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## ANALYSIS: IMPACT OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT ON FOOD SECURITY IN BENUE SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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### Abstract

*This study examines the impact of communal conflict on food security in Benue South Senatorial District, Nigeria, from 2014 to 2024. The research population comprised farming and herding communities directly affected by communal conflicts in the region. Using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula, a sample of 381 respondents was selected for the study. Employing a descriptive survey research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires focusing on the four pillars of food security: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was used to analyze the relationships between conflict and food security indicators. The findings indicate that communal conflicts have significantly disrupted food production, market access, dietary diversity, and overall food system stability, exacerbating food insecurity and economic hardship in the affected communities. The study recommends integrated conflict resolution, improved rural infrastructure, and community resilience initiatives to restore food security and foster sustainable peace in Benue South Senatorial District.*

**Keywords:** Communal Conflict, Food Security, Agricultural Production, Displacement and Community Resilience

### 1. Introduction

Conflicts are a recognized driver of food insecurity, severing agricultural production, displacing people, and destabilizing food supply chains globally (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2021). The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417 (2018) underscores the use of hunger as a weapon of war, showing its impact on food availability and access. Regions such as the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa experience sharp rises in food insecurity due to destroyed infrastructure and hampered humanitarian aid. In West Africa, conflict, climate variability, and economic shocks have further escalated hunger. The World Food Programme (2022) reports that over 31 million people faced food insecurity in 2022, up 30% from the prior year, with conflicts in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria causing mass displacement and surging food prices.

Across Africa, communal disputes over land, water, and political control have led to over \$120 billion in agricultural losses in recent decades (Adepoju, 2019). Marxist perspectives interpret these conflicts as resource struggles, fueling cycles of deprivation and food scarcity (Nwosu, 2020). In Nigeria, especially in the Middle Belt, farmer-herder violence has increased since 2014, reducing crop yields, raising prices, and disrupting markets (Onuk Bulus & Arima, 2023). Studies in Khana Local Government area showed land disputes and unequal resource allocation worsen farming and malnutrition (Wukari International Studies Journal, 2023).

Socio-economic disparities and environmental issues like drought and floods further threaten agriculture. Estimates suggest food production must rise 59–102% by 2050 for the projected population of 9.2 billion (Silva, 2018). Poverty and inequality keep nutritious food out of reach for many, even in food-rich nations (Prosekov &

Ivanova, 2018; Sibhatu & Qaim, 2017). Recent global conflicts have further deepened food insecurity, especially where agriculture is the economic base. The World Food Programme finds conflict is now a leading cause of hunger, with regions like Yemen and Syria relying heavily on international aid due to agricultural collapse (FAO, 2016; FAO, 2024). Disrupted supply, lost infrastructure, and hikes in food prices worsen conditions for the vulnerable, highlighting the need for conflict-sensitive policies (Keen, 1994).

Africa faces food insecurity rooted in politics, economics, and environment, with the Global Hunger Index marking Sub-Saharan Africa as especially at risk (FAO, 2024). Most nations depend on agriculture, but conflict, land loss, and climate volatility reduce food supply and distribution. Rainfall shifts and droughts further threaten yields (Mbow et al., 2020). West Africa, especially the Sahel, has been hit by communal clashes between pastoralists and farmers, affecting food production and prompting migration. These conflicts drive poverty, restrict land access, and push reliance on food aid (Thornton, 2010; Peters, 2018).

In Nigeria, food insecurity is closely tied to communal violence. Benue State has been hardest hit, with herder-farmer conflicts upending production and pushing communities into poverty (Fasoyiro & Taiwo, 2012; Achanya & Luma, 2024). Resource scarcity, ethnic divisions, and population growth fuel these issues, as displaced rural and urban populations face market disruptions and income loss (Kughur et al., 2022; Gbatse et al., 2022).

Benue's reliance on agriculture makes each conflict devastating. Farmland loss, worker displacement, and declines in output drive up prices and deepen instability. Economic disruption leaves households vulnerable to poverty, sparking further tensions (Audu et al., 2023; Furini, 2019). To address these challenges, experts advocate holistic, multi-sectoral solutions tackling the roots of conflict, fair resource allocation, land management, and community-centric dispute resolution. Support for farm reintegration, crop diversification, and market access can help build resilience (Sarkingobir et al., 2023).

