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IMPACT OF PASTORALIST-CROP FARMERS' CONFLICTS ON FOOD ACCESSIBILITY IN BENUE NORTH-WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF BENUE STATE

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Abstract

Crop farmers and pastoralists' conflict has occurred in many parts of Nigeria, especially in Benue State, resulting in wanton destruction of lives and properties, hence affecting accessibility in the State. The paper was underpinned by the Eco-Violence theory, which is vital in the understanding of the role scarcity of land resources play in driving crop farmers-pastoralists' conflict in Benue State. The aim of this paper was to examine the impact of pastoralists and crop farmers' conflict on food accessibility in Benue State. The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled: "Pastoralist-Crop Farmers Conflicts and Food Security Questionnaire (PCFCFSQ)" developed by the researcher. The questionnaire items were structured using a 4-point rating scale. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. This enabled the researcher to ascertain a typical mean score on each item whether or not it reached an acceptable level. A benchmark of 2.50 was used for decision making. Any mean scores of 2.50 and above was accepted as having the desired impact while mean scores of less than 2.50 was rejected as not having the impact. Chi-square (χ^2) of goodness fit was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts have negative impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West

Keywords:
Pastoralists, crop farmers, conflict, food security, food accessibility

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Senatorial District of Benue State. It is recommended, among other things, that government and international organizations should encourage through provision of soft loans to pastoralists to enable them adopt ranching system where all cattle herds would be housed in a given location and feed while crop farmers should be given soft loans to expand their farming into commercial farming venture to help expand the existing dwindling food supply in the state.

Introduction

Among the methods used by many households in the nation to promote food security include crop cultivation and animal husbandry (Muwanga et. al., 2020). For rural people, raising cattle and other animals is a significant source of income. Crop farming and animal rearing support the development of rural income and the expansion of food sustainability (Tshering & Thinley, 2017). The aforementioned demonstrates that safeguarding farmers' crops and grazing areas should be integral parts of national food security. However, over the years, the government has mostly focused on using security forces to apprehend or shoot farmers and pastoralists who cause unrest in order to combat insecurity (Adeleke, 2021). The conflict between crop-farmers and pastoralists is a product of environmental instability, which has led to flooding and soil degradation, both of which have a detrimental effect on the amount of land available for crop production and grazing (Okereke, 2022). This implies that the problem of climate change is a security issue, and that it is partially to blame for the rise of herder-farmer disputes that have several ramifications for the nation's food security.

According to McGregor (2014), the conflict between Nigerian farmers and herders has its roots in the development of agriculture; yet, as agricultural pressure has increased, so too has the conflict. Due to the introduction of private land ownership, Nigeria's archaic agricultural practices and land tenure structure have also contributed to this dispute. Since the 20th century, the conflict has been made worse by ecological causes and population growth (Idowu, 2017). The loss of cattle and grazing land, rural banditry, escalating conflict in northern Nigeria, and the collapse of traditional institutions are among the primary causes of the conflict between farmers and herders, according to the International Crisis Group (2017).

Many scholars including Adeola (2020), Oluweleye (2020), among others, have studied farmers-herders' conflict in Nigeria. Majority of the scholars did not link pastoralists-crop farmers' conflict to food accessibility in Benue State that are populated by majority of farming communities and have equally experienced series of attacks in recent times. This undoubtedly created gaps in the extant literature which needs further intellectual inquiry.

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Pastoralists-crop farmers' conflict have resulted in wanton destruction of lives and properties in Benue State with huge incidences of violent attacks. In Doma in 2011, Fulani herder was killed by Tiv youths and this led to destruction of lives and properties in the State. With displacement of many farmers from their farm lands due to the conflict, the level of food production in the state has drastically reduced as majority of farmers in the areas now live in the IDPs camps in the state due to destruction of their livelihoods, which has many impacts on food production in the state, especially reduction in cassava and yam production in the local government areas. In 2015, Benue State produced 2,560,1000 metric tons of yam. In 2023, the state produced about 1,966,450 metric tons of yams reflecting reduction in yam production in the state (Chijioke, 2021).

Despite the avalanche of literature on the negative impacts of crop-farmers-pastoralists conflict on food accessibility in Benue State, the conflict has continued to cause widespread destruction of lives and properties, fear of insecurity in rural communities (Oruonye, Ahmed & Fatima, 2020). Also, the conflict has continued to causes reduction in farm output and reduction in income of both crop-farmers-pastoralists (Aniche & Nwangwu, 2019).

