. This demographic explosion has had profound implications for land use, especially in agrarian

regions like Benue State, which is often dubbed the “Food Basket of the Nation.” With its fertile soil and favorable climate, Benue State has become a magnet for both internal migration and agricultural expansion. However, this increasing demand for land driven by a growing population—has also intensified competition over natural resources, particularly between sedentary farmers and transhumant pastoralists. As more people settle in Benue State, the need for housing, commercial farming, infrastructure development, and public services continues to rise. Vast tracts of land once reserved for communal use or ecological conservation are now being cleared for cultivation, residential estates, and roads. The government’s development agenda, while necessary, has not always included adequate land-use planning frameworks, leading to unregulated land acquisition and use. Consequently, this has drastically reduced the open spaces traditionally used by nomadic pastoralists for grazing and seasonal movement. In Gwer West Local Government Area, the impact of population growth is particularly visible. Over the last two decades, the LGA has experienced an influx of migrants from both within and outside Benue State due to urban spillover, rural-to-rural migration, and displacement from conflict-prone areas. The result has been a sharp increase in demand for agricultural plots, which has pushed cultivation further into areas that were once designated as grazing corridors, fallow zones, or open rangelands. This unplanned expansion has created spatial conflict zones, where the interests of farmers and pastoralist collide. Without clearly marked boundaries or effective local land governance mechanisms, pastoralists unknowingly or unavoidably encroach on cultivated land during

their seasonal migrations. Cattle straying into newly established farmlands can result in destruction of crops, often leading to hostile confrontations between both groups. In many cases, such disputes escalate beyond verbal altercations to physical violence, arson, and even fatalities. Farmers in Gwer West often perceive pastoralist as outsiders who pose a direct threat to their economic survival and land ownership rights. Many believe that the presence of pastoralists is synonymous with insecurity, land degradation, and instability. Conversely, pastoralists argue that they are being systematically displaced from traditional grazing territories that they have used for generations. To them, the loss of grazing paths and watering points due to farmland encroachment is an existential threat—one that forces them into marginal spaces or compels them to compete for shrinking pasture, often with dire consequences.

This mutual distrust is further worsened by the absence of a coherent land-use policy that considers the needs of both groups. Although the Nigerian Land Use Act (1978) vests all land in the governor of each state and provides for land allocation, its implementation at the grassroots level has been marred by corruption, political interference, and weak institutional capacity. Local governments like Gwer West lack the technical and financial resources to undertake comprehensive land surveys, demarcate rangelands, or enforce zoning regulations, making peaceful coexistence between farmers and pastoralist increasingly difficult.

Moreover, the land tenure system in many rural areas is customary and undocumented, which leads to overlapping claims and confusion over ownership. In such settings, traditional rulers or family heads may allocate the same parcel of land to multiple users, sometimes for bribes or favors. These overlapping claims become flashpoints for violent confrontation when farming and herding activities overlap during critical periods of the agricultural calendar particularly during planting and harvest seasons.

The youth bulge associated with population growth also contributes to the intensification of the conflict. Many young people in rural communities, particularly in Gwer West, face high unemployment and limited access to education or skills training. This socioeconomic frustration makes them susceptible to mobilization for violence, especially in contexts where ethnic or religious narratives are used to frame the farmer-pastoralist conflict. Vigilante groups or self-defense militias have formed in many communities, heightening the risk of retaliatory attacks and creating a cycle of violence that is difficult to break

### **3. Weakening of Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

Historically, relations between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria were largely symbiotic, built on mutual dependence and shaped by long-established norms and customary practices. In agrarian communities such as those in Benue State, particularly Gwer West LGA, traditional institutions played a crucial role in regulating interactions between both

groups. Local chiefs, community elders, clan heads, and religious leaders were instrumental in mediating land disputes, negotiating access to water sources, and facilitating seasonal grazing arrangements. These community-based mechanisms operated within well-understood frameworks of dialogue, reciprocity, and restorative justice, which emphasized consensus-building and the restoration of social harmony over punishment or exclusion. However, in recent decades, this traditional architecture of conflict resolution has steadily eroded, leading to a vacuum in grassroots peacebuilding and justice systems. Several interrelated forces—modernization, urbanization, political interference, and the decline in respect for traditional authority—have undermined the legitimacy, effectiveness, and neutrality of traditional institutions.

One of the key challenges facing traditional rulers and community elders today is a declining social mandate. As rural communities become more exposed to urban culture, digital media, and formal legal systems, the authority once held by elders and monarchs is now frequently challenged particularly by educated youth, political actors, and non-indigenous settlers. This is especially evident in Gwer West, where younger generations, often alienated from customary norms and decision-making processes, are less inclined to seek redress through traditional channels. Moreover, communal trust in traditional leaders has weakened, largely due to perceptions of bias, corruption, and politicization. In some instances, traditional rulers have been accused of favoring one group over another, particularly along ethnic or religious lines. Given that most of the herders are of Fulani-

Muslim identity, while the host farming communities in Benue State are predominantly Tiv and Idoma Christians, disputes are often perceived not just as land or livelihood issues but as existential and identity-based struggles. This ethno-religious dimension further complicates the neutrality of traditional rulers, who may be seen as partial by either party. Another critical factor contributing to the breakdown of customary mechanisms is the commercialization of land, which has disrupted the communal landholding systems that once facilitated shared access. Traditional rulers and local chiefs—who historically managed land on behalf of communities—are now increasingly involved in the sale or lease of land for personal or political gain. This commodification has introduced new sources of conflict, as land allocations are often made without transparency or consideration for existing informal land use arrangements between farmers and pastoralists. When disputes arise, communities may refuse to accept the rulings of traditional authorities, whom they suspect of being financially or politically compromised. Compounding these challenges is the lack of legal recognition and institutional support for traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. The Nigerian legal system tends to privilege statutory law and formal judicial processes, offering little integration between customary practices and state institutions. As a result, traditional leaders are often left with no enforcement capacity, particularly in cases involving violence, theft, or murder. In situations where they attempt to mediate, their decisions are not always respected or followed through, especially when one party has the backing of more powerful external actors.

This institutional vacuum has created fertile ground for violent escalation. Without trusted mediators or effective grassroots mechanisms, minor disputes—such as crop damage by cattle or access to a watering point—can quickly spiral into violent confrontations, leading to deaths, property destruction, and cycles of revenge. The presence of small arms and light weapons, combined with the emergence of ethnic militias and self-defense groups, has further militarized community responses to conflict. In such a volatile environment, parties are less willing to engage in non-violent negotiation, seeing it as futile or one-sided. In Gwer West LGA, the consequences of this breakdown are stark. Communities that once relied on peaceful dialogue now find themselves trapped in a climate of suspicion and retaliation. Disputes that might have been resolved by a council of elders in the past now often require intervention from security forces, state officials, or humanitarian organizations, who may lack the local knowledge or legitimacy to deescalate tensions effectively. This externalization of conflict resolution often results in delayed or inconsistent outcomes, further eroding public confidence in any form of peaceful dispute management.

