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The Socioeconomic Toll of Farmer–Herder Conflict in Benue-Nasarawa Corridor, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the socio-economic impacts of farmer-herder conflict on households in Benue and Nasarawa States, Nigeria. Farmer–herder conflict has become a major threat to rural livelihoods in Nigeria's Middle Belt, causing widespread disruption of agricultural production, household income, and food security. A triangulated mixed-methods retrospective research design was adopted, involving household surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Data were collected from 400 respondents across eight Local Government Areas, including farming and herding households. Descriptive statistics were used to compare livelihood conditions before and during the conflict period. The findings revealed significant livelihood losses among affected households. Farm sizes declined considerably, with households cultivating 7-10 hectares reducing from 31.8% before conflict to 8.8% during conflict, while those cultivating less than 1 hectare increased from 8.2% to 26.7%. Livestock ownership also declined, as households owning 100 or more animals reduced from 40.2% to 2.4%, while those owning fewer than 50 animals increased from 3.7% to 42.7%. Household income deteriorated significantly, with respondents earning below ₦50,000 increasing from 21.5% before conflict to 43.0% during conflict, while those earning above ₦150,000 declined from 22.0% to 7.0%. Although some households adopted alternative livelihoods, 36.0% reported adopting no new income-generating activity, indicating limited adaptive capacity. Conflict also worsened food security, as households consuming three or more meals daily declined from 57.5% to 30.0%, while those consuming one meal or less increased from 11.5% to 29.5%. The study concludes that farmer-herder conflict has weakened household productive assets, reduced income opportunities, and intensified food insecurity. It recommends conflict resolution, livelihood recovery programmes, and agricultural support.

Keywords: farmer-herder conflict; rural livelihoods; food security; household income.

1. Introduction

Farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt has evolved from sporadic, localised disputes into one of the country's most persistent rural crises. The Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index (2026) now ranks Nigeria as the fourth most terrorism-affected country in the world, a deterioration driven in part by a documented escalation of farmer-herder conflict specifically within the Middle Belt. In Benue State alone, Amnesty International (2025) reports more than 6,800 deaths since 2004 and over 500,000 people internally displaced, with a single attack on Yelwata community in Guma Local Government Area - the epicentre identified in this study - killing more than 100 people in June 2025 alone.

What is less understood and what this paper addresses is not the violence itself, but its economic aftermath. Existing research has done important work establishing that farmer-herder conflict damages rural economies in general terms (Nnaji et al., 2022; International Crisis Group, 2021). Far less empirical attention has been paid to how that damage moves through a household's economic life: from a shrinking farm, to a smaller herd, to a smaller income, to a smaller plate of food on the table. This paper follows that chain directly, using household-level data from Benue and Nasarawa States two of the states most affected by this conflict to trace how violence translates into material hardship.

The stakes of this gap are not abstract. Displacement associated with the conflict has already uprooted large numbers of rural households (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021-2022), and conflict-related instability continues to threaten Nigeria's broader effort to diversify its economy away from oil and toward agriculture (Sowunmi, et al, 2025). Vesco et al. (2025) argue that armed conflict of this kind does not simply disrupt livelihoods temporarily - it entrenches poverty by damaging the infrastructure and market access that rural households depend on to recover. Yet as McGuirk (2025) cautions, resource-based tension does not automatically produce economic collapse; it does so specifically when ecological stress, weak institutions, and livelihood insecurity compound one another over time. This paper treats that compounding effect as its central empirical question.

Benue and Nasarawa States offer a particularly clear setting in which to examine this. Benue is overwhelmingly agrarian, often described as Nigeria's food basket, with the large majority of households depending directly on crop cultivation for income and subsistence. Nasarawa combines farming with substantial pastoral activity, giving the two states a useful contrast in livelihood structure while both remain firmly within the conflict's most intense corridor - a corridor independently mapped by Faiyetole & Abiodun (2026), whose national Conflict Corridor Model identifies a distinct Nasarawa-Benue nomadic pastoralism route encompassing three of this study's eight sampled Local Government Areas. Together, these two states allow this paper to examine livelihood disruption across both the arable and pastoral sides of the conflict, rather than treating farmers and herders as a single undifferentiated population.