The ongoing communal conflicts in Benue State, especially in the South Senatorial District, pose serious threats to food security, requiring focused study. Food security includes availability, access, utilization, and

stability essential for healthy populations and thriving economies. Known as Nigeria's "Food Basket," Benue's agricultural potential is undercut by violent clashes between farming and herding communities. These conflicts displace farmers, lower crop yields, and increase food prices, threatening livelihoods and nutrition. These conflicts result from socio-economic, environmental, and political challenges. Resource scarcity, worsened by climate variability, fuels competition over land and water, escalating tensions between farmers and pastoralists. Climate change disrupts traditional farming through irregular rainfall and drought, reducing yields. These disputes destroy infrastructure, displace people, and create insecurity that discourages investment in agriculture, perpetuating food insecurity.

The impacts extend across all food security dimensions. Availability decreases as farmers lose land access; accessibility declines as food becomes scarcer and costlier; utilization suffers when displaced people shift to less nutritious diets; stability is threatened by recurring violence deterring long-term agricultural investment. Addressing food insecurity in Benue needs more than increased production. It demands tackling root causes like equitable resource sharing, sustainable land use, and effective conflict resolution. Yet, there is limited research on how these conflicts uniquely affect food security in Benue South Senatorial District. This study aims to fill that gap by empirically examining the specific socio-economic drivers and consequences, providing vital insights for policy and intervention design to promote sustainable development and resilience locally.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

This section establishes a solid foundation for the study by providing scholarly and academically defining and explicating the key concepts and theoretical constructs that underpin the research topic. The rationale for defining these central concepts and their operational definitions within the context of the study was for maintaining consistency and avoiding ambiguity throughout the research process.

#### Communal Conflict

The persistent occurrence of communal conflict in Benue South Senatorial District is not only a humanitarian crisis but also a significant barrier to

sustainable development and poverty reduction in the region. As observed in similar contexts across sub-Saharan Africa, the cyclical pattern of violence and food insecurity creates a complex web of challenges that perpetuate vulnerability among affected populations (FAO, 2016; Mbow et al., 2020). When farming communities are displaced, they lose access to their primary means of livelihood, which in turn disrupts local food markets and undermines the economic stability of entire communities. This displacement often leads to the emergence of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where living conditions are typically poor, and access to adequate nutrition is severely limited (Academia.edu, 2019). The resulting dependency on humanitarian aid further erodes community resilience and self-sufficiency.

### **Food**

Food is any substance consumed to provide nutritional support for the body, supplying essential nutrients such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, or minerals. These nutrients are necessary for the body to function optimally, supporting processes such as metabolism, growth, and tissue repair. Food can originate from plant or animal sources and is typically ingested, digested, and absorbed to maintain life and promote health. The quality and quantity of food consumed directly influence an individual's overall well-being, making access to adequate and nutritious food a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of public health (Thomson, 2009).

Food is fundamental to human survival, serving as a source of energy and nutrients necessary for growth, development, and the maintenance of life. Without food, the human body cannot perform essential functions such as movement, temperature regulation, and cellular repair. Food provides the calories needed for daily activities and the building blocks for new tissues. The absence of sufficient food leads to malnutrition, disease, and eventually death. Thus, ensuring consistent access to safe and nutritious food is a primary concern for societies worldwide, as it underpins economic productivity and social stability (Thomson, 2009).

### **Food Security**

This study will adopt (Korzeniowski, 2016) definition of security because it defined security in better shape that is tailored to the concept of this research work. Food

security is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that has evolved in both academic and policy discourse to reflect the complex realities of modern societies. At its foundation, food security is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as a condition in which “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2008, p. 1). This definition is widely adopted and forms the basis for global efforts to address hunger and malnutrition. However, the practical realization of food security is fraught with challenges, especially in regions affected by socio-economic inequalities, environmental change, and violent conflict (Pawlak & Kołodziejczak, 2020).

The four pillars of food security—availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability—provide a framework for understanding and addressing the various factors that influence whether individuals and communities can reliably access adequate nutrition. Food availability refers to the physical presence of food, whether from local production, imports, or food aid. It is determined by factors such as agricultural productivity, infrastructure, and trade policies. In Benue State, Nigeria, communal conflicts have severely undermined food availability by displacing farmers, destroying crops, and disrupting supply chains (Achanya & Luma, 2024; Fasoyiro & Taiwo, 2012). Even with technological advances in agriculture, availability can be compromised by violence, climate shocks, and poor governance, leading to persistent shortages and price volatility (FAO, 2016; Mbow et al., 2020).