#### **4. Proliferation of Small Arms and Weapons**

Another critical factor fueling the escalation of violence in farmer-pastoralist conflicts is the widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). The porous nature of Nigeria's northern borders, especially those adjoining conflict-prone regions in the Sahel, such as Niger, Chad, and Mali, has facilitated the illicit flow of arms into the

country. Regional instability—marked by insurgencies, rebel movements, and weak governance—has created a black market for firearms, making it relatively easy for non-state actors, including farmers and herders, to access dangerous weapons (Abbass, 2012; Onuoha, 2011).

This influx of weapons has dramatically altered the nature and intensity of pastoral conflicts. What were previously sporadic, low-intensity disagreements over land and water use have evolved into highly militarized confrontations, often resulting in significant fatalities, widespread destruction of property, and mass displacement of rural populations. The easy availability of weapons emboldens groups to engage in violent reprisal attacks, turning small-scale altercations into full-blown communal crises.

In Gwer West LGA, the situation has deteriorated as both farming and pastoralist communities have resorted to arming themselves, either for perceived self-defense or in anticipation of retaliatory attacks. This arms race has not only heightened fear and insecurity but also entrenched a culture of violence, where parties are less likely to seek peaceful resolution due to the assurance of force as a viable option. In some communities, militias have formed around ethnic or occupational lines, exacerbating the conflict and making it increasingly difficult to mediate or de-escalate.

The militarization of the conflict has also significantly undermined the capacity of state security forces and local law enforcement. Police and other security agencies operating in

the region often lack the resources, manpower, and strategic coordination required to counter well-armed groups. In some cases, they are perceived as biased or ineffective, further eroding public trust. This vacuum has led to the emergence of vigilante groups and informal security outfits, which, although initially intended to protect communities, often contribute to the violence by engaging in extrajudicial actions or retaliatory assaults. Furthermore, the proliferation of arms has complicated efforts at peacebuilding and reconciliation. Communities that have suffered attacks are reluctant to disarm or engage in dialogue, fearing future attacks. As a result, a cycle of mistrust and vengeance persists, deepening the societal divides between farmers and herders and prolonging the conflict.

Ultimately, tackling the spread of SALWs is crucial for restoring peace in Gwer West and other affected regions. This requires a coordinated response that includes tightening border control, improving intelligence gathering, disarming militias, and promoting community-based disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. International cooperation, especially with neighboring Sahelian countries, is also essential to curb the transnational dimensions of arms trafficking.

## **5. The Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017**

A defining moment in the trajectory of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Benue State was the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in May 2017. This legislation was a bold and controversial attempt by the Benue State Government to address the rising tide of violence and destruction attributed to open grazing practices. The law prohibits the movement of livestock by foot across the state and instead mandates the creation of ranches as a modern, regulated system for livestock management. While the law was intended to enhance security, protect farmlands, and modernize animal husbandry, its implementation has been fraught with unintended consequences, particularly in volatile areas like Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA). From the perspective of many agrarian communities, the law was long overdue. Years of unregulated cattle movement had led to crop destruction, water source pollution, and deadly clashes, which communities felt the state had not done enough to prevent. As such, the law was largely welcomed by farming populations who saw it as a mechanism for protecting their land, livelihoods, and personal safety. The law symbolized, for them, a decisive shift toward prioritizing local food security and land rights over the unchecked mobility of pastoralist groups. However, for many pastoralists, especially the predominantly Fulani herders, the law was perceived as discriminatory, abrupt, and exclusionary. Rather than being seen as a neutral tool for peace, it was viewed as a political instrument that unfairly targeted their nomadic way of life. Critics, including pastoralist associations and human rights observers, noted that the formulation and implementation process lacked adequate consultation with the pastoralist communities

who would be most affected. There were limited efforts to involve them in public hearings, needs assessments, or the design of supportive infrastructure to enable the transition from open grazing to ranching. As a result, many herders felt marginalized and alienated from a legal process that directly impinged on their economic and cultural practices. According to Okeke (2020), although the law was designed to de-escalate tensions and modernize livestock practices, its actual implementation has often produced the opposite effect. In Gwer West, where both farming and herding communities co-exist in a fragile balance, the law has become a flashpoint. Enforcement agencies, including state livestock guards, local vigilante groups, and security forces, have carried out actions such as confiscation of cattle, arrest and detention of herders, and destruction of makeshift camps. These actions, although legal under the provisions of the law, have fueled resentment, fear, and mistrust among pastoralists, who believe that the enforcement is selective and punitive rather than reformative.

Furthermore, vigilante enforcement carried out by community-based security groups—has sometimes lacked professionalism and accountability. In some cases, confrontations between vigilantes and herders have led to violent reprisals, resulting in loss of life, destruction of property, and retaliatory attacks. This has contributed to a climate of insecurity and polarization in Gwer West, undermining the very goals the law sought to achieve. The increasing perception that the state government is biased in favor of farming communities has further strained intergroup relations and hardened ethnic identities.

Another critical shortfall of the law’s implementation has been the absence of necessary infrastructure to support the ranching alternative. Despite the legal requirement for herders to adopt ranching, few viable ranches have been established or made accessible to traditional herding communities. Many pastoralists—especially those who operate on small or subsistence scales—lack the financial resources, technical knowledge, and land tenure security required to establish and maintain a ranch. Additionally, no comprehensive land allocation framework for ranches has been implemented, nor has the government provided sufficient veterinary, water, or fodder support systems. This logistical vacuum has left many pastoralists with no clear path to compliance. In the absence of practical alternatives, some herders have chosen to relocate to neighboring states with less restrictive policies. Others have stayed behind, operating covertly, moving cattle at night or along informal paths, which increases the chances of undetected clashes and illicit activity. In some cases, transhumant herders from outside Benue State have also returned seasonally, clashing with both local authorities and farming communities, thereby complicating the security landscape further. It is important to note that not all resistance to the law stems from pastoralists alone. Some farmers have also raised concerns about the politicization of enforcement, where community disputes are reframed as violations of the anti-grazing law to justify police or vigilante intervention. There have also been accusations of extortion and abuse by enforcement officials, leading to legal and human rights challenges.

## **2.2 Socioeconomic Impact of the Conflict**

The socioeconomic impacts of farmers-pastoralists conflict are profound and multifaceted. First, agricultural productivity has significantly declined due to the destruction of farmlands, loss of crops, and displacement of farming communities (Ofuoku & Isife, 2009). Agriculture being the backbone of Benue's economy, these losses translate directly into reduced food security and economic stagnation. Second, education in conflict-affected areas such as Gwer West suffers as schools are closed or destroyed during attacks, and displaced children face disrupted learning (Aliyu, 2015). Similarly, healthcare services are hampered, as health facilities are vandalized, and access is restricted due to insecurity (Iro, 2004). Moreover, forced migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps place additional burdens on limited government resources. IDPs often lose access to their traditional sources of livelihood, resulting in increased poverty and dependency on humanitarian aid (Anishi & Ijaha, 2016).

