

Implication of Violent Conflict on Food Security in Nigeria: A Case of Farmers and Herdsmen Clashes in the Benue Valley

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Abstract: *The emergence of conflicts in many countries has demonstrated another dimension of threat to food security around the world. Notably is the farmers-herders conflict in the Benue Valley, Nigeria which has displaced many farming households in the rural communities from their homes and are currently seeking shelter in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp. The study which employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD), descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse results revealed that the majority of the household were food insecure. Furthermore, they lost their field, food, farm produce, properties and livelihood. they were employing less lucrative coping strategies like, farming for others in areas that were not yet affected by the conflict and their women were also serving as food vendor attendants on market days to help mitigate their challenges. It is recommended that, agricultural intervention should be made available to the displaced farmers to help resettle them into their livelihood and food aid should also be provided to help cushion the immediate effect of hunger and starvation in the IDP camps.*

Keywords: Conflict, Food security, Farmers, Herdsmen, Benue Valley

1. Introduction

The emergence of food riot in over 48 countries which was motivated by record world food price within the period of 2007-2008 raised instability significantly and revealed interest in food security as a factor for political instability and conflict (Brinkman and Hendrix 2011). Over 1.5 million people in the world are still living in areas affected by conflict and people in these areas are twice more likely to be undernourished (Breisinge *et al.* 2014). The rising issues of conflicts in many communities around the world is gradually masking the already existing challenge of growing global population as a major challenge to Food Security (Breisinge *et al.* 2014). In addition, the livelihood of an estimated 30 million people have been affected by conflict in over 60 countries around the world including Nigeria (Bora *et al.* 2010). These conflicts have been majorly centred on resource control and has demonstrated the capacity of elimination of the unfit in the quest for acquiring these production resources thus resulting to marginal availability of food to households. Flores (2004) attributes this to weak government functions, collapse of institutions, lack of legitimate authorities, and a tendency for any transition from violent conflict to peace to be protracted, uncertain and prone to reversal.

Conflicts have introduced an entirely new approach to food insecurity drive (Simmons 2013). Given that it has consistently distorted the local food chain and the purchasing power of the farmers thus influencing the level of their food security (Verwimp 2012), it is expedient to state that Food security can only exist when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Simmons 2013, Martin-Shields and Stojetz 2018). Conflicts within the context of violence, disasters and household food provision has limited this concept at both the family and national levels thus making many households in various

communities around the world including in Nigeria to struggle for food supply.

Nigeria has been faced with serious herders and farmers' tussles over the years in States predominantly including Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Plateau, Kogi and Taraba less to talk about the issues of the Boko Haram insurgency that has rocked the North Eastern part of the country. According to FAO and WFP (2019) the beneficial relationship that has existed between farmers and pastoralist over the years has become more confrontational and uncooperative thus leading to a serious demerit to food security. The confrontation between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has led to serious displacement of people and has also resulted to loss of livelihood, lives and properties. Most of its impact has been felt in the rural areas where the smallholder farmers in charge of the bulk of the food production in the country reside. According to Verwimp (2013) eminent violent conflict in the rural communities especially in Africa, places food security in jeopardy. This has been the experience of Benue State which is known to be the Nigeria's food basket that has constantly been challenged by herdsmen-farmers' clashes over the past four years leaving many in the rural areas displaced and now depending on humanitarian aids in displaced camps. It is important to add that most of these farmers do not even have coping strategies to overcome this menace thus making them more vulnerable to conflict shocks.

The reduction in human capital as well as physical and social capital, has strong implications for food security (Flores 2004, Martin-Shields and Stojetz 2018). This has been demonstrated on the rural population in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps in Benue state because their capacity to produce food has been significantly reduced which also translates to less food supply to satisfy the urban population thus aggravating households' food insufficiency, poor markets, poor and deficient diets and poor health care. Considering that the rural population has always have less of

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these available to them, the impact of conflict has resulted to a worse scenario. According to Bora *et al.* (2010), it is critical to break the vicious circle of conflict and food insecurity, especially in rural areas that tend to be poorer and more dependent on agriculture for both food and livelihoods.