### **Dimension of Food Security**

Four dimensions of food security have been identified according to the definition (Thomson, 2009)

#### **Effects of Communal Conflict on Food Availability**

Food availability refers to the physical presence of sufficient quantities of food, whether produced locally, imported, or provided as aid (FAO, 2008). In Benue State, communal conflicts have drastically reduced food availability. Violent clashes often result in the destruction of farmlands, crops, and livestock, directly diminishing agricultural output (Adewuyi & Odeh,

2024). Many farmers have been forced to abandon their fields due to fear of attack, while others have lost access to their land entirely through displacement (Apenda, 2023).

The destruction of infrastructure-such as roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems-further disrupts the food supply chain, making it difficult to transport produce to markets or store surplus for lean periods (Ukwueze, 2023). As a result, the volume and variety of food available in local markets decline, leading to shortages and increased reliance on food imports or humanitarian aid. This situation is exacerbated by seasonal fluctuations and climate-related shocks, which further reduce the reliability of food supplies (Thornton, 2010).

### **Effects of Communal Conflict on Food Accessibility**

Food accessibility concerns the ability of individuals and households to obtain sufficient food, either through purchase, production, or social networks (FAO, 2008). In conflict-affected areas of Benue State, accessibility is severely constrained by both physical and economic barriers. Displacement due to violence often forces families into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where they are cut off from their traditional sources of food and income (Academia.edu, 2019). The loss of livelihoods and assets-such as land, tools, and livestock-reduces household purchasing power, making it difficult to afford food even when it is available in markets (Gbatse et al., 2022).

Moreover, the destruction of transportation infrastructure, such as the Otukpo-Obollo Afor-Opi-9th Mile Road, has led to skyrocketing food prices in southern Nigeria, as the cost of moving goods from production areas to consumers increases dramatically (Ukwueze, 2023). This economic barrier disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly, who may lack the resources or social networks to secure adequate food.

### **Effects of Communal Conflict on Food Utilization**

Food utilization refers to the proper biological use of food, requiring a diet that provides sufficient energy and essential nutrients, as well as access to clean water,

sanitation, and healthcare (FAO, 2008). Communal conflict undermines food utilization in several ways. Displacement often leads to overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions in IDP camps, increasing the risk of disease and malnutrition (Academia.edu, 2019). With limited access to diverse and nutritious foods, displaced families may resort to less varied diets, relying on staple grains and forgoing fruits, vegetables, and protein sources.

The psychological stress of conflict and displacement can also affect dietary practices, as families prioritize immediate survival over long-term nutritional needs (Furini, 2019). Children and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of poor utilization, as inadequate nutrition during critical periods can have lifelong consequences for health and development (Prosekov & Ivanova, 2018).

### **Effects of communal Conflict on Food Stability**

Food stability means having consistent access to adequate food at all times, without the risk of losing access due to sudden shocks or cyclical events (FAO, 2008). In Benue State, the recurrent nature of communal conflicts undermines the stability of food systems. Each new outbreak of violence can undo years of agricultural investment and recovery, creating a cycle of instability that makes it difficult for communities to rebuild their livelihoods or plan for the future (Thornton, 2010).

Climate variability and environmental degradation further threaten stability, as erratic rainfall and soil depletion reduce the resilience of local food systems (Mbow et al., 2020). The cumulative effect of these shocks is chronic food insecurity, with many households experiencing repeated periods of hunger and deprivation. This instability not only affects immediate food access but also erodes the social and economic foundations needed for long-term development and peace.

### **Socio-Economic and Policy Implications of communal Conflict**

The socio-economic consequences of communal conflict on food security in Benue State are profound. The loss of agricultural productivity translates into reduced household incomes, increased poverty, and greater

dependence on external assistance (Adewuyi & Odeh, 2024). The destruction of schools, health centers, and other social infrastructure further undermines community resilience, making it harder to recover from shocks or invest in future growth (Apenda, 2023).