Beyond economic implications, the conflicts have eroded social cohesion. Communities that once coexisted peacefully are now divided along ethnic and occupational lines, with deep-seated mistrust and grievances hampering reconciliation efforts (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

### **1. Agricultural Decline and Economic Disruption**

Agriculture remains the cornerstone of Benue State's economy, earning it the moniker "the Food Basket of the Nation." The sector provides employment for the vast majority of the population, particularly in rural areas, and serves as the main source of food, livelihood, and state revenue. Crops such as yam, rice, cassava, maize, soybean, groundnuts, and citrus fruits are widely cultivated across the state, contributing significantly to both local consumption and national food security. However, the persistent conflict between farmers and pastoralists has had a profoundly damaging effect on agricultural productivity, especially in conflict-prone areas like Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA). As Ofuoku and Isife (2009) observed, farmlands in conflict zones are frequently subjected to widespread destruction during herder-farmer clashes. In Gwer West, this destruction manifests in multiple forms—cattle trampling crops, the intentional burning of farms during reprisal attacks, the theft or destruction of farming implements, and the vandalism of storage facilities. During peak periods of violence, many farmers are forced to abandon their farms for fear of attacks, leading to missed planting or harvesting seasons and a disruption in agricultural cycles. Even when physical access to land is possible, insecurity discourages investment in land preparation and reduces the scale of operations, as farmers are uncertain of their safety or the future of their crops.

Another devastating outcome of the conflict is the mass displacement of farming communities. In Gwer West, entire villages have been emptied due to persistent attacks, with households seeking refuge in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps or

relocating to urban areas. This displacement not only reduces the available agricultural labor force but also interrupts generational farming knowledge transfer, as young people are detached from rural life and subsistence activities. Women, who play a vital role in post-harvest activities and local food processing, are particularly affected, further compounding the food production deficit.

The cumulative effect of farmland destruction, reduced labor, and abandonment of cultivation has been a significant decline in agricultural output in affected areas. This has translated into food shortages, especially of staple crops, and corresponding price hikes in local markets. These inflationary trends strain household budgets, reduce access to nutritious food, and increase dependency on external food aid and imports—an unsustainable model for a region traditionally known for food surplus.

Beyond direct agricultural losses, the conflict has triggered wider economic disruptions across the value chain. Market women, transport operators, artisans, and traders—who rely heavily on the agricultural economy for their livelihoods—face declining incomes due to the closure or under-functioning of rural markets. As rural commerce slows, local governments experience reduced tax and revenue generation, which in turn limits their ability to provide basic services and invest in development projects. Audu (2014) emphasizes that the destabilization of rural economies exacerbates poverty, unemployment, **and** youth restiveness, deepening existing vulnerabilities and threatening long-term development.

The economic consequences of the conflict go beyond statistics; they have real and lasting effects on people's livelihoods and well-being. Families that once relied on farm produce for food and income are now entrenched in cycles of poverty. Unable to access their land or harvest their crops, many farmers have become dependent on humanitarian relief, while others have taken up low-paying jobs in urban centers or engaged in negative coping mechanisms.

The conflict has also discouraged agricultural investment, both from local and external stakeholders. Potential investors in agribusiness are wary of putting money into an insecure region, and government-led agricultural extension services are often restricted due to safety concerns. This has led to stagnation in technological adoption, mechanized farming, sustainable land use practices, leaving many rural communities locked in low-yield, subsistence farming that can no longer meet the demands of the growing population.

## **2. Disruption of Education Services**

One of the most alarming yet often underreported consequences of the protracted farmers-pastoralists conflict in Benue State is the disruption of educational activities,

particularly in vulnerable areas such as Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA). Education, which is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable development, has suffered deeply under the weight of recurrent violence. In volatile communities, repeated attacks by armed groups have led to the closure of schools, the destruction of educational infrastructure, and the displacement of both teachers and learners, thereby eroding the very fabric of community development. According to Aliyu (2015), conflict zones frequently experience the abandonment of school buildings, not only because of the imminent threat of violence but also due to their repurposing as makeshift shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In Gwer West, numerous schools have been either partially damaged or completely destroyed, forcing school administrations to shut down or operate at severely diminished capacity. Where school buildings are still standing, many have been taken over by displaced families, leaving students without dedicated spaces for learning.

The displacement of school-aged children presents one of the gravest challenges to educational continuity. As families flee their ancestral homes to escape violence, children are pulled out of school and relocated to IDP camps or urban slums where educational infrastructure is either insufficient or non-existent. Even where schools are present, the overcrowded and under-resourced environments severely compromise the quality of education. Many IDP children attend makeshift schools in tents or open-air structures, often without access to textbooks, teaching aids, sanitary facilities, or qualified educators.

Teachers, who are also affected by the conflict, may be unable or unwilling to remain in insecure areas, leading to critical staffing shortages and interrupted academic sessions. The long-term implications of educational disruption are severe and far-reaching. As noted by UNICEF Nigeria (2021), the loss of continuous schooling not only hinders the academic and personal development of children but also diminishes their economic potential in adulthood. Young people who are unable to attain even basic literacy and numeracy skills face limited job opportunities and are more likely to remain trapped in poverty. The intergenerational consequences of this are profound, as communities become locked in cycles of illiteracy, unemployment, and dependency. Additionally, the absence of formal education creates a vacuum that may be filled by negative influences. Youths who grow up without educational opportunities are more susceptible to criminal behavior, substance abuse, or recruitment into militant groups and communal militias. This not only poses a threat to regional security but also undermines peacebuilding efforts and the cultivation of civic values. The economic, social, and security costs of having a large, under-educated, and underemployed youth population cannot be overstated.

Furthermore, the psychosocial impact of conflict on displaced children presents a major barrier to effective learning. Many children who have witnessed violence, lost family members, or experienced forced migration suffer from trauma, anxiety, and emotional instability. These psychological wounds, if left unaddressed, significantly impair

cognitive development, attention span, and classroom participation. Learning under such stress is often unproductive, as children are unable to process information effectively or relate to peers in healthy ways. Without specialized psychosocial support services and trauma-informed teaching approaches, these children are unlikely to realize their full academic potential. In communities like Gwer West, where education was once a pathway out of poverty and a source of hope for future generations, the sustained conflict has reversed decades of progress. Literacy rates have stagnated or declined, school enrolment has dropped, and the ambition of many young people to pursue higher education has been shattered. Parents, too, become discouraged from investing in their children's education when schools are seen as unsafe or when survival takes precedence over learning

### **3. Healthcare Challenges and Humanitarian Crises**

The farmer-pastoralist conflict in Benue State has had devastating consequences for the healthcare sector, especially in conflict-prone areas such as Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA). In these rural communities, where health infrastructure is already limited and access to care is fragile, repeated outbreaks of violence have destroyed critical health facilities or rendered them inoperable. Attacks on villages frequently target public infrastructure, including primary healthcare centers, dispensaries, and outreach clinics, many of which have been burned, looted, or abandoned due to ongoing insecurity. As Iro (2004) and subsequent field reports from humanitarian

organizations confirm, healthcare workers often flee these volatile areas for their safety, leading to severe shortages of medical personnel. Those who remain face restricted movement and are unable to carry out medical outreach programs or attend to patients in remote communities. Additionally, supply chains for essential medicines, vaccines, and equipment have been disrupted, further limiting the availability of basic health services. As a result, preventable and treatable diseases go unmanaged, leading to increased mortality and morbidity in affected communities. The burden of this healthcare crisis falls disproportionately on the most vulnerable segments of the population pregnant women, infants, children, and the elderly. Pregnant women, for instance, often lack access to prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, and emergency obstetric services, resulting in increased maternal and neonatal mortality rates. Similarly, children in conflict zones face heightened risks of malnutrition, respiratory infections, diarrhea, and vaccine-preventable diseases, due to poor nutrition, unsanitary living conditions, and missed immunization schedules. The absence of consistent maternal and child health services has severely undermined public health gains made in the region over previous decades.