2. Context

Focusing on the Farmers-Herders violent conflict that has been rocking the Benue valley, farmers have been displaced in some rural communities in the State and they are residing in camps set up to this regard. According to Flores (2004), conflict has displaced people and made them refugees; the farmers displaced in this case have been depending on humanitarian aid to help cushion the devastating effect on their food security. Even though food aids have been coming in, they cannot still attain their food security status since there is no economic ability talk less of nutritious foods. According to Bora *et al.* (2010) food aid can facilitate a successful transition to longer term agricultural productivity growth and local market and can be used to only minimise the immediate impact of food insecurity. This study seeks to assess the impact of farmers-herders conflicts on food security in the Benue valley and thus evaluates their coping strategy in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps.

Statement of Hypothesis

The study will test the following hypothesis;

Hypothesis H₀: Food loss does not have impact on displaced farmers' food security.

Hypothesis H₀: Livestock loss does not have impact on farmers' food security.

3. Methodology

Study Area

The Study was carried out in Benue State in the IDPs camp. Benue State is situated in the North Central region of Nigeria located longitude 7° 47' and 10° 0' East. Latitude 6° 25' and 8° 8' North. The State has an estimated population size of 4,253,641 people with an average population of 99 persons per km² and has a total land area of 34,059km² and it is bounded by Nassarawa State to the North, Taraba State to the East, Cross River State to the South, Enugu State to the South-West and Kogi State to the West and also shares boundary with republic of Cameroon to the South-East. The state has very fertile land which has made it to be marked for its good agricultural potential earning it the name 'Food basket of the Nation'. Benue State has been characterised with one of the largest rivers in Nigeria known as the river Benue which proves to present a good irrigation potential to farmers.

Data Collection

Baseline survey was conducted to gather primary information for the study. Data was randomly and purposively collected from 80 households in the Internal Displaced Persons' (IDPs) camps around the state situated in Agatu, Guma, Logo, and Makurdi local government areas of Benue State. Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted with the leaders in the IDPs camps to verify the information retrieved from the baseline survey and gather further information for the study.

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analysis data collected for the purpose of this study. Information gathered from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also used to relate the result from the study and to ascertain farmers' coping strategies in the camp for enhanced food security and improved standard of life.

4. Results and Discussion

The study revealed that all the people seeking shelter in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp were displaced by the Fulani herdsmen-farmers violent conflict which has been ongoing since January 2018. This collaborate with the FGD revealing that the primary occupation of people in the camp before the emergence of the violent farmers-herders conflict in their respective communities was farming. According to ILO (2017) irrespective of labour diversification, agriculture still remain the main source of employment to people living in the rural areas. It is thus rational to state that farmers are the ones mostly affected by rural conflicts since they basically depend on farming activities for their livelihood and survival. The farmers further opine that haven been displaced for over nineteen months has made it very difficult for them to engage in their occupation thus distorting their standard of life. It is imperative to state that, even before the conflict, the people in these displace communities were having a poor standard of life less to talk about the emergence of challenge of lack of livelihood; this collaborate with the assertions by ILO (2017), FAO and WFP (2019) that one of the underlying challenge in most rural areas is characterized by lack of basic amenities, economic and social structures to help drive development thus result to worst case of poverty and consequently conflicts. This relates the assertions by De La O Campos *et al.* (2018) inferring that, extreme poverty reduces household access to food and limits their purchasing power, good health care, ability to produce food, and basic infrastructure which are essential for food security. Since their displacement, there has been a challenge of food insufficiency and nutritional insecurity which has been seriously affecting their welfare. The overall protein intake in the majority of the households in the camps was low (Fig 1.2); this explains the place of nutritional insecurity in the camps. According to Flores (2004) nutritional insecurity exists in conflicts were the welfare and the economic conditions of the affected people have long been undermined. Furthermore, most of the displaced families could not afford up to three meals per day (Fig. 1.3) but they could occasionally afford two meals most of the time. This collaborate with the assertions by Martin-Shields and Stojetz (2018) that, one of the impacts of conflict on farming households is lower daily energy supply. More so, Internally Displaced Persons and host families in many conflict areas are faced with an alarming challenge of food needs and food availability (FAO and WFP 2019).