From a policy perspective, addressing food insecurity in conflict-prone areas requires a multifaceted approach. Scholars emphasize the need for conflict-sensitive agricultural policies that promote equitable resource allocation, sustainable land management, and community-based conflict resolution (Yusufu et al., 2020). Interventions should also focus on rebuilding infrastructure, supporting displaced populations to resume farming, and providing targeted assistance to the most vulnerable groups (Sarkingobir et al., 2023).

The Nigerian government must also review and reform existing land tenure laws to reduce disputes and promote peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders (Achanya & Luma, 2024). Policies that address population growth, climate adaptation, and economic diversification are essential for building resilient food systems capable of withstanding future shocks.

### **Impact of Security Challenges on Food Production in Nigeria**

Good health is desired by all human and can be largely assured from adequate intake of quality food. Due to increased security challenges in Nigeria, availability of sufficient food for everyone has become a major challenge in Nigeria. Also, population is swiftly increasing while food production is declining. Nigeria is faced with population growth and is expected to double by 2050, and by 2100, the population is predicted to reach 800 million (Olowe, 2020). The assumption is that in subsequent years there will be limited land for food production (Olowe, 2020). The expected growth is tremendously worrisome, as no mechanistic approach has been projected to address its probable consequences in Nigeria. This may exacerbate the current fragile food security caused by especially insecurity, and future food security may not be guarantee. To ensure sustainable (present and future) food security in Nigeria, population growth must significantly translate to food production sufficient to ensure national and household food security

(Abdulrahman, 2013). This implies that food production at all times must exceeds (double or triple) the desired food requirement by the population. Furthermore, this may help overcome the problem of food and nutrition insecurity in order to achieve a sustainable development goal for “Zero hunger” (Wongnaa & Awunyo-Vitor, 2018).

However, with little emphasis on agriculture (as it has been in Nigeria), particularly amidst security challenges coupled with population growth, the United Nations (UN) effort towards achieving the sustainable development goal for “Zero hunger” would be impossible in Nigeria, even beyond 2030. Agricultural sector is one of the least priorities of the government, as oil sector is perceived as the only redeemer of the Nigeria economy (Okoi, 2019). Over the years it has been proven that the oil sector is not the only way forward. Yet the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has not deemed it necessary to give agriculture a top most priority (Olowa & Olowa, 2014). Although the oil sector got all it could to take Nigeria beyond development, unfortunately it hasn’t for obvious reasons. The over dependent on oil alone may further increase restiveness, insecurity, volatility and fragility of Nigeria economy.

In recent times an increasing number of persons in rural communities are shunning agriculture for white-collar jobs in the urban cities, largely due to security challenges in rural communities. Many of the migrants originate from rural areas, and young people constitute a larger percentage, leaving women and aged members of the society to constitute the labour force of rural communities (World Bank, 2011). Consequently, food production decreases. Reasons for the migration maybe justifiable, though on a more complex reason, people migrate or force to leave due to cultural, demographic, socio-economic, ethnic conflicts, environmental, natural disasters, or political (large scale infrastructure projects and resettlement), and largely as a result of security challenges (Tanle *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, it could be the preference for industrial sectors or urban jobs. This has over the years contributed to a substantial decrease in food production, and consequently increases in food prices, food insecurity and security challenges in Nigeria. A group of researchers highlighted that rural-

urban migration has a deteriorative impact on rural economy, a major cause of poor food production, and consequently food insecurity (Babi *et al.*, 2017). The economy of the rural communities is driven by agricultural activities by the people living in them (rural communities). Hence, the more rural-urban migration surface, the more will be the food insecurity, and poverty rate in Nigeria. Increased population growth and decreased farming activities caused by the security challenges, are conjugal factors that have contributed significantly to decline food production, and consequently national food insecurity in Nigeria.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

From the conceptual clarification of the key variables in the preceding section, the researcher has extensively elucidated key concept pertinent to the study, drawing upon a diverse array of scholarly investigations conducted by various authors across the globe. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that different scholars have undertaken empirical studies on topics related to the one under investigation, with varying scopes and emphases. Consequently, this section aims to provide a comprehensive review of these studies, while concurrently identifying the existing gaps within them.