Despite measures taken by the government such as establishment of National Commission for Nomadic Education, deployment of security forces to manage the conflicts, creation of Grazing Reserves, proposal for establishment of RUGA, enactment of Anti-Open Grazing Law, among others, the problem of crop-farmers-pastoralists conflict has continued to worsen in Benue State. An examination of crop-farmers-pastoralists conflict shows that the existing strategies by the government to solve the problem are retrogressive, discriminatory, and violate the rights of indigenes and ethnic minority groups, which could further lead to identity-destruction in the state (Balarebe, 2021). A cursory examination of the measures adopted by the government, over the years, in order to mitigate the conflicts and engender increased production of yam, millet, cassava, rice, among others, have been hampered by governance deficit. This situation continues to make the conflicts fester, and this has continued to cause hunger and starvation in the state, especially in the farming communities that are largely dislocated from their farms. Therefore, it is important to interrogate crop-farmers-pastoralists' conflicts with particular reference to its impact on food accessibility in Benue State.

Pastoralists-Crop Farmers' Conflict

According to Muwanga et. al. (2020), farming is one of the ways of ensuring household food security. Crop farmers in Nigeria are mainly sedentary farmers, who carry out their farming activities in defined location on a permanent basis. Farmers are mainly located in

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the Southern part of Nigeria, where Christianity is the prevalent religious practice. Given this situation, farmers-herders conflict usually takes ethnic and religious dimensions in the country. Though Muwanga et. al. captured the fact that farmers are mainly subsistence farmers, who are located in the villages, but did not capture the level of attachment of farmers to their ancestral land as Okoli (2021) succinctly captured.

In addition, farmers are largely restricted to their ancestral lands where they cultivate their crops either for consumption or for commercial purposes. They are largely attached to their land, and would not easily relinquish it to people from different ethno-religious afflictions with them for fear of domination. For some of the farmers, the land on which they farm was inherited from their ancestors, while some others are community land (Okoli, 2021), but this did not cover sedentary farming which is crucial to the understanding of farmers-herders' conflict in Benue State.

From the foregoing, farmers can be defined as sedentary farmers who are land owners and are restricted to specific portions of land in order to carry out agricultural production and enhance their livelihood. Farmers are largely from the Southern part of Nigeria, where there is pastures for grazing of animals. Farmers, in this study, are defined as those that are involved in sedentary farming, and who specialise in crop production.

Having reviewed the concept of crop-farmers, it is crucial to examine the next concept which is pastoralists. The issue of pastoralists or herders has been understood and defined by scholars. Cattle rearers are referred to as herders in Nigeria. Herders (pastoralists) mainly originate from the Northern part of Nigeria, and they are mainly Fulanis (Yikwabs et. al., 2020). The definition of herders by Gambo did not capture the need for peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers which is necessary for the realization of educational development in Benue State.

Tshering & Thinley (2017) noted that rearing of livestock is an important source of livelihood for rural communities in developing states. Herders rear livestock in order to generate dairy products, animal dungs, and meat. This shows that herders perform very crucial role in the development of agriculture in Nigeria because of its contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as rural income in the country. During the day, herders rear their livestock in nearby bushes or forests. In view of the foregoing, herders are defined, in this study, as Fulanis who rear livestock, especially cattle by moving them from one location to another in search of pastures. Herders are mainly nomadic or pseudo-nomadic in nature, whose major means of livelihood is rearing of livestock. In order to protect their livestock and themselves from danger, herders are armed with weapons like daggers, machetes, and arrows (Muhammed & Abdulkadier, 2019).

Rearing of livestock is a vital source of livelihood for rural communities in developing countries. Some of the herders rear livestock for meat, dairy products, and dung. Herders' role in rearing of livestock is a crucial aspect of agricultural system and it contributes to

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and even to the development of rural income. Most livestock belonging to herders are reared in the nearby forests during the day (Tshering & Thinley, 2017).