This paper asks two questions. First, to what extent has the conflict altered farm size, livestock holdings, and household income among affected households? Second, what has this meant for food security and poverty specifically, how has meal frequency and household food expenditure

shifted as a direct consequence? Answering these questions matters beyond the study area itself. As Nigeria continues to position agriculture as a pillar of economic diversification, a rural population that is simultaneously losing crops, livestock, and income cannot be expected to anchor that transition. Understanding precisely how conflict erodes household economic capacity - not just that it does is a necessary step toward designing recovery interventions that address the actual mechanism of harm, rather than its symptoms alone.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 situates the study within the broader literature on conflict and rural livelihoods. Section 3 outlines the study's mixed-methods design and data sources. Section 4 presents the empirical findings on livelihood, income, and food security impacts. Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to existing literature, and Section 6 concludes with policy implications for livelihood recovery in conflict-affected agrarian economies.

The relationship between violent conflict and rural livelihoods has attracted sustained scholarly attention across the Sahel and Middle Belt, yet the empirical focus has often remained broad, documenting that conflict harms rural economies without tracing precisely how that harm accumulates through a household's economic life. This review situates the present study within three overlapping strands of literature: the general conflict-livelihood relationship, the specific evidence on farming and pastoral productivity losses, and the narrower body of work on income, poverty, and food security outcomes.

Brottem (2021) frames farmer-herder conflict in West and Central Africa as increasingly complex, driven not only by resource competition but by population pressure, shifting land-use patterns, and the erosion of traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms. This complexity matters for livelihood analysis because it suggests that economic harm does not follow a single, uniform pathway - it is mediated by how communities have historically managed resource-sharing, and by how quickly those mechanisms break down under stress. At the national level, Sowunmi, et al (2025) argue that the socio-economic instability produced by farmer-herder conflict extends well beyond the immediate conflict zone, threatening Nigeria's broader effort to diversify its economy toward agriculture. Vesco et al. (2025) similarly contend that armed conflict of this kind entrenches poverty specifically by damaging the market access and infrastructure that rural households depend on for recovery.

A more focused body of work documents how conflict reshapes agricultural and pastoral production directly. Okoli & Atelhe (2014) found that insecurity in Nasarawa State forced farming households to abandon distant farmlands and concentrate cultivation on smaller, safer plots close to settlements. Adisa (2016) extends this finding, showing that repeated attacks and the fear of raids constrained farmers' access to fertile but remote land, producing a broader shift from medium- and large-scale farming toward smallholder subsistence production. Blench (2017) and Higazi (2018) corroborate this pattern across the wider Middle Belt.

On the pastoral side, Campbell et al. (2017) link herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria to substantial cattle losses, displacement, and restricted grazing access, connecting these losses directly to rising poverty and food insecurity among affected households. Dimelu et al. (2017), studying conflict in Kogi State, found comparable disruption to livelihoods and production outcomes, with consequences extending to household survival and asset accumulation more broadly.

John & Ndubuisi (2025), studying the socio-economic consequences of farmer-herder conflict specifically in Benue State, reported major losses in livelihoods and agricultural productivity accompanied by displacement and broader economic hardship. Fadare, et al (2024) offer a more adaptive perspective, showing that some households mitigate income shocks through livestock diversification, suggesting the relationship between conflict and poverty is shaped by households' adaptive capacity.

On food security specifically, Mohammed, et al (2021) found that farmer-herder conflict significantly reduces meal frequency and dietary diversity among affected households, while Banful & Leavy (2017) observed similar patterns of rising food costs among conflict-affected populations across West Africa more broadly.

This literature establishes two things clearly: that conflict damages farming and livestock production, and that conflict is associated with income decline and food insecurity. What remains less developed is the connective tissue between these two claims - empirical work that traces the full chain from land and livestock loss, through income decline, to measurable food security and poverty outcomes, within a single household-level dataset. This paper addresses that gap directly, using paired household-level data from Benue and Nasarawa States to trace this chain empirically from production loss to the household dinner table.

2. STUDY AREA

Benue State is situated in the north-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria and serves as a critical agricultural hub in the region. Geographically, the state lies between latitudes 6°25'N and 8°8'N and longitudes 7°47'E and 10°0'E. It shares boundaries with Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the east, Cross River State to the south, and Kogi State to the west. It also borders Enugu and Ebonyi States to the southwest and the Republic of Cameroon to the southeast, making it one of the few Nigerian states with international borders (Idoko, 2019). The River Benue, a prominent geographical feature after which the state is named, bisects the state and is essential for its agricultural and transportation activities.

