

STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT AND THE MANAGEMENT OF FARMER-HERDERS CONFLICTS IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN BENUE STATE

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Accepted 23, July, 2026

This study examines stakeholders' engagement and the management of farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State. The primary objectives are to identify key stakeholders involved in the conflicts, evaluate the level of their engagement in conflict management processes, assess the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies, and analyze the challenges faced in stakeholder engagement. The study adopts the Stakeholder Theory, emphasizing the importance of inclusive participation for conflict resolution. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative interviews with 350 community leaders, security agencies, and local government officials, alongside qualitative surveys of 10 key selected stakeholders to gather comprehensive data. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, with a mean cutoff point of 2.50 guiding decision-making. Findings reveal that key