Compounding these challenges is the proliferation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) resulting from the conflict. Thousands of individuals and families in Gwer West have been uprooted from their ancestral homes and farmlands due to violence, seeking refuge in temporary camps or host communities. Many of these IDP camps are overcrowded,

under-resourced, and lacking in essential services. Basic amenities such as potable water, adequate sanitation facilities, and shelter are often insufficient, leading to unhygienic conditions that foster the spread of communicable diseases like cholera, typhoid, and malaria. Healthcare services in IDP camps are extremely limited. Few camps have permanent health posts, and even where mobile clinics are deployed by humanitarian organizations or local authorities, inconsistent funding, poor coordination, and logistical constraints hinder their effectiveness. Moreover, mental health services are almost entirely absent, despite the fact that many displaced persons suffer from psychological trauma, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) resulting from their exposure to violence and displacement. The heavy reliance of IDPs on humanitarian aid and government relief underscores the depth of their vulnerability. As Anishi and Ijaha (2016) highlight, most displaced persons in Benue State have lost not only their homes but also their farms, tools, and sources of livelihood. Consequently, they are entirely dependent on external assistance for food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare. Women and children, who make up the majority of displaced populations, face heightened risks of gender-based violence, malnutrition, exploitation, and social exclusion, especially in under-supervised or poorly planned camp environments. This crisis places an immense strain on the already overstretched resources of both the Benue State Government and humanitarian agencies. With limited budget allocations, poor infrastructure, and high demand for services, the state's ability to mount an effective healthcare response is severely constrained. Furthermore, the protracted nature of the

conflict and the slow pace of reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts have transformed what was once a humanitarian emergency into a chronic public health crisis.

#### **4. Erosion of Social Cohesion and Inter-Communal Trust**

Beyond the tangible and material losses such as the destruction of farmlands, displacement of populations, and economic stagnation—the intangible consequences of the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Benue State are equally, if not more, alarming. These include the disintegration of social cohesion, the breakdown of inter-group trust, and the fragmentation of longstanding communal relationships that once served as the bedrock of peaceful coexistence. Historically, Benue State has been home to a diverse population, notably Tiv farmers and Fulani pastoralists, who developed symbiotic relationships over generations. These relationships were governed by traditional conflict resolution institutions, mutual respect, and shared economic interests, including the exchange of goods and services such as cattle dung for crop residue, and access to grazing land during off-seasons. This system of coexistence was supported by local customs, seasonal migration patterns, and dispute resolution facilitated by elders, traditional rulers, and religious leaders. However, the escalation of conflict in recent decades has significantly undermined these communal bonds. The repeated cycles of violence, loss, and retaliation have created a climate of fear, suspicion, and hostility between farming and herding communities. As Okoli and Atelhe (2014) observe, the social narrative has shifted from one of coexistence to one of mutual victimhood, betrayal, and distrust. In many cases,

each group views the other not just as adversaries in land disputes, but as existential threats to their identity, livelihood, and future. In Gwer West LGA, the effects of this sociocultural rupture are deeply felt. Entire communities have become ethnically or occupationally segregated, with former neighbors becoming enemies and areas once known for diversity now marked by homogeneity born of fear and forced migration. Reprisal attacks have become common, fueling a cycle of vengeance where one act of aggression is met with another, often with increasing brutality. The consequences of these attacks are not just physical but psychological and emotional, with trauma, grief, and resentment festering within both communities. This social fragmentation has direct implications for peace building and development. Community-based initiatives, which rely on trust and cooperation, are now harder to implement. Joint farming schemes, market collaborations, intermarriages, and even religious interactions that once symbolized harmony have diminished or ceased entirely. In many villages, segregated markets have emerged, and inter-ethnic marriages, which once served as powerful symbols of unity, are now rare or actively discouraged. Furthermore, younger generations growing up amidst these tensions are often socialized into these divisions, inheriting narratives of hostility rather than coexistence. This is particularly dangerous, as it perpetuates a culture of conflict, making reconciliation even more difficult. The educational system, which could serve as a tool for peace education, is itself compromised in conflict areas, thereby limiting opportunities to foster inter-group understanding and tolerance. Efforts at dialogue and peacebuilding are often impeded by

this mutual mistrust. In some cases, community leaders are seen as partial, especially if they belong to one group, making it difficult to mediate fairly. Even government interventions are viewed through ethnic or political lenses, further polarizing communities. As a result, development programs, humanitarian aid distribution, and even law enforcement activities can become contested, perceived as favoring one group over the other.

## **2.3 Theoretical Review**

### **Resource Scarcity Theory**

The Resource Scarcity Theory, as articulated by Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999), offers a compelling lens through which to understand and analyze the persistent and escalating farmer-pastoralist conflict in regions such as Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This theory posits that conflict is more likely to emerge when vital natural resources—such as arable land, water, and forest cover—become scarce or increasingly inaccessible. The central argument is that environmental stress, driven by both natural degradation and human-induced pressures, creates the conditions for social fragmentation, economic decline, and ultimately, violent conflict. In the specific context of Gwer West, the application of this theory is particularly salient. The area has witnessed rapid environmental degradation, including deforestation, soil erosion, and the effects of climate change, such as irregular rainfall, longer dry seasons, and desert encroachment from the north. These conditions have severely limited the amount of arable and grazing

land available to the communities living there. Farmers, who rely on fertile soil and predictable weather patterns to grow crops, are experiencing lower yields and more frequent crop failures. At the same time, pastoralists, who require expansive grazing fields and access to water bodies for their cattle, are finding traditional pastoral routes closed or overused. Moreover, population growth has further intensified this competition. As the number of people and by extension, livestock grows, the pressure on the limited natural resources increases. Farmlands expand into previously communal or grazing areas, while herders, in search of dwindling pasture, may be forced to encroach on cultivated fields. These encounters inevitably lead to conflict, particularly when livestock destroy crops or when farmers erect barriers that block traditional migratory routes. In many cases, these disputes escalate rapidly, turning violent and leading to loss of life, property, and displacement. The Resource Scarcity Theory reframes the conflict as being not solely about ethnicity, identity, or culture as is often portrayed—but rather about competing livelihood strategies in an environment of increasing scarcity. From this viewpoint, the Tiv farmers and Fulani pastoralists in Gwer West are not inherently antagonistic groups; rather, they are two socio-economic systems forced into collision by environmental and demographic pressures. This interpretation is crucial because it shifts the focus of interventions from managing inter-ethnic relations alone to also addressing the underlying structural causes, such as environmental sustainability, land tenure systems, and resource governance. Furthermore, Homer-Dixon's framework outlines how resource scarcity can act as a threat multiplier by exacerbating existing inequalities and weakening

the capacity of institutions to manage conflict. In Gwer West, the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, weak enforcement of land use regulations, and limited state capacity to mediate disputes have all contributed to the escalation of violence. The absence of strong institutions capable of allocating resources equitably and resolving disputes fairly has left a vacuum often filled by vigilante groups or armed militias, further complicating the security landscape. Another key insight from the Resource Scarcity Theory is its emphasis on adaptive capacity that is, the ability of a society to respond to and manage environmental stress. In Gwer West, adaptive capacity remains low due to poverty, lack of education, limited access to technology, and insufficient investment in sustainable agriculture or ranching alternatives. This lack of adaptability leaves both farmers and herders vulnerable, forcing them into zero-sum competition rather than cooperative survival strategies.