Benue State covers a land area of approximately 34,059 square kilometers, making it one of Nigeria's largest states. The state's topography includes extensive plains, river valleys, and uplands, which support its agricultural dominance in producing crops such as yam, cassava, and soybeans. The diverse climatic conditions and fertile soil further reinforce Benue's reputation as the "Food Basket of the Nation" (Onah & Eze, 2018).

Nasarawa State is located in the north-central region of Nigeria, strategically positioned near the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The state lies between latitudes 7°45'N and 9°25'N and longitudes 7°7'E and 9°37'E. It is bordered by Benue State to the south, Kogi State to the west, Kaduna State to the north, Plateau State to the northeast, and Taraba State to the east (Abah, 2021b). Its proximity to the FCT enhances its economic relevance, making it a transit and trade route between the northern and southern parts of the country.

The land area of Nasarawa State is approximately 27,117 square kilometers, making it smaller than Benue State but equally significant in terms of its natural resources and topographical diversity. The state is characterized by undulating hills, fertile plains, and valleys, which are favorable for agriculture and mining. Nasarawa is rich in mineral resources, such as solid minerals, which contribute significantly to its economic base (Umeh & Garba, 2020).

From the above, Benue and Nasarawa States are essential components of Nigeria's north-central geopolitical zone due to their strategic locations and sizes. While Benue State excels in agriculture with its expansive land and fertile soil, Nasarawa State's proximity to the FCT and its rich mineral deposits make it a vital economic player. (See Figure 1.)

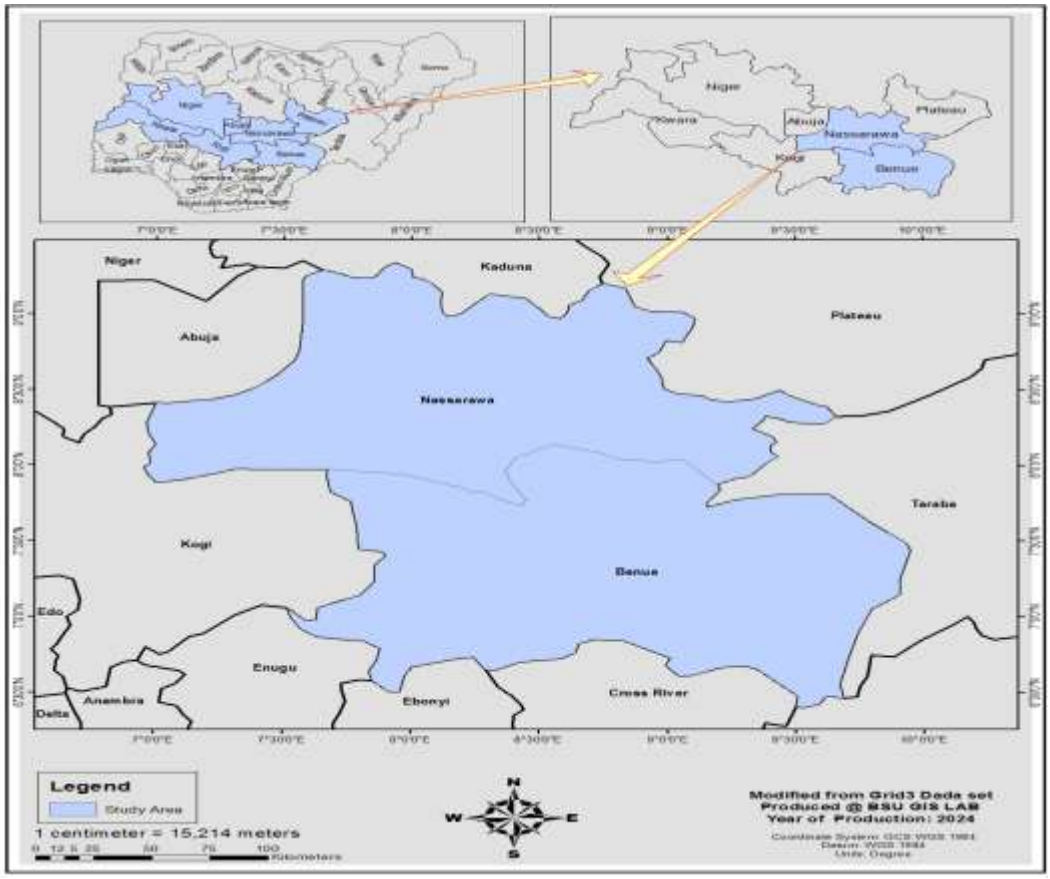

Figure 1: Benue and Nasarawa States

Source: Department of Geography, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, GIS Laboratory (2024).