The FGD reveals that the respective camps were accessing humanitarian aids from both government and the non-governmental organisations but the aids were more consistent from the non-governmental organisations as compared to the government. Notwithstanding the aids that were accessed, they opined that food and cloth aids were the

most accessed aids in the camps. This underpins the assertions by Flores (2004) revealing that International responses to complex emergencies concentrates mainly on food aid, and short-term agricultural assistance. However, agricultural aid was not attainable to the displaced population and the food aid was not sufficient to guarantee them three meals in a day as they were only eating for survival; this agrees with the findings by Bora *et al.* (2010), Martin-Shields and Stojetz (2018) revealing that food aid can only be used to minimise the immediate impact of food insecurity in situations of conflict but it's not a sustainable way of bringing household to food sufficiency. Furthermore, the interval of the food provision was over four months before they could access another food tranche from any source and this has been really causing hunger and starvation in the camps. The logical explanation to this could be that, because the conflict has prolonged, there has been infiltration thus creating bureaucratic bottle necks in the process of aid delivery. The Majority of the displaced families do not have control over their accommodations and this explain why the FGD reveals that they have been sleeping in tents provided by Non-governmental organisation which are usually flooded by water when there is heavy rainfall. Furthermore, their health was under treat considering the challenge of open defecation, urination and lack of adequate health care in the camps. This agrees with the assertions by FAO and WFP (2019) inferring that one of the profound and multiple impacts of conflict on farmer livelihoods and food security often arises from complex and highly context-specific interactive factors including environmental hazards, resource scarcity and degradation, political and socioeconomic marginalization, lack of basic services, crime and the spread of disease. However, one of the IDPs camp reported that both government and non-governmental organisations were responding promptly to their needs; that was the primary camp set up for the Internally Displaced Persons by the Benue State Government, but the accommodation space was not enough to accommodate the displaced persons thus resulting to the creation of satellite camps. The camp had better accommodations as compared to the satellite camps where people were only seeking shelters in tent and public school buildings. Their sleeping conditions was harsh and they were exposed to harsh environmental conditions thus making sickness and diseases eminent; and there was no immediate hope of settling them back to their respective communities.

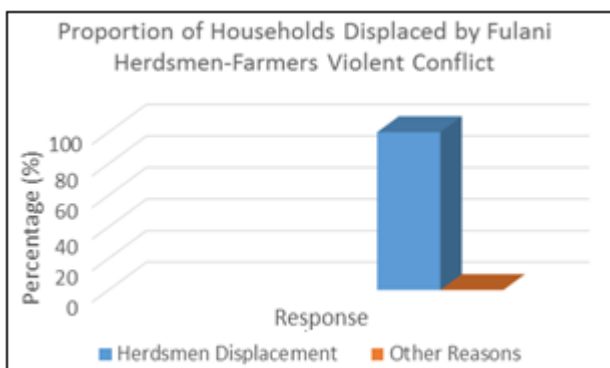


Figure 1.1: Proportion of Farming Households Displaced by Farmers and Herdsmen Violent Conflict in the Benue Valley

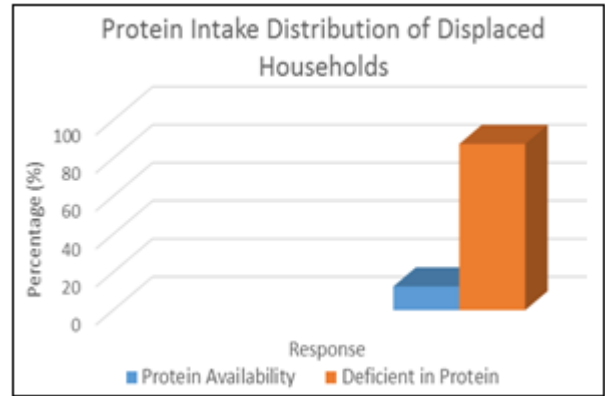


Figure 1.2: Protein Intake Distribution of Displaced Farming Households in the Benue Valley