A study by Sambe, Avanger, and Alakali (2013) examines the impact of communal violence on food security in Benue State, Nigeria, focusing on how violent conflicts disrupt agricultural activities and food supply. The objective was to analyze both direct and indirect consequences of communal violence on food production and access. The population included rural farming communities in Benue State. The sample size was not explicitly stated, but the research was based on secondary data and field observations. The Marxist theory, emphasizing group interest and competition for resources, underpinned the analysis. Data were collected through literature review and key informant interviews. The method of data analysis was qualitative content analysis. Findings revealed that communal violence leads to destruction of infrastructure, plundering of crops and livestock, displacement of labor, and use of food as a weapon, all of which limit food access and reduce agricultural output. The study concluded that the effects

of violence on food security persist long after conflicts end due to asset destruction and population displacement (Sambe *et al.*, 2013).

Apenda's research investigates how herders' conflicts have affected food security in Benue State (Apenda 2023). The objective was to assess the impact of these conflicts on farm output and human capital. The population consisted of farmers affected by herder-farmer conflicts, with a sample size of 320 selected through survey design. The study used the tragedy of the commons theory, which posits that shared resources are often overexploited, leading to resource depletion. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and oral interviews. Descriptive statistics were used for analysis. The findings showed significant loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, residences, and schools, leading to a drastic decline in farm output and increased food insecurity. The study recommends strong government intervention to address the crisis (Apenda, 2023).

Agbese and Ojo (2019) investigated the impact of communal conflicts on food accessibility in Benue State, focusing on how recurrent farmer-herder clashes disrupt farming activities and limit access to food in rural communities. The objective was to analyze the extent to which violence affects the ability of households to obtain sufficient and affordable food. The population comprised farmers and pastoralists in conflict-prone local government areas of Benue State. Using stratified random sampling, 400 respondents were selected to represent both groups adequately. The Conflict Theory was employed, which explains that social conflicts arise from competition over scarce resources, disrupting economic and social systems, including food access. Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with community leaders and farmers were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to examine the relationship between conflict intensity and food accessibility. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The study found that communal conflicts significantly reduce food accessibility by causing farm

abandonment, destruction of crops, and displacement of farmers. The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between conflict frequency and food access. The authors concluded that sustained violence threatens food security by limiting physical and economic access to food and recommended conflict resolution mechanisms and government interventions to protect farmlands and improve food accessibility (Agbese & Ojo, 2019).

Yusufu et al., (2020) carried a systematic study on Resource Scarcity and Farmer-Herder Conflict: Implications for Food Utilization. This study examined how resource-based conflicts between farmers and herders have affected food security, with a focus on food utilization in Benue State. The objective was to determine the relationship between resource conflict and various dimensions of food security, including utilization. Using a multi-stage sampling procedure, 360 respondents (180 herders and 180 farmers) were selected. The Resource Access Theory (RAT) framed the analysis, positing that conflicts arise from competition over ecological resources. Data were collected through structured questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale and analyzed with descriptive statistics and Chi Square tests. The findings revealed that communal conflicts disrupt food utilization by displacing populations, reducing access to farmland, and undermining dietary diversity. Displacement and insecurity led to reduced household food stocks and forced reliance on less preferred foods, negatively impacting nutrition and food utilization patterns in affected communities (Yusufu et al., 2020).

Gabriel A. (2024) investigated the Impact of Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict on Food Security in Benue State. The objective was to understand how violence and displacement affect dietary practices and nutritional outcomes. The population included displaced farmers and affected households, with data gathered via in-depth oral interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The study was guided by conflict theory, highlighting the role of resource competition. Analysis was thematic and qualitative. Findings showed that communal violence led to mass displacement, land degradation, and loss of livelihoods, which in turn resulted in decreased access to

diverse and nutritious foods. Many households reported skipping meals and reducing portion sizes, indicating compromised food utilization and increased malnutrition risk (Gabriel, 2024).

Okeke, and Eze, (2021) explored the socioeconomic impact of communal conflicts on food stability in Benue State. The objective was to understand how recurrent violence affects household food security and the broader food system. The population included households in conflict-prone areas, with a sample of 300 respondents selected via stratified random sampling. The Social Conflict Theory was used to explain how competition over scarce resources leads to violence and food instability. Data collection involved structured questionnaires and key informant interviews, analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings indicated that communal conflicts disrupt agricultural activities, leading to reduced food production and erratic food supply. Households experienced fluctuating food availability, resulting in unstable consumption patterns and increased vulnerability to hunger (Okeke & Eze, 2021). The study recommended peace building initiatives and sustainable agricultural practices to enhance food stability.