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a triangulated mixed-methods, retrospective design covering a fourteen-year period (2010-2024). Quantitative data on farm size, livestock holdings, income, and food security indicators were collected through structured household surveys, while qualitative accounts from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions provided contextual depth.

3.2 Study Population

The study was conducted across eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue and Nasarawa States, Nigeria - Guma, Makurdi, Agatu, and Logo in Benue; Aw, Doma, Keana, and Obi in Nasarawa. The combined population of the eight LGAs was 1,871,200 (NPC, 2006) projection 2024.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error, proportionately allocated across the eight LGAs and further split between farming households (n = 318) and herding households (n = 82). Farming households were selected through random sampling; herders were selected through accidental sampling, reflecting the absence of a fixed sampling frame for this mobile population.

3.4 Instruments and Data Collection

Structured questionnaires captured quantitative data on farm size, livestock holdings, monthly household income before and during the conflict period, livelihood diversification, days of economic activity lost, meal frequency, and monthly food expenditure, administered face-to-face by trained enumerators with a 100% retrieval rate. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions provided qualitative depth on household coping responses to livelihood loss.

3.5 Method of data presentation and Analysis

Data were presented in tables and interpreted using Descriptive statistics. A Mann-Whitney U test (equivalently, the Wilcoxon rank-sum test) was applied to test for significant differences between the independently tabulated before and during conflict distributions of meal frequency and food expenditure.

4. Results

4.1 Effects on Farm Size and Livestock Holdings

Farmer-herder conflicts significantly affect rural livelihoods by disrupting access to farmland, reducing cultivated land size, and causing losses in livestock assets. Insecurity, displacement, fear of attacks, and restricted movement often force households to abandon farms or reduce agricultural activities, while livestock owners face challenges such as cattle theft, limited grazing areas, and insecurity. These changes negatively affect household income, food security, and agricultural productivity. Figure 1 presents data on farm size before and during conflict