According to Gursou (2019), herders are largely Fulanis who have settled and integrated with the Hausas to form the Hausa-Fulani. They are largely Muslims, but Hausa-Fulanis are far more educated as well as politically active relative to nomadic Fulanis. In the Southern part of Nigeria, Christianity is the most prominent religion amongst the people. In Plateau State, for instance, herders-farmers conflict has ethnic as well as religious angles, which reinforce the grazing disputes. Sedentary farmers are crucial party in the herders-farmers conflict due to the impact of economic as well as environmental changes affecting farmers in their agricultural production, especially in the northern part of Nigeria. This shows that herders-farmers conflict take place when the two parties to the conflict have an encounter on the same land and put-up efforts to protect their advantages (Oluweleye, 2020). The foregoing is important to this study because it raises the religious and ethnic dimensions to the herders-farmers conflict which is necessary in the understanding of herders and farmers. Nevertheless, the study did not examine the place of sedentary farming in the understanding of farmers and herders, which is relevant to this study.

At this juncture, pastoralists are defined, in this study, as those that rear their livestock, especially cattle by taking them from one place to another in search of pastures. Pastoralists, in this paper, are comprised of mainly Fulanis who rear their livestock in the southern part of Nigeria where grasslands abound. pastoralists are usually nomadic or semi-nomadic in nature. Their basic means of livelihood is raising of livestock. Pastoralists largely move with their herds from one location to another in search of fresh water and pasture.

According to Bercovitch (2014), conflict is defined as inevitable in human society because of its possible connection with distribution of scarce resources, role differentiation, power relations, and division of functions. According to the Bercovitch, conflict is a situation where two or more parties have incompatible goals. The definition of conflict by the author is vital to this paper because it highlighted the role of incompatibility of goals or interests of diverse parties in driving conflicts between herders and crop farmers. However, the Bercovitch did not capture the different categories of conflicts.

Udezo (2016) defined conflict as a struggle or contest between two or more groups that have contradictory needs, beliefs, ideas, values, and goals, which they seek to pursue. Conflicts can be violent or non-violent. Conflict is dynamic and occurs in cycles. Conflicts can be destructive, and can equally bring about the transition of a society from one level of development to another level. However, this definition of conflict is aligned to farmers-herders conflict. Conflict is defined, in this study, as disagreements between crop farmers

and Fulani herders over land and its resources. Fulani herders are perceived as settlers, while crop farmers are perceived as land owners. In this study, farmers-herders conflict has huge implications for educational development in Benue State.

According to Swanstrom & Weissmann (2005), conflict means a situation in which diverse parties compete in order to acquire common scarce resources at the same time. Flowing from this, conflict is dynamic and not static given the degree of changes that usually occur in the life cycle of conflicts. This shows that a clear understanding of the life cycle of a conflict is vital in comprehending the "how", "where" and "when" to introduce now measures aimed at conflict prevention as well as management. Therefore, conflict means disagreements between herders and farmers over land resources in a given area over a period of time, and where herders are perceived as visitors and farmers perceived as land-owners. In this study, herders-farmers conflict has many impacts on educational development in Benue State. This is because conflict emanates from structural contradictions, behaviours and attitudes in the society, which is aligned with the ideal of conflict by Galtung (1997) cited by Obiora-Okonkwo (2018). Reasons for pastoralists-crop farmers conflict include differences in values, perceptions, as well as cultural differences and incompatible needs for limited resources.

Food Accessibility

Food accessibility is an important element of food security because, even when food is in sufficient quantity, all individuals and families need to have access to it both physically and economically. All stages of food chain supply have some influence on physical accessibility, particularly transportation, storage, and marketing of these food commodities. According to Obamiro, Doppler & Kormawa (2018), economic accessibility or purchasing power of household income is considered the most important factor affecting people's accessibility to healthy and nourishing foods.

Idachaba (2014) explained that access to food by all households imply that at food security status, majority of the populace must meet minimum nutritional standards and have assured access to food at all times (without fluctuation in food availability) in homes. Similarly, access by all people at all times to enough food for active, healthy life would mean that every individual in any society is entitled to have enough food that would sustain him in order to be useful to himself, his family and society throughout life. It implies still that at a minimum the food available should contain all the essential nutrients and be prepared in a hygienic environment (Anderson, 2015).

It is also believed that the ability to acquire food must be through socially acceptable ways not through struggling and stealing. Lack of access to nutritionally adequate diet in a household can occur when there is chronic food insecurity that results to persistent

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insufficient food supplies to low-income families which can lead to inadequate nutrition for all members of the family.