### **Political Ecology Theory**

The Political Ecology Theory, as outlined by scholars such as Turner (2004), provides a critical analytical lens for understanding the complex interplay between environmental change and socio-political dynamics in conflict settings. Unlike theories that focus narrowly on ecological degradation or resource scarcity, Political Ecology emphasizes that environmental issues are not merely natural phenomena, but are deeply embedded in broader political, economic, and historical contexts. It argues that access to and control over resources are not equitably distributed but are shaped by power relations,

institutional structures, and policy decisions—often to the detriment of marginalized groups. In the context of Gwer West Local Government Area in Benue State, the Political Ecology perspective reveals that the farmer-pastoralist conflict cannot be fully understood without considering how political decisions and systemic inequalities shape patterns of land use, access to resources, and conflict outcomes. For instance, while environmental factors such as desertification and climate change contribute to the southward migration of pastoralists, the way governments respond to these pressures is politically charged and often uneven.

A central example of this is the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017, passed by the Benue State Government. While ostensibly designed to reduce violent conflict and promote sustainable livestock management, the law has been perceived differently by the communities it affects. Farming communities, primarily made up of the majority ethnic group (the Tiv), largely view the law as a necessary step to protect their land and livelihoods from encroachment and destruction by cattle. In contrast, pastoralist communities, especially the Fulani, see the law as discriminatory, exclusionary, and politically motivated, arguing that it does not provide practical or inclusive alternatives for their nomadic way of life. From a Political Ecology standpoint, this divergence in perception highlights how state policies can inadvertently exacerbate conflict when they are not participatory or inclusive. The formulation of the anti-grazing law reportedly lacked adequate consultation with pastoralist groups, many of whom were

not involved in the decision-making process and thus felt alienated from the governance structures that directly affect their survival. This reflects a broader pattern of marginalization of nomadic communities in Nigeria's political landscape, where pastoralists often lack formal representation, land rights, or access to public services. Moreover, the implementation of the law has been uneven and perceived as biased, particularly when security agencies or vigilante groups tasked with enforcement disproportionately target pastoralist populations. Political favoritism and ethnic alignment in local governance further complicate matters. When public officials are perceived to support one group over another—especially in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious setting like Benue State—it fosters resentment, deepens mistrust, and fuels cycles of retaliatory violence. Political Ecology also draws attention to the legacy of colonial and postcolonial land tenure systems, which have long favored sedentary farming over pastoralism. Historically, pastoralist modes of land use—being communal, mobile, and less visibly productive—have been undervalued or even criminalized in official land policies. This structural bias is evident in the absence of clearly demarcated grazing routes, poor investment in ranching infrastructure, and inconsistent land allocation practices, all of which limit the ability of herders to adapt to changing environmental conditions within the legal framework. Furthermore, the failure of governance institutions such as local government authorities, customary land councils, and conflict resolution bodies—to mediate disputes fairly and transparently has allowed tensions to fester. Corruption, political patronage, and the militarization of local conflicts have all contributed to a

situation where disputes are no longer settled through dialogue but are increasingly resolved through violence or vigilantism. The state's inability or unwillingness to enforce land use policies in a fair and transparent manner underscores the need for institutional reforms, rather than simply environmental management solutions. Political Ecology therefore shifts the analysis from merely looking at environmental change or cultural differences to interrogating the systemic power asymmetries and governance failures that underlie and perpetuate the conflict. It challenges policymakers to address not only ecological sustainability but also social justice, inclusive governance, and political accountability.

### **2.3.1 Relevance of the theories to the Study**

By combining Resource Scarcity Theory and Political Ecology Theory, this study adopts a comprehensive, multi-dimensional framework for analyzing the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State. Each theory offers unique but complementary insights that, when integrated, provide a fuller understanding of the complex and layered nature of the conflict.

Resource Scarcity Theory, as posited by Homer-Dixon (1999), emphasizes the environmental and demographic roots of the conflict. It explains how factors such as climate change, desertification, population growth, and land degradation have led to increased competition over dwindling natural resources particularly fertile land and water.

In the case of Gwer West, both farmers and pastoralists rely heavily on these resources for their survival. As availability shrinks and demand rises, tensions escalate into open confrontation. This theory provides a solid foundation for understanding the structural and ecological triggers of conflict, especially in regions like the Middle Belt, where resource-dependent livelihoods are the norm.

However, Political Ecology Theory, as advanced by scholars like Turner (2004), goes a step further by revealing how environmental pressures are mediated and magnified through political, economic, and institutional processes. It draws attention to issues of marginalization, historical land injustices, governance failures, and asymmetric power relations that shape access to and control over resources. In the context of Benue State, laws such as the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017), while intended to reduce conflict, have often reinforced divisions and fueled resentment particularly among pastoralist communities who were excluded from decision-making processes. Political Ecology thus underscores that the conflict is not only about scarcity but also about how resources are managed, by whom, and for whose benefit.

By synthesizing these two theoretical perspectives, the study moves beyond mono-causal explanations and embraces a holistic understanding of conflict causation and escalation. This integrated lens reveals that while ecological stress and population pressure create the conditions for conflict (as Resource Scarcity Theory argues), it is the failure of political institutions, exclusionary policies, and unequal power dynamics (as highlighted by

Political Ecology Theory) that sustain and intensify violence. Most importantly, this dual-framework approach helps to clarify the broader implications of the conflict on socioeconomic development in Gwer West LGA. It explains why the conflict has not only led to the loss of livelihoods, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure, but has also weakened social cohesion, crippled educational and healthcare systems, and undermined poverty reduction and development efforts.

In terms of policy and intervention, the integrated theoretical lens suggests that solutions must be equally multi-dimensional. Addressing environmental and demographic stress alone is insufficient without institutional reforms, inclusive governance, equitable land policies, and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. Effective interventions must simultaneously target environmental management, economic diversification, and political empowerment of marginalized groups, particularly pastoralists, to break the cycles of violence and enable sustainable peace and development in the region.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. This is because it seeks the opinions of respondents as regards the Impact of Farmers-Pastoralists Conflict on the Socioeconomic Development of Benue State: A Case Study of Gwer West Local Government Area. According to Omorogiuwa (2012), descriptive survey research design is a type of research design that allows a researcher to study a group of persons or items by collecting and analyzing data from a few persons or items considered to be representative of the entire population.