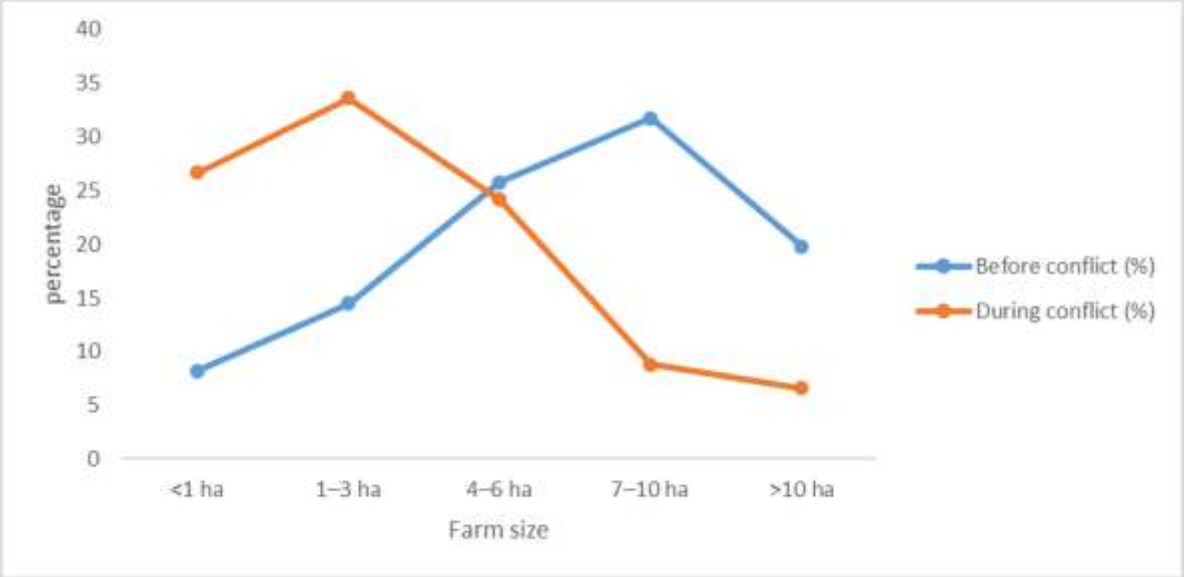

Figure 1. Farm size before and during conflict
Source: Field survey, 2025

Figure 1 presents the distribution of farm sizes among sampled households before and during the period of conflict. The findings revealed a significant reduction in the size of cultivated farmland during conflict, indicating that insecurity has negatively affected agricultural land access and farming activities in the study area. Before the conflict, larger farm sizes were more common, with 31.8% of households cultivating 7-10 hectares, followed by 25.8% cultivating 4–6 hectares and 19.8% cultivating more than 10 hectares. However, during the conflict period, the proportion of households cultivating larger farms declined considerably, with only 8.8% maintaining farms of 7-10 hectares and 6.6% cultivating more than 10 hectares.

Conversely, the proportion of households operating smaller farms increased during the conflict. The percentage of farmers cultivating less than 1 hectare increased from 8.2% before conflict to 26.7% during conflict, while those cultivating 1-3 hectares increased from 14.5% to 33.6%. This shift indicates that many households reduced their cultivated land area due to insecurity, displacement, restricted access to farmland, increased production risks, and inability to invest in agricultural expansion.

The reduction in farm size reflects the broader impacts of farmer-herder conflicts on rural agricultural systems in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Conflict situations often force farmers to abandon distant farmlands and cultivate only areas considered relatively safe, thereby reducing overall agricultural productivity and household income. According to the International Crisis Group (2017), recurring farmer-herder violence in Nigeria has resulted in displacement, loss of access to agricultural lands, and disruption of farming activities, particularly in Benue and neighbouring states. Similarly, Okoli &Lenshie (2018) noted that insecurity associated with farmer-herder conflicts has weakened rural livelihoods by limiting farmers' ability to access productive resources such as land, labour, and capital.

The findings also support the argument that conflict reduces agricultural investment and encourages risk-averse farming behaviour. In conflict-affected environments, farmers often avoid expanding cultivated areas because larger farms require greater investment and expose households to increased risks of crop destruction, attacks, and displacement (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021). As a result, households tend to adopt survival-oriented strategies by cultivating smaller plots mainly for subsistence rather than commercial production.