Empirical Review

Muhammed & Abdulkadier (2019) studied causes and socio-economic implications for herders-farmers conflict in Sabon Daga of Niger State. The purpose of the study was to examine the causes as well as socio-economic implications for herders-farmers conflict in Sabon Data. Data for the study were collected using both primary and secondary data in order to answer the questions raised in the research questions. Primary data were collected using 400 questionnaire that were administered to farmers and herders in the ratio of 50:50. Secondary data were collected from journals, books and internet sources on herders-farmers conflict and economic development. It was found that the causes of herders-farmers conflict in the area were destruction of crops (4.06), killing of herders (3.79), and stealing of farm products (3.79) as well s reduction in the income of farmers, which adversely affected socio-economic development in the study area. Among other things, conflict prevention and resolution strategies were recommended to curtail future conflicts. However, the study did not examine the impact of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts on food availability in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State, which is one of the objectives of this study.

Oghuvbu & Oghuvbu (2020) examined farmers-herders conflict in Africa focusing on Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to interrogate the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria with a view to proffering solutions to the conflict. Data for the study were generated largely from the secondary source and analysed using content analysis. The study blamed farmers-herders conflict on population growth resulting in the increase in the number of farmers and herders, climate change, inability to resolve water and land disputes over the years and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in West African subregion. It was pointed out that the conflict was caused by multiple factors such as scarce resources, reprisal attacks, land and climate change, among others. In Nigeria, the conflict negatively impinges on the unity of the country. Among other things, the need to restore previous interactive relationship between farmers and herders was recommended. Nevertheless, the study did not examine the impact of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts on food availability in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State, which is the focus of this study.

Oluweleye (2020) studied challenges of herders-farmers conflicts focusing on its implications for peacebuilding on sustainable development in Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to empirically examine the challenges posed by herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, especially in Benue State with a view to determining its implications for Nigeria. Data were collected from both primary and secondary data. Data from primary source

were analysed using frequency and simple percentages, while data from secondary source were analysed using descriptive analysis. It was found that lack of education, bad orientation, lack of respect for human rights, ineffective laws on grazing as well as obsolete culture were triggers of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. It was equally found that the implications for the study included insecurity, unemployment, underemployment, loss of lives and properties, among others. Among other things, adoption of better and more effective government policies was recommended as a panacea to the problem of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the study did not examine the impact of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts on food availability in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

Theoretical Framework: Eco Violence Theory

This paper is anchored on Eco Violence theory as propounded by Homer-Dixon in 1999. The eco violence theory derives its epistemological foundation from the political ecology perspective. Eco-violence explores links between environmental scarcities of key renewable variables such as cropland, fresh water, forests and violent rebellions, insurgencies and ethnic clashes in developing countries (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

The assumptions of this theory are summarized by Homer Dixon (1999) as follows: Decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and resource access, act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests, and fish. This can reduce economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts.

The theory is useful in the understanding of conflicts between pastoralists and peasant farmers in Benue State. The theory is helpful in the understanding of the root causes and escalations of the conflict, especially how barning of rangelands, Fadama and blockage of stock routes and water pints by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herdsmen, while increasing rate of cattle theft which is often accompanied by violence, antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition tor resources he acknowledged that government is unwilling to scale the conflict for reasons that relate to external political presentation.

Research Methodology

The design of the study was descriptive research design involving survey research. The total population of the study was 5,460 comprising all the crop farmers taking refuge in

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internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. The sample size of the study was 400 determined using using Taro Yamane (1967) formula for sample size estimation.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the sample size. The first stage involved the use of cluster sampling technique where the population was clustered into the four Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. The second stage involved the use of purposive sampling technique where two internally displaced persons (IDP) camps were selected. Finally, simple random sampling which gives every internally displaced person equal opportunity to participate in the study was applied to select the respondents. Pieces of paper with inscriptions of yes and no were put in a bag. After thorough reshuffling, internally displaced persons (males and females) who picked yes papers formed the sample for the study. However, the study was conducted in Dauda and Naka IDP camps in Benue State, Nigeria.

The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled: "Pastoralist-Crop Farmers Conflicts and Food Security Questionnaire (PCFCFSQ)" developed by the researcher. It was a 21-item questionnaire which was divided into four sections, 1-4. Section 1 elicited information on pastoralist-crop farmers' conflicts and food accessibility. The questionnaire items were structured using a 4-point rating scale with the following options: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The acceptable mean score was 2.50, that is 4+3+2+1 = 10÷4 = 2.50.