#### **3.2 Population of Study**

the population of the study comprises of individuals in Gwer Local Government of area of Benue State. According of census population projection (2022) The population for this study will be 176,600. This consists of the total numbers of people living in Gwer Local Government of Area of Benue state.

#### **3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

Taking a sample becomes imperative since it is impossible to study every object of an entire population. This study will make use of simple percentage/mean deviation as tool of analysis. A total of 400 questionnaires will be distributed for data analysis. Simple

Random Sampling techniques. Sampling technique is the method employed in drawing sample from the population which provides the sample size for the study.

Since the population is known, Yamane (1967) statistical formula will be used to determine the sample size for the study. The formula is given as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where: n =Sample size, 1 =Constant value, N= Population size, e = Level of precision or acceptable sample error (0.05).

$$n = \frac{176,600}{1+176,600(0.05)^2} = 399$$

Making use of the formula above, the sample size adequate for this study was 399, from the population of 176,600 (one hundred and seventy six and six hundred) individual in Gwer local government area of Benue state. Given this, a sampling error of 0.05 was taken in which a total of 399 questionnaires were administered to the individual in the local government under study.

### **3.5 Validation of the Quantitative Instrument**

The validation of the questionnaire will be undertaken by the researchers' supervisor to ascertain suitability and appropriateness for the research; and one other expert in the

Department of political science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin University. Their suggestions and criticisms will make up the final copy.

### **3.6 Reliability of the Study**

The reliability of the survey instrument will be assessed using measures such as internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Internal consistency will be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess the extent to which items in the survey instrument measure the same underlying construct. Test-retest reliability will be assessed by administering the survey to a subset of participant at two different time point and examine the consistency of Reponses over time.

### **3.7 Method of Data Collection**

For the purpose of data collection, the researcher will personally administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire administered will be collected from the respondents immediately after filling.

### **3.8 Method of Data Analysis**

Mean statistic will be used for data analysis, in order to determine the degree of respondent's agreement /disagreement on each of the items in the questionnaire, nominal values will be assigned to the response option as follow. Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Therefore, decision will be taken that any of the questionnaire

items that have mean rating of 2.50 and above were regarded as agree while any value below 2.50 will be regarded as disagree

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of the data and presents the study's findings. The data are systematically arranged in tables and structured in alignment with the research questions formulated in the study. From the sample size of 399. It was 120 questionnaire that was successfully retrieve, well answered and collected from the respondent which was majorly farmers and pastoralist that data was analyzed using SPSS.

#### Demographic Information

*Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex*

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	70	58.3
Female	50	41.7
Total	120	100

Table 4.1 reveals that 58.3% of the respondents were male, while 41.7% were female. This implies that both genders participated in the study, although males were slightly

more represented. This aligns with the agrarian nature of Gwer West, where farming and herding activities are male-dominated.

*Table 4.2: Distribution of Respondents by Age*

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–30	35	29.2
31–40	40	33.3
41–50	30	25.0
51 and above	15	12.5
Total	120	100

Most respondents (33.3%) were within the 31–40 age bracket, followed by 29.2% aged 18–30. This indicates that a majority of the participants were economically active adults who are directly involved in farming or herding, and therefore, more likely to experience the effects of the conflict firsthand.

*Table 4.3: Distribution of Respondents by Occupation*

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Farmers	80	66.7
Pastoralists	15	12.5
Traders	10	8.3
Civil Servants	10	8.3
Others	5	4.2
Total	120	100

The majority of respondents (66.7%) were farmers, followed by pastoralists (12.5%). This supports the study's focus, as it captures views from the two main occupational groups involved in the conflict. The presence of traders and civil servants also provides a broader socioeconomic perspective.

**Research Question 1: What are the main causes of farmers-pastoralists conflicts in Gwer West**

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics on main causes of farmers-pastoralists conflicts in Gwer West**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Environmental degradation and shrinking grazing land contribute significantly to conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Gwer West.	3.83	.817	Agreed
2.	Population growth and increased land pressure have intensified disputes between farming and pastoralist communities.	3.74	.583	Agreed
3.	The destruction of farmlands by cattle is a major trigger of farmer-pastoralist clashes in the area.	3.39	.625	Agreed
4.	The lack of clearly defined land boundaries contributes to the frequent conflict between farmers and herders.	3.66	.887	Agreed
5.	The enactment and enforcement of the Open Grazing Prohibition Law has escalated tensions between the two groups	2.18	.598	disagreed
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>3.36</b>	<b>.726</b>	<b>High</b>

**N = 120, Criterion Mean = 2.5**

Table 3 revealed the responses of the respondents on all the items presented at a mean score of 3.83, 3.74, 3.39, 3.66 and 2.18 respectively. The cluster mean of 3.36 is above the criterion mean score of 2.50 which implies that the conflict between the pastoralist and farmers in gwer local government is quite high based on the questions responded to.

This result indicates that the major causes of the conflict as identified by the respondents include environmental degradation and the shrinking of grazing land (Mean = 3.83), population growth and increased land pressure (Mean = 3.74), destruction of farmlands by cattle (Mean = 3.39), and the lack of clearly defined land boundaries (Mean = 3.66). These findings suggest that competition for land resources between the two groups has intensified as a result of population expansion and environmental stress. Furthermore, the relatively low mean score of 2.18 on the item relating to the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law indicates that respondents do not perceive this law as a major cause of the conflict. This suggests that while legislation has influenced interactions between farmers and pastoralists, the root causes are more deeply embedded in resource scarcity, land ownership disputes, and inadequate conflict management mechanisms.

**Research Question 2: How have these conflicts affected agricultural productivity and food security?**

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on the effect of conflict on agricultural productivity and food security**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1.	Frequent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists have led to the destruction of farmlands and crops.	3.56	.779	Agreed
2.	Conflicts have disrupted the farming calendar and led to irregular planting and harvesting cycles.	3.28	.812	Agreed
3.	The fear of attacks discourages farmers from working on their farms, leading to reduced agricultural productivity	3.44	.933	Agreed
4.	Conflicts between farmers and pastoralist have contributed to food shortages in local communities	3.73	.652	Agreed
5.	The loss of farming tools and livestock due to violent clashes has weakened household food security.	3.94	.594	Agreed
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>3.59</b>	<b>.752</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

**N = 120, Criterion Mean = 2.5**

Table 2 revealed the responses of the respondents on all the items presented at a mean score of 3.56, 3.28, 3.44, 3.73 and 3.94. The cluster mean of 3.59 is above the criterion mean score of 2.50 which implies that there is a significant effect of conflict on agricultural productivity and food security.