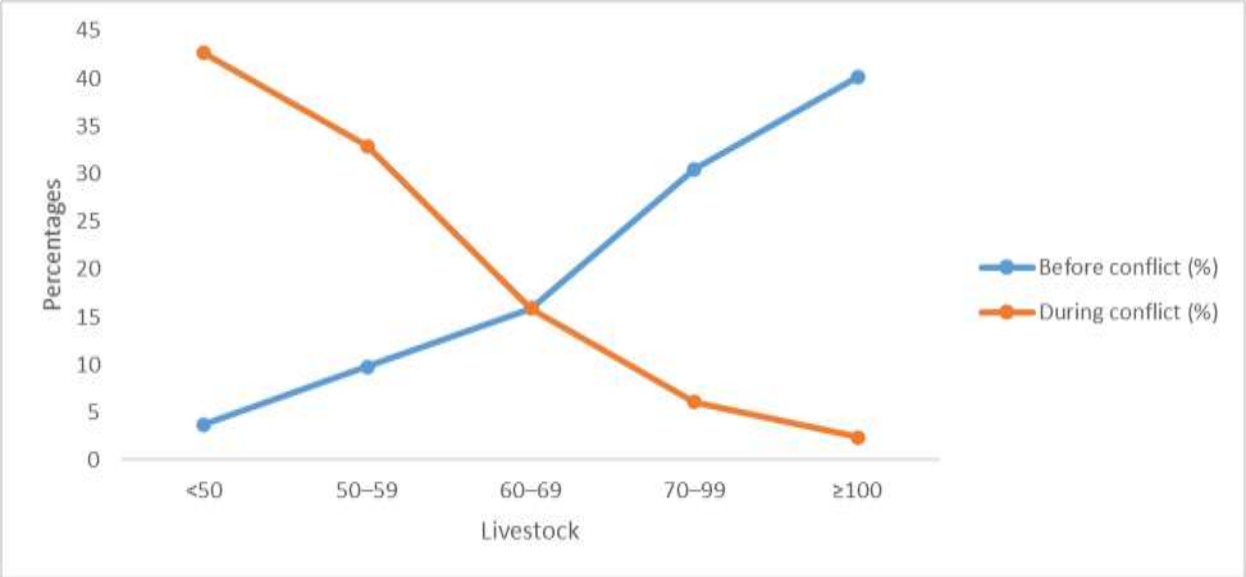

Figure 2. Livestock Holdings Before and During Conflict
Source: Field survey, 2025

Data presented in Figure 2 presents the distribution of livestock holdings among livestock-owning households before and during the period of conflict. The findings revealed a substantial decline in herd sizes during conflict, indicating that insecurity has had a severe negative impact on livestock-based livelihoods. Before the conflict, livestock ownership was characterised by relatively large herd sizes, with 40.2% of households owning 100 or more animals, while 30.5% owned between 70–99 animals. Similarly, 15.9% of households possessed 60–69 animals, showing that many livestock owners operated at a relatively commercial scale before the emergence of intensified conflict.

However, during the conflict period, there was a significant shift towards smaller herd sizes. The proportion of households owning less than 50 animals increased from 3.7% before conflict to 42.7% during conflict, while those owning 50-59 animals increased from 9.8% to 32.9%. In contrast, ownership of larger herds declined considerably, with households owning 70-99 animals reducing from 30.5% to 6.1%, and those owning 100 or more animals declining dramatically from 40.2% to only 2.4%. This indicates extensive livestock losses and a reduction in pastoral wealth due to conflict-related pressures.

The decline in livestock holdings is attributed to several conflict-related factors, including cattle rustling, killings of animals during violent attacks, restricted movement, displacement of pastoral households, destruction of grazing resources, and increased. Livestock represents an important economic asset among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, serving as a source of income, food security, social status, and household resilience. Therefore, losses in herd size directly reduce household economic capacity and increase vulnerability (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The findings are consistent with existing literature on farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt, which shows that prolonged insecurity has significantly affected pastoral livelihoods through livestock losses and reduced access to grazing resources. Okoli & Lenshie (2018) observed that recurring conflicts between farmers and herders have disrupted pastoral mobility, increased cattle losses, and weakened traditional livestock production systems. Similarly, Benjaminsen & Ba (2021) argued that competition over land and water resources, combined with climate variability and insecurity, has placed increasing pressure on pastoral systems across West Africa, forcing many herders to reduce herd sizes or abandon livestock activities.

The reduction in livestock ownership also reflects the broader consequences of displacement. When pastoralists and agro-pastoralists are displaced, they often lose access to grazing land, watering points, and markets required for maintaining large herds. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022), conflict and displacement are major drivers of livestock asset depletion because affected households are often forced to sell animals under distress conditions or lose them through theft and violence.

4.2 Effects of the Voilence on Household Income and Livelihood Diversification

The effects of violence on household income and livelihood diversification is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Monthly Income Before and During Conflict (N = 400)

Income (₦)	Before (%)	During (%)
Below 50,000	21.5	43.0
50,000–100,000	27.8	36.5
100,001–150,000	28.7	13.5
Above 150,000	22.0	7.0
Total	100%	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents' monthly income before and during farmer–herder conflict among 400 respondents. The findings revealed a significant decline in household income levels during the conflict period, indicating the adverse economic consequences of insecurity, displacement, and disruption of livelihood activities. Before the conflict, income distribution was relatively balanced across the different income categories. However, during the conflict, there was a noticeable shift towards lower-income groups, suggesting increased economic vulnerability among affected households.

Before the conflict, only 21.5% of respondents earned below ₦50,000 monthly, but this proportion increased substantially to 43.0% during the conflict. Similarly, the proportion of households earning between ₦50,000 and ₦100,000 increased from 27.8% before the conflict to 36.5% during the conflict. Conversely, households earning higher incomes experienced a sharp decline. This indicates that conflict conditions pushed many households from higher income categories into lower income groups.