Adewale and Musa, (2022) examined the Role of Displacement in Food Stability among Benue Communities. The objective was to assess how forced migration affects food access and continuity of food supply. The study population comprised internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities, with a sample of 250 respondents. The Forced Migration Theory guided the research framework. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. Results revealed that displacement led to loss of farmland, disruption of food production cycles, and dependence on food aid, which collectively undermined food stability. IDPs reported irregular food supply and poor dietary diversity, highlighting the long-term effects of conflict-induced displacement on food security (Adewale & Musa, 2022).

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

To understand the impact of communal conflict on food security in Benue South Senatorial District, a robust theoretical framework is essential for examining the study problem through a well-grounded theoretical perspective. This study employs a range of theories that align with its objectives and offer a nuanced approach to the subject. The selected theories include conflict theory, human needs theory (HNT), frustration-aggression theory, and eco-violence theory (EVT). This research work is anchored on Frustration Aggression Theory because it best explained the concept of the

### Frustration-Aggression Theory

Frustration-Aggression Theory (FAT), originally proposed by Dollard and Miller in 1939 and later refined by Berkowitz in 1969, offers a practical lens for understanding communal conflict, especially in resource-limited environments like Benue South Senatorial District. FAT suggests aggression emerges from frustration when efforts toward important goals are obstructed. Frustration produces a latent tendency for aggression; however, aggression manifests only when triggered by environmental “cues.” Berkowitz (1969) noted that minor provocations or triggers can set off aggression in frustrated individuals (Myers, 2007). In Benue, FAT helps explain how blocked agricultural and pastoral objectives among farmers and herders generate tensions, and how small incidents can escalate these frustrations into violent conflict.

FAT’s relevance lies in its explanation of how communal conflicts develop when goals are repeatedly blocked. Farmers in Benue South become frustrated when their crops are destroyed by grazing cattle, threatening their income and food security. Herders, meanwhile, are frustrated when their cattle’s access to grazing land or water is impeded. These mutual frustrations can precipitate aggression, especially as each group sees the other as an obstacle to survival. The cyclical nature of conflict, where small provocations (like cattle straying or water disputes) spark disproportionate aggression, is evident in incidents such as Fulani herders’ attacks, often linked to longstanding resource competition. As Rationis (2014) notes, even minor confrontations can ignite

deeply rooted frustrations. FAT frames farmer-herder conflict as a cycle, where both groups act as barriers to each other’s goals, and accumulated frustration makes violence more likely. Seemingly trivial triggers—cattle on farmland or a farmer using shared water—can produce disproportional aggression, leading to cycles of retaliation. This predictive quality is useful for designing policy interventions; recognizing that unmet needs increase readiness for aggression, proactive efforts can help reduce frustration and prevent escalation.

A major strength of FAT is its clear link between goal blockage and aggression, providing an intuitive framework for understanding conflict escalation in settings like Benue South, where disputes often evolve into cycles of retaliation. Policymakers can apply this understanding to alleviate frustrations and address triggers. Yet, FAT has limitations. It sometimes oversimplifies social dynamics, focusing mostly on frustration while neglecting factors like political manipulation, historical grievances, and cultural beliefs. Though FAT helps clarify how resource competition leads to frustration, it doesn’t fully account for the influence of broader socio-political dynamics. Critics argue FAT’s deterministic outlook underestimates how frustration can, at times, be resolved non-violently (Myers, 2007).

### Eco-Violence Theory

Eco-Violence Theory (EVT), developed by Homer-Dixon (1942), is key to understanding the link between environmental resource scarcity and violent conflict. EVT suggests that competition over limited resources like land and water causes scarcity, which drives population migration and escalates conflicts, especially where resource access is unequal. In Benue State’s farmer-herder conflict, EVT explains how uneven resource distribution intensifies competition and social instability.

The migration of herders to Benue, attracted by available pastures, heightens struggles over land and water with farmers. This competition creates a zero-sum situation where one group’s gain means the other’s loss. EVT highlights how resource scarcity disrupts social and economic practices, harming food security by reducing

availability, access, stability, and utilization—through land disputes, community displacement, and farmland destruction.

EVT's interdisciplinary approach links environmental, social, and economic factors to conflict, especially relevant in drought-affected regions like Benue. It stresses environmental constraints' role in shaping conflict, moving beyond simplistic ethnic or cultural explanations. However, critics argue EVT overlooks governance failures and socio-political inequalities that also worsen conflicts and underestimates communities' resilience and adaptation strategies.

Human Needs Theory (HNT), developed by Maslow (1943) and expanded by Burton and Azar, complements this view by focusing on fundamental human needs—security, identity, recognition, and development—essential for social stability. In Benue South, communal conflicts arise from struggles over basic resources like land and water, which are vital to farmers' and herders' survival and identity. When these needs are unmet, conflict becomes almost inevitable.

HNT explains that competition here is not merely economic but driven by deeper psychological and social needs. The failure of institutions to fairly address these needs fosters zero-sum thinking, exacerbating conflicts. These conflicts cause displacement, farmland abandonment, and agricultural disruption, which hurts food security comprehensively.

While HNT offers a deep understanding of conflict roots, it may neglect sociocultural and political complexities unique to multi-ethnic areas like Benue South. Nonetheless, it underscores the importance of inclusive policies addressing fundamental needs to achieve lasting peace and food security.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

A well-conceived research design enables the study to systematically address its objectives, ensure the validity

and reliability of findings, and facilitate meaningful conclusions and recommendations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given the multifaceted nature of the research problem, this study will adopt a mixed design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This choice aligns with the study's aim to not only quantify the impacts of communal conflict on food security but also to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the affected population. Scholars in social science research advocate for cross-sectional methods approaches as particularly effective in studies requiring both depth and breadth of understanding, especially when exploring socio-political and economic phenomena like communal conflict and food security (Johnson *et al.*, 2007).

#### 3.2 Population, Sample Size Determination and Sampling Procedure

This section outlines the study's target population, details the process for determining an appropriate sample size, and describes the sampling technique that will be utilized throughout the research.

#### 3.3 Population for the Study

The target population for this study will include a diverse group of individuals and stakeholders directly or indirectly impacted by communal conflict, such as agricultural households, community leaders, displaced individuals, and government officials. This varied population enables a comprehensive examination of the conflict's impact on food availability, access, utilization, and stability, offering insights into the socio-economic and food security challenges in the region (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The primary participants of the study will include 1,500 rural households – 500 from each of the Agatu, APA, and Ogbadibo LGAs, who are directly engaged in farming and livestock rearing, and are therefore likely to be significantly affected by the conflict's impact on food production.

For a detailed breakdown of the study's target population, refer to Table 1.

**Table 1: Target population of the Study**

| S/N | Target group                                                       | Target Population               |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1   | Rural households                                                   | 1,499                           |
| 2   | Community leaders                                                  | 69                              |
| 3   | Displaced person                                                   | 495                             |
| 4   | Local government officials                                         | 194                             |
| 5   | Officials of Benue state Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security | 302                             |
| 6   | Officers of the Nigerian Police Force                              | 61                              |
|     |                                                                    | <b>Total Population = 2,620</b> |

Source: *Author's computation, 2025.*

### 3.4 Sample Size Determination

There are numerous methods for determining sample size, each tailored to different research types and data requirements. In this study, the Taro Yamane (1967) formula was utilized to estimate the proposed sample size for the study, as it is particularly effective for calculating population proportions. Using this method, the study's sample size was derived as follows:

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

Where:

$n$  = the sample size,

$N$  = the population size (2,620 in this case),

$e$  = is the margin of error, typically expressed as a decimal (0.05 for 5% in this case).

Substitute the values in to the formular:

$$n = \frac{2,620}{1 + 2,620(0.05^2)}$$

$$\text{Calculating } (0.05)^2 = \frac{2,620}{1 + 2,620 \times 0.0025}$$

$$\text{Calculating } 2,620 \times 0.0025 = 6.55$$

$$n = \frac{2,620}{1 + 6.55} = \frac{2,620}{7.55} \approx 346.36$$

(From the above calculations, the sample size  $n$  is thus approximately  $n \approx 346$  participants. Thus, 10% of 346.36 which gives the total of 381 sample size to be consider for this research)