The results show that respondents strongly agreed that frequent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists have led to the destruction of farmlands and crops (Mean = 3.56), and that farming calendars have been disrupted, leading to irregular planting and harvesting

seasons (Mean = 3.28). This implies that persistent insecurity and attacks have reduced farmers' capacity to plan, plant, and harvest effectively. Moreover, the finding that fear of attacks discourages farmers from going to their farms (Mean = 3.44) further explains why there has been a noticeable decline in agricultural productivity across conflict-prone communities. In addition, the high mean scores of 3.73 and 3.94 on the items regarding food shortages and loss of farming tools and livestock reveal that the conflicts have severely disrupted local food systems, leading to lower yields, scarcity of produce, and a reduction in household food availability. This reflects a situation where both crop farming and livestock production have been negatively affected, thereby undermining the livelihoods of households that depend on agriculture as their main source of income.

**Research Question 3: what ways have education, health, and the local economy been impacted**

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on the effect of conflict on education, health and the local economy.**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1.	Schools in conflict-affected communities have been closed or destroyed due to farmers-pastoralists clashes..	3.94	.594	Agreed
2.	health facilities in affected areas have been destroyed or rendered inaccessible during attacks.	3.82	.884	Agreed
3.	The conflict has led to shortages of medical supplies and restricted access to healthcare services.	3.75	.586	Agreed
4.	the local economy has declined due to the disruption of farming, trade, and other income-generating activities	3.79	.745	Agreed
5.	Market activities have been negatively affected due to insecurity and frequent attacks.	3.83	.696	Agreed
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>3.82</b>		
<b>N = 120, Criterion Mean = 2.5</b>				

Table 3 revealed the responses of the respondents on all the items presented at a mean score of 3.94, 3.82, 3.75, 3.79 and 3.83 respectively. The cluster mean of 3.82 is above the criterion mean score of 2.50 which implies that the effect of conflict on the health , education and local economy of the local government is highly negative.

The first item, with a high mean score of 3.94, shows that respondents strongly agreed that schools in conflict-affected communities have been closed or destroyed due to clashes. This finding reflects how insecurity and recurrent violence have prevented

children from attending school and displaced teachers from their duty posts. Continuous disruptions in education not only reduce literacy levels but also undermine the long-term human capital development of the local area. Similarly, the mean scores of 3.82 and 3.75 for health-related items reveal that health facilities have been destroyed or rendered inaccessible during attacks, and shortages of medical supplies and restricted access to healthcare services have become major challenges. These findings suggest that frequent conflicts have strained the local health system, limiting access to medical care, especially for women, children, and the elderly. Many health centers have either been abandoned or are operating below capacity due to insecurity and population displacement. Furthermore, the high mean scores of 3.79 and 3.83 for the economic indicators indicate that the local economy has declined due to the disruption of farming, trade, and other income-generating activities, and that market activities have been negatively affected due to insecurity and frequent attacks. This implies that many local markets have been deserted, farm produce cannot be transported safely, and prices of goods have risen sharply due to reduced supply. The loss of livelihoods and decline in local economic activity have deepened poverty and unemployment, further exacerbating social instability in the area.

**Research Question 4: What strategies can be implemented to reduce the impact of divorce on children’s social and emotional development?**

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on strategies implemented to reduce impact of divorce on children social and emotional development.**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1.	The Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law has helped reduce conflict in Gwer West	3.94	.594	Agreed
2.	Community dialogue and peace building initiatives have played a key role in managing the conflict.	3.82	.884	Agreed
3.	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have supported reconciliation efforts between the two groups.	3.75	.586	Agreed
4.	Public awareness and sensitization campaigns have contributed to peaceful coexistence in the area.	3.79	.745	Agreed
5.	Traditional leaders are still actively involved in conflict resolution between farmers and pastoralists.	3.83	.696	Agreed
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>3.83</b>		
<b>N = 120, Criterion Mean = 2.5</b>				

Table 4 revealed the responses of the respondents on all the items presented at a mean score of 3.94, 3.82, 3.75, 3.79 and 3.83 respectively. The cluster mean of 3.83 is above the criterion mean score of 2.50 which implies that on strategies implemented to reduce conflict farmers and pastoralist is high and if this strategies are implemented it can have a positive impact of conflict resolution in gwer local government.

The first item, with the highest mean score of 3.94, indicates that the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law has contributed significantly to reducing

open grazing and minimizing direct clashes between farmers and herders. Although the implementation of this law has faced challenges, the respondents recognized it as a key legal framework aimed at managing land use and reducing indiscriminate movement of cattle through farmlands.

Furthermore, the high mean scores of 3.82 and 3.75 for the items on community dialogue, peacebuilding initiatives, and the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) show that respondents believe that grassroots peace dialogues, sensitization programs, and mediation efforts have played vital roles in easing tension between the two groups. These initiatives often involve local leaders, youth groups, and women's associations, which enhances inclusiveness and trust-building across both communities. Similarly, the mean scores of 3.79 and 3.83 on public awareness campaigns and traditional leadership involvement reveal that respondents recognize the importance of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms rooted in cultural and traditional authority systems. The active participation of traditional rulers in mediating disputes and enforcing communal peace agreements has been particularly effective, given their moral authority and close relationship with local residents.

## **Discussion of findings**

From research question one, The results revealed that environmental degradation, shrinking grazing land, population growth, destruction of farmlands by cattle, and poorly defined land boundaries are the primary causes of conflicts in Gwer West. These findings are consistent with the Resource Scarcity Theory (Homer-Dixon, 1999), which posits that conflict is more likely when essential resources such as land and water become scarce. The southward migration of herders in search of pasture, driven by desertification and climate change in northern Nigeria, has increased the contest over land with sedentary farming communities, as noted by Adisa (2022) and Tonah (2016). Interestingly, the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017, often cited in literature as a major trigger of violent clashes (Okeke, 2020; Blench, 2017), was not rated as a significant factor by respondents. This indicates that at the local level, communities perceive immediate and direct drivers such as farmland destruction and boundary disputes as more pressing causes of conflict than state-level policies. This suggests that legislative measures alone cannot adequately address the conflict without tackling deeper structural and ecological drivers.

Furthermore, research question two established that farmers–pastoralists conflict has severely undermined agricultural productivity and food security in Gwer West. Respondents strongly agreed that frequent attacks destroy farmlands and crops, disrupt farming calendars, instill fear among farmers, and cause the loss of tools and livestock.

These disruptions have led to reduced productivity, food shortages, and increased household vulnerability. This finding supports earlier studies such as Ofuoku and Isife (2009) and Abbass (2012), who highlighted that violent clashes between farmers and herders often result in farmland abandonment, displacement, and reduced output. For a state like Benue, often regarded as the “Food Basket of the Nation,” the decline in production undermines not only local livelihoods but also national food supply. The inflation of food prices, as a result of scarcity, aligns with the observation of Audu (2014) that conflict-induced instability in rural areas disrupts agricultural value chains, discourages investment, and deepens rural poverty.

From research question three, The findings also showed that the conflict has negatively impacted education, health, and the local economy. Respondents agreed that schools in affected communities have been closed or destroyed, healthcare facilities vandalized or rendered inaccessible, and market activities disrupted due to insecurity. These outcomes confirm the observations of Aliyu (2015), who reported the disruption of education in conflict areas, and Iro (2004), who emphasized how insecurity restricts healthcare access in rural Nigeria. The long-term implications are significant. Displaced children experience interrupted learning, which diminishes human capital development and perpetuates cycles of illiteracy and poverty. Similarly, the breakdown of rural healthcare systems increases maternal and child mortality, while economic decline forces households into poverty traps. These findings also echo Anishi and Ijaha (2016), who

documented how displacement in Benue State results in heightened dependency on humanitarian aid. The collapse of markets and local trade reflects the erosion of livelihoods, confirming Okoli and Atelhe's (2017) argument that insecurity hampers community development and revenue generation.

Finally research question four, further revealed that various strategies are being implemented to address the conflict, including the Open Grazing Prohibition Law, community dialogue, peacebuilding initiatives, NGO interventions, sensitization campaigns, and the involvement of traditional leaders. The high mean ratings across these strategies demonstrate that a multi-stakeholder approach is critical for conflict management in Gwer West. These findings align with Lederach's (1997) peacebuilding model, which emphasizes grassroots participation, dialogue, and long-term relationship building as central to sustainable peace. While the anti-open grazing law has a role, respondents highlighted the importance of dialogue, community sensitization, and traditional leadership in fostering peaceful coexistence. This suggests that hybrid approaches that combine legislative frameworks with community-driven initiatives are more likely to yield lasting solutions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

This study assessed the impact of farmers–pastoralists conflict on the socioeconomic development of Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State. Specifically, it examined the causes of the conflict, its effect on agricultural productivity and food security, its impact on education, health, and the local economy, and strategies employed to mitigate the conflict.

The findings revealed that:

1. **Causes of the Conflict:** The main drivers are environmental degradation, shrinking grazing land, population growth, destruction of farmlands by cattle, and lack of clearly defined boundaries. Interestingly, the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law was not considered a major cause of conflict.
2. **Agricultural Productivity and Food Security:** The conflict has severely undermined agriculture through destruction of farms, disruption of planting and harvesting cycles, fear of attacks, and loss of tools and livestock. This has resulted in reduced productivity, food shortages, and increased household vulnerability.

3. **Education, Health, and Local Economy:** Schools have been closed or destroyed, health facilities vandalized or made inaccessible, and markets disrupted. These have led to learning interruptions, inadequate healthcare delivery, increased poverty, and reduced household income.
4. **Conflict Management Strategies:** Respondents acknowledged the role of the Open Grazing Prohibition Law, community dialogue, NGO interventions, sensitization campaigns, and traditional leadership. This demonstrates the importance of multi-stakeholder strategies in conflict resolution.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that the farmers–pastoralists conflict in Gwer West LGA is largely a product of resource scarcity, population pressure, and weak boundary demarcations rather than legislation alone. The consequences have been devastating, affecting agriculture, food security, education, healthcare, and the local economy. However, the findings also highlight that a combination of legal frameworks, grassroots dialogue, and traditional mechanisms can reduce the intensity of the conflict and promote sustainable development. Therefore, the resolution of farmers–pastoralists conflict requires an integrated approach that addresses both environmental and institutional factors while strengthening peace building initiatives.

### 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Sustainable Land Use Planning:** The government should develop comprehensive land-use policies that clearly demarcate farmland and grazing areas, supported by cadastral mapping and community participation.
2. **Promotion of Ranching:** Adequate support such as access to land, finance, veterinary services, and water facilities should be provided to pastoralists to encourage a transition from open grazing to modern ranching systems.
3. **Strengthening Traditional and Community Institutions:** Traditional rulers and community elders should be empowered to mediate conflicts, while also being integrated into formal conflict resolution frameworks.
4. **Peace Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Sensitization programs should be implemented in schools, communities, and through mass media to foster peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.
5. **Improved Security and Law Enforcement:** Security agencies should be adequately resourced to prevent attacks, protect lives and property, and ensure impartial enforcement of laws.
6. **Support for Victims and IDPs:** Government and NGOs should provide targeted support in terms of relief materials, education continuity for displaced children, healthcare services, and livelihood restoration programs.

## **5.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

Future research should be carryout

1. Investigate the long-term psychological and social impacts of farmers–pastoralists conflict on children and youth.
2. Explore the role of gender in the conflict, particularly how women are affected and how they can contribute to peace building.
3. Assess the effectiveness of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law after several years of implementation, including its socioeconomic implications.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of political science  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Benin,  
Benin City, Edo state.

Dear Sir/Madam

## SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a final year student of the above department. I am currently carrying out a research on : “***THE IMPACT OF FARMERS-PASTORALISTS CONFLICT ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BENUE STATE***”.

Kindly assist me in completing the attached questionnaire. Information elicited through this questionnaire is intended to aid me in this study. All responses will be treated with strict confidence; you do not need to write your name or address.

Yours faithfully,

Researcher

## PART A: BIO-DATA

**Instruction:** Please mark as [✓] appropriate

1. Sex; Male [ ], Female [ ]
2. Age: 18-30 ( ), 31-40 ( ), 41-50 ( ), 51 and above ( )
3. Occupation: farmers ( ), pastoralist ( ), traders ( ), civil servants ( ), others ( )

**SECTION B:** For each statement ,tick (✓) under the column that best describes your response.

Keys: Strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly disagreed (SD), Disagree (D).

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
	<b>What are the main causes of farmers-pastoralists conflicts in Gwer West</b>				
1	Environmental degradation and shrinking grazing land contribute significantly to conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Gwer West.				
2	Population growth and increased land pressure have intensified disputes between farming and pastoralist communities.				
3	The destruction of farmlands by cattle is a major trigger of farmer-pastoralist clashes in the area.				
4	The lack of clearly defined land boundaries contributes to the frequent conflict between farmers and herders.				
5	The enactment and enforcement of the Open Grazing Prohibition Law has escalated tensions between the two groups				

	<b>How have these conflicts affected agricultural productivity and food security.</b>				
6	Frequent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists have led to the destruction of farmlands and crops.				
7	Conflicts have disrupted the farming calendar and led to irregular planting and harvesting cycles.				
8	The fear of attacks discourages farmers from working on their farms, leading to reduced agricultural productivity				
9	Conflicts between farmers and pastoralist have contributed to food shortages in local communities				
10	The loss of farming tools and livestock due to violent clashes has weakened household food security.				
	<b>In what ways have education, health, and the local economy been impacted</b>				
11	Schools in conflict-affected communities have been closed or destroyed due to farmers-pastoralists clashes..				
12	health facilities in affected areas have been destroyed or rendered inaccessible during attacks.				
14	The conflict has led to shortages of medical supplies and restricted access to healthcare services.				
13	the local economy has declined due to the disruption of farming, trade, and other income-generating activities.				
15	Market activities have been negatively affected due to insecurity and frequent attacks.				
	<b>What strategies are used to cope with and resolve these conflicts</b>				

16	The Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law has helped reduce conflict in Gwer West.				
17	Community dialogue and peace building initiatives have played a key role in managing the conflict.				
18	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have supported reconciliation efforts between the two groups				
19	Public awareness and sensitization campaigns have contributed to peaceful coexistence in the area.				
20	Traditional leaders are still actively involved in conflict resolution between farmers and pastoralists.				

**Thanks**