The decline in income is attributed to the disruption of major livelihood activities, particularly farming and livestock production, which constitute the primary economic activities of rural households in Benue and Nasarawa States. Farmer–herder conflicts often result in the destruction of farmlands, abandonment of agricultural activities, livestock losses, restricted access to markets, and displacement of economically active populations. As a result, households experience reduced production capacity, loss of productive assets, and diminished income-generating opportunities.

This finding supports the argument of Adebayo (2020) that violent conflicts in rural Nigeria weaken household economies by reducing agricultural productivity, limiting access to farmland, and increasing poverty among affected populations. Similarly, International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022) reported that conflict-induced displacement in Nigeria significantly affects household income sources because displaced persons lose access to land, employment opportunities, and productive resources. The increase in the proportion of respondents earning below ₦50,000 during conflict aligns with these observations, showing how insecurity contributes to economic decline and livelihood deterioration.

The result also agrees with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework proposed by Chambers & Conway (1992), which explains that households depend on access to livelihood assets such as natural resources, financial capital, physical assets, and social networks. Conflict weakens these assets by destroying farms, disrupting markets, reducing employment opportunities, and limiting access to natural resources. Consequently, households are forced to adopt survival strategies that often generate lower income compared with their pre-conflict livelihoods.

Table 2. Adoption of New Income-Generating Activities (N = 400)

New Activities Adopted	%
None	36.0
1	9.7
2	19.5
3	15.8
More than 3	19.0
Total	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 2 presents the adoption of new income-generating activities by households affected by farmer-herder conflict. The findings indicate that conflict significantly influenced livelihood diversification among respondents, as many households adopted alternative economic activities as coping mechanisms. However, a considerable proportion of respondents (36.0%) reported adopting no new income-generating activity, suggesting that some households lacked the financial capacity, skills, social networks, or access to opportunities required to adjust their livelihoods after conflict disruption. Substantial number of households engaged in multiple livelihood strategies to compensate for income losses caused by conflict. The adoption of multiple activities reflects household efforts to reduce economic vulnerability and rebuild livelihoods in an unstable environment.

The finding supports the sustainable livelihoods framework of Chambers & Conway (1992), which explains that households respond to shocks by modifying their livelihood strategies through diversification and increased reliance on available assets. In conflict-affected areas, households often shift away from traditional activities such as farming and livestock production towards alternative sources of income, including petty trading, casual labour, food processing, small businesses, and service activities. These strategies help households survive when their primary livelihood systems are disrupted.

The result agrees with Ellis (2000), who argued that rural households commonly diversify their income sources in response to economic uncertainties, environmental shocks, and social instability. According to Ellis, livelihood diversification reduces dependence on a single source of income and enhances household resilience. The adoption of multiple income-generating activities observed in this study demonstrates how conflict-affected households attempt to adapt to changing economic conditions.

Similarly, studies by Mercy Corps (2021) and IOM (2022) found that conflict and displacement in Nigeria often force affected populations to adopt alternative livelihood activities because access to farmland, livestock resources, and markets becomes restricted. The presence of respondents adopting more than three activities (19.0%) reflects the desperate search for

economic survival among households whose previous livelihoods have been weakened by insecurity.

.**Table 3. Days of Economic Activity Lost to Conflict (N = 400)**

Days Lost	%
1–30	32.0
31–90	28.7
91–180	26.0
Over 180	13.3
Total	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 3 showed the number of days respondents lost economic activities due to conflict. The results indicate that farmer–herder conflict caused considerable disruption to household economic productivity. About 32.0% of respondents lost between 1–30 days of economic activity, while 28.7% experienced losses lasting between 31–90 days. Furthermore, 26.0% reported losing between 91–180 days, and 13.3% lost economic activities for more than 180 days.

The findings revealed that conflict significantly interrupted livelihood activities, with many households experiencing prolonged periods of reduced or completely suspended economic engagement. The loss of economic days can be attributed to displacement, insecurity, destruction of productive assets, restricted movement, fear of attacks, closure of markets, and inability to access farmland. For farming communities, conflict often results in missed planting seasons, abandonment of cultivated fields, and reduced agricultural output, which directly affects household income.

This finding is consistent with Okoli and Atelhe (2014), who observed that farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria disrupt rural economies by limiting agricultural production, damaging property, and reducing opportunities for economic engagement. Similarly, International Crisis Group (2017) reported that recurring conflicts between farming and pastoral communities have contributed to livelihood insecurity by preventing communities from accessing productive resources and engaging freely in economic activities.