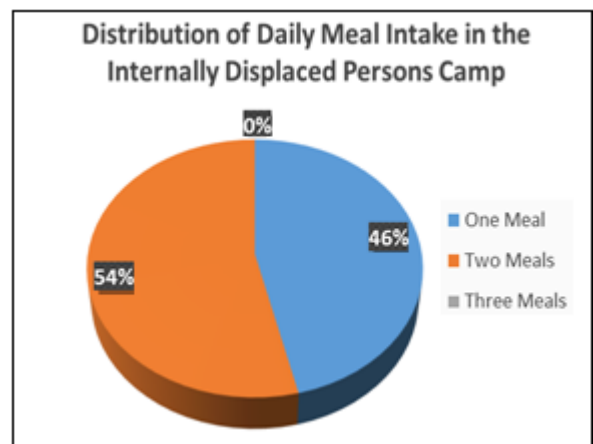


Figure 1.3: Distribution of Displaced Farming Households Daily Meal Intake in the Benue Valley

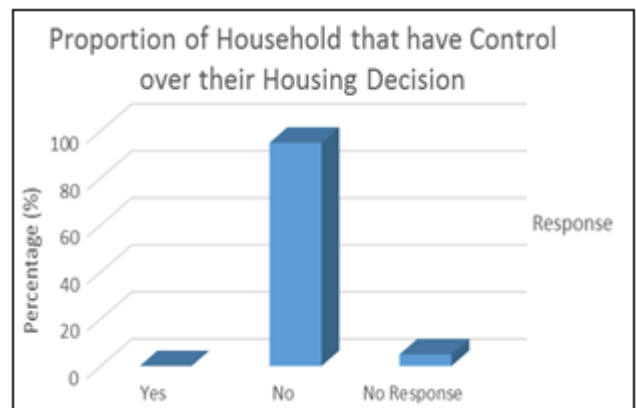


Figure 1.4: Proportion of Displaced Farming Households who have Control over their Housing Decision in the Benue Valley

The impact of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict on the Internally Displace Persons and their Copping Strategies

The study also revealed that the majority of the displaced farmers lost access to their farming fields, food, produce, livestock, properties and houses. The outcome of this losses has also resulted to starvation of displaced households. This collaborates with the assertions by FAO and WFP (2019) revealing that, the direct impacts of conflicts often result to deliberate targeting and physical destruction of lives and livelihoods. The indirect consequences include gradual erosion of livelihoods assets, such as those resulting from disruption of mobility, population displacement, disease and

pest outbreaks, food insecurity and malnutrition. This also agrees with the FGD revealing that those who managed to bring out food and livestock sold them immediately they got out of their communities to see to some immediate needs and those whose houses were not destroyed cannot return to them because peace has not been restored in the areas. These people have to develop new coping strategies in the Internally Displaced Persons' camp that will enable them mitigate their living conditions in terms of health, child education, and household food security.

According to the FGD, their coping strategies included taking up menial jobs in people's farms, cleaning people's homes, helping people to sell in the market square on market days; all these in the quest of accessing money to tackle their respective immediate and pressing household needs. Even at this, they could not meet the obligation of fulfilling their needs thus collaborating with the assertions by Martin-Shields and Stojetz (2018) that violent conflict reduces the purchasing power of households. FGD however reveal that, the non-governmental organisations have been selecting some household members to participate in vocational trainings outside farming. It is imperative to state that learning new skills outside your vocation can only be referred to as employment diversification and long term resettlement plan after peace has returned to the local communities as compared to empowering them to continue with their farming activities.