Data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. This enabled the researcher to ascertain a typical mean score on each item whether or not it reached an acceptable level. A benchmark of 2.50 was used for decision making. Any mean scores of 2.50 and above was accepted as having the desired impact while mean scores of less than 2.50 was rejected as not having the impact. Chi-square (χ^2) of goodness fit was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule for the acceptance or rejection of hypothesis was based on the set value of 0.05. In the test, when the calculated p-value was less than the stipulated level of significance (0.05), it means that there was significant impact and the hypothesis was rejected. Conversely, where the calculated p-value was equal to or greater than the stipulated level of significance (0.05), it means that there was no significant impact and the hypothesis was retained.

Findings and Discussions

Findings on the extent pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State are provided as follows:

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Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Impact of Pastoralists-Crop Farmers' Conflicts on Food Accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State

S/NO	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	DECISION
1.	There is a reduction in the amount of food I consume due to pastoralist-crop farmers conflicts	121	182	61	-	3.16	.68	Agree
2.	I have to borrow money to purchase food due to pastoralist-crop farmers conflicts	133	194	37	-	2.68	.63	Agree
3.	I sold my assets in order to purchase food due to due to pastoralist-crop farmers conflicts	121	182	61	–	3.10	.79	Agree
4.	I have to reduce the quality of food I consume due to pastoralist-crop farmers conflicts	134	182	37	10	3.29	.60	Agree
5.	There is increase in transportation to access food due to pastoralist-crop farmers conflicts	15	61	179	121	2.04	. 78	Agree
6.	I have to rely on alternative sources of food such humanitarian aid because of pastoralists-crop farmers conflicts	130	185	37	-	2.86	.74	Agree
	Cluster Mean/SD					**2.85**	**0.70**	Agree

Source: Field Survey, April, 2024

Table 1 presents the results of the analysis on impact of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. The table revealed that, with the benchmark of 2.50, the respondents agreed on item 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 with the mean scores of 3.16, 2.68, 3.10, 3.29 and 2.86 with corresponding standard deviations of 0.68, 0.63, 0.79, 0.60 and 0.74 respectively for having negative impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. However, they disagreed on item 5 with a mean score of 2.04 with standard deviation of 0.78 for not having negative impact. The Table also revealed a cluster mean of 2.85 and standard deviation of 0.70 which is above the benchmark of 2.50, and this indicates that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts have negative impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

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Table 2: Chi-Square Analysis of the Impact of Pastoralists-Crop Farmers' Conflicts on Food Accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of Sig	χ^2_{cal}	p.val	Decision
SA	148	121	2	0.05	95.051[a]	.001	H_O Rejected
A	192	121					
D	49	121					
SD	7	121					

χ^2cal = 95.051[a], df=2, P=0.05>0.001

Source: Field Survey, April, 2024

Table 2 reveals the Chi-square value of the impact of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts on food availability in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. The calculated value of Chi-square (χ^2) = 95.051[a]at df = 2 and P = 0.001. Since P < 0.05, the result is significant therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant impact of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State is not accepted and the alternative hypothesis retained. This implies that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts have significant impact on food availability in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

Findings from the foregoing revealed that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts have negative impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. The corresponding hypothesis to the above research question revealed that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts have significant impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. This implies that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts made many families both pastoralists and crop farmers to starve as they could no longer have access to adequate food items. This finding is in consonance with Muhammed & Abdulkadiar (2019), Oghuvbu & Oghubu (2020) as well as Oluweleye (2020) which showed that the conflict has greatly affected crop farming and grazing activities, resulting in low productivity, food instability, low food utilization, food inaccessibility and inadequate availability of food in many parts of Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pastoralists-crop farmers' violent conflicts have created humanitarian toll across many communities in Nigeria. Many have died, many displaced and properties in form of crops, animals, houses, vehicles among others destroyed. Farmers, though, have occasionally been involved in carrying attacks or reprisal attacks against the pastoralists, have been seen to be mostly at the receiving end of the conflicts. They count more losses than the

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pastoralists. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts have negative impact on food accessibility in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State. the implication for this is that unless the challenges of pastoralists-crop farmers' conflicts are adequately addressed, the problem of food accessibility would continue to fester in Benue North-West Senatorial District of Benue State.

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that the government and international organizations should encourage through provision of soft loans to pastoralists to enable them adopt ranching system where all cattle herds would be housed in a given location and feed while crop farmers should be given soft loans to expand their farming into commercial farming venture to help expand the existing dwindling food supply in the state.

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