4.3 Effects on Food Security and Household Expenditure

The effects of food security and household expenditure is shown in Table 4 and 5

Table 4. Meal Frequency Before and During Conflict (N = 400)

Meals per Day	Before (%)	During (%)
One or less	11.5	29.5
Two	31.0	40.5
Three or more	57.5	30.0
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

The findings from Table 4 indicated that conflict negatively affected households' ability to access adequate food, as the proportion of households consuming three or more meals daily declined from 57.5% before the conflict to 30.0% during the conflict. Conversely, households consuming one meal or less per day increased substantially from 11.5% before the conflict to 29.5% during the conflict. This shift demonstrates a decline in food availability, reduced purchasing power, and increased vulnerability to hunger among conflict-affected households.

The reduction in meal frequency is linked to the disruption of agricultural production, loss of livelihoods, displacement, and rising food prices associated with violent conflicts. In farming communities, conflict often prevents households from accessing farmlands, cultivating crops, harvesting produce, or participating in local markets. Consequently, households experience reduced food supplies and income losses, forcing them to adopt food consumption strategies as reducing meal frequency, limiting portion sizes, or relying on less nutritious food options.

This finding agrees with the World Food Programme (WFP, 2022), which reported that conflict and insecurity are major drivers of food insecurity because they disrupt food production systems, restrict market access, and reduce household purchasing power. The decline in the number of households consuming three or more meals daily reflects the broader impact of conflict on food availability and household nutrition.

Table 5. Monthly Household Food Expenditure Before and During Conflict (N = 400)

Expenditure (₦)	Before (%)	During (%)
1,000–10,000	34.5	13.0
10,001–20,000	37.3	23.5
21,001–30,000	17.7	32.0
30,001–40,000	8.0	19.8
40,001 and above	2.5	11.7
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 5 shows changes in monthly household food expenditure before and during the conflict. The findings reveal a shift in household food spending patterns, with more households moving into higher expenditure categories during the conflict period. Before the conflict, most households spent between ₦10,001-₦20,000 (37.3%) and ₦1,000-₦10,000 (34.5%) monthly on food. However, during the conflict, the proportion spending ₦21,001-₦30,000 increased from 17.7% to 32.0%, while those spending ₦30,001-₦40,000 rose from 8.0% to 19.8%. Similarly, households spending ₦40,001 and above increased from 2.5% to 11.7%.

The increase in food expenditure during conflict reflects rising food prices, reduced local food production, and increased dependence on purchased food due to disrupted farming activities. Although households experienced declining incomes, they were forced to spend more on food because of market shortages, transportation costs, and inflationary pressures associated with insecurity. This indicates a decline in household economic welfare, as a larger share of income is directed towards meeting basic food needs.

The finding agrees with FAO (2021), which reported that conflict disrupts agricultural production and food supply chains, leading to increased food prices and reduced access to affordable food. Similarly, WFP (2022) noted that conflict-affected households often experience increased food expenditure despite declining income because insecurity limits food availability and weakens household purchasing power.

Conclusion

This study concludes that farmer–herder conflict has produced significant negative socio-economic consequences on affected households in the study area. The findings revealed that conflict disrupted major livelihood activities by reducing farm sizes, causing substantial losses in livestock holdings, and limiting access to productive resources. The reduction in cultivated land and herd ownership demonstrates how insecurity, displacement, and restricted movement weakened agricultural and pastoral production systems.

The study further established that conflict contributed to declining household income and increased economic vulnerability. Many households shifted from higher income categories to lower income groups due to the destruction of livelihoods, loss of productive assets, and reduced economic opportunities. Although some households adopted alternative income-generating activities as coping strategies, a significant proportion lacked the resources needed to diversify their livelihoods effectively.

The study also concludes that farmer–herder conflict adversely affected household food security. Reduced agricultural production, income losses, and rising food costs resulted in fewer households consuming three or more meals daily, while dependence on higher food expenditure increased during the conflict period. Overall, the findings demonstrate that farmer–herder conflict extends beyond physical insecurity to undermine livelihoods, household welfare, and food security. Therefore, sustainable conflict resolution, livelihood restoration programmes, agricultural support, and measures that improve access to productive resources are essential for rebuilding resilience among affected communities.

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