### 3.5 Method of Data Collection

The nature and sources of data for this study are carefully chosen to provide a comprehensive, empirical basis for understanding the multidimensional effects of conflict on food availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. To address the study's objectives, primary data will be utilized, enabling the study to capture current conditions in the field as well as contextualize findings within existing knowledge frameworks. Primary data will be sourced directly from individuals and households within the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue South Senatorial District, community leaders, displaced persons, and officials from local government and food security organizations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

#### Primary Data Collection

Primary data for this study will be collected directly from individuals and households within the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue South Senatorial District, including Agatu, APA and Ogbadibo. The primary data will be gathered using two key methods: survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

#### Survey Questionnaire

Survey questionnaires are particularly suited for this study, as they allow for systematic data collection from a large number of participants, providing quantitative insights into food security status and conflict experiences across the study area. This structured approach facilitates the collection of standardized responses, enabling analysis of patterns in how conflict impacts food security

dimensions, such as availability and accessibility, among households in the region (Fowler, 2013).

### 3.6 Techniques of Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis will employ both quantitative and qualitative techniques to achieve a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data will be analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, facilitating a detailed examination of the relationship between communal conflict and various dimensions of food security. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, will provide an initial overview of participant responses and highlight patterns within the data. These preliminary results will be organized in Microsoft Excel and then entered into IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26) and Smart Partial Least Square (Smart-PLS) for in-depth analysis. For inferential analysis, regression models will be applied to assess potential predictive relationships and interactions between variables, a method particularly well-suited for studies exploring correlations between social conflicts and economic or food security outcomes (Field, 2013).

## 4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study on the impact of communal conflict on food security in Benue South Senatorial District reveal significant disruptions across all four pillars of food security: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. The research established that communal conflicts, primarily between farming and herding communities, have directly contributed to reduced food production through farmland destruction and farmer displacement. As agricultural activities are hampered, the physical availability of food diminishes, leading to shortages in local markets. Moreover, accessibility to food suffers due to both economic and physical barriers. Displacement reduces household income and purchasing power, while damaged infrastructure limits the efficient distribution of food, causing price surges that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Food utilization is also negatively impacted as displaced communities face nutritional deficits, resorting to less diverse diets with

poor quality, compounded by poor sanitation and healthcare access. These factors increase malnutrition risks, particularly among children and pregnant women.

The study further highlights that the recurring nature of communal conflicts undermines food system stability, creating cycles of instability that impede agricultural recovery and long-term food security efforts. These disruptions exacerbate poverty and economic hardship, reducing community resilience. The findings underscore the urgent need for integrated conflict-resolution strategies, improved rural infrastructure, and community resilience programs to restore food security and foster sustainable peace in Benue South. This comprehensive analysis illuminates the multidimensional ways conflict undermines food security, offering critical insights for policy interventions aimed at stabilizing food systems and livelihoods in conflict-affected areas.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that communal conflicts in Benue South Senatorial District have severely damaged food security in all its aspects—availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Violence between farmers and herders has caused farmland destruction, displacement, and disruption of food supply chains, leading to reduced production and market access. These issues raise food prices and cut dietary diversity, worsening food insecurity and economic hardship. Conflict cycles and environmental challenges like climate variability further hinder recovery and stability. The findings call for comprehensive interventions addressing root causes such as fair resource distribution, sustainable land use, and conflict resolution. Strengthening infrastructure, aiding displaced persons, and building community resilience are vital for restoring food security and peace. Policymakers must reform land tenure and elevate agriculture in development plans to break the cycle of violence and insecurity. This research highlights the complex link between communal conflict and food security, offering crucial guidance for local and national policies to create stable, resilient food systems in affected areas.

- i. Develop and strengthen community-based conflict resolution frameworks that address the root causes of communal violence between farming and herding groups, promoting peaceful coexistence.
- ii. Prioritize the rehabilitation and expansion of rural infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems, to improve agricultural productivity and enhance market access for farmers.
- iii. Establish community-led initiatives such as cooperative farming, livelihood diversification, and social safety nets aimed at strengthening food security and assisting displaced persons in rebuilding their livelihoods.
- iv. Develop policies that encourage equitable sharing of land and water resources and adopt sustainable agricultural practices to reduce competition and environmental degradation.
- v. Undertake comprehensive reforms of land tenure systems to reduce disputes and conflicts, ensuring secure land rights and fostering trust between conflicting groups to sustain long-term peace and agricultural development.

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