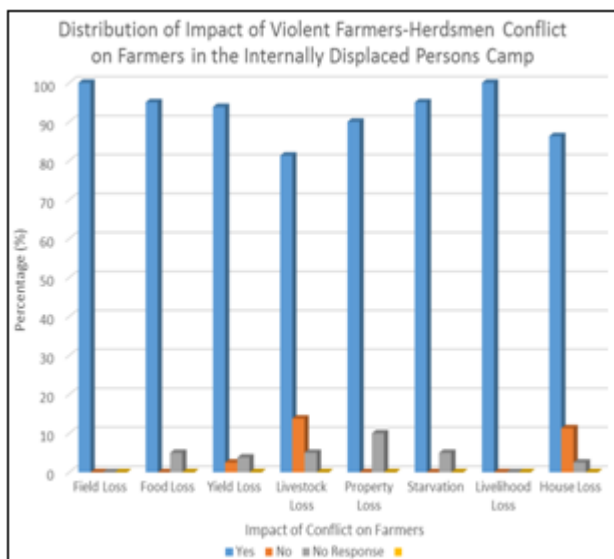


Figure 1.5: Distribution of Conflict Impact on Displaced Farming Households in the Benue Valley

Table 1: Regression Analyses of Farmers' Food Insecurity in IDP Camps

t	B	t	Sig.
Constant	1.155	4.783	.000
Food Loss	-0.072	-0.631	0.53
Livestock Loss	-0.082	-0.876	0.384

Dependent Variable: Starvation

The result to verify the hypothesis (Table 1.0) revealed that both food loss and livestock loss had a direct and negative impact on the displaced famers' food security thus the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that, as food and livestock loss increases, starvation also increased. It is

expedient to state that, the economic potential of farmers to purchase food declined as they loss their crops and livestock. The herdsman are also likely to face a similar challenge as they loss their cattle and other herder animals. The resultant effect of all these remains deadening economy for the farmers and national food insecurity.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

The result from the study reveals that all the people displaced by Fulani herdsman and Farmers violent conflicts in Benue State who were seeking shelter in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps were crop farmers. The Majority of the farmers' household were malnourished and were also having low calorie energy intake. The impact of the conflicts on the farming households was diverse ranging from loss of access to their farming fields, food, farm produce, properties and livelihood to starvation and exposure to sickness and diseases.

5.2 Recommendation

Critically observing the outcome of the study, it is expedient to recommend that, agricultural intervention to resettle the Internally Displaced Persons in their farms where they have their primary source of livelihood was the most important form of aid that was lacking in the IDPs camp. The farmers were of the view in the FGD that, if they can get interventions in terms of farming inputs, they will rent land in safe areas to continue their farming activities to improve their household food security and other areas of their living through the selling of the excess food they produced as they have always done before they were displaced; this will improve their household income and overall living standards. This should be the focal point of aids in the IDPs camps in Benue State where the majority of the population are predominantly famers and there is still vast land outside the conflict areas to accommodate more farming operations. Giving farmers agricultural support in terms of agro interventions will avail a fast opportunity to resettle them in their livelihood thus aiding in mitigating against conflict shocks and food insecurity. These farmers can also be engaged in contract farming by the government and other multinational agro allied industries as part of government policy to cushion the effect of poverty and food insecurity which has been caused by violent conflicts.

The impact of food and cloth aid on the livelihood of the displaced has proven to be less sustainable since aids supply has been politicised and there is a decline in the motivation to supply these aids in the camps. There is thus the need for additional food aid in the IDPs camp through new independent channels under strict process monitoring to help solve the immediate needs of the food and nutritional insecurity. This also agrees with the findings of Flores (2004) revealing that, there is always the need to secure the food and nutrition requirements of the population suffering from conflict since it is one of the necessary condition for recovery. "In the absence of adequate food security, the conflict/post-conflict scenarios of mass migration, starvation, sectoral collapse and death due to hunger and

disease (as opposed to combat-induced death) become more likely” (Flores 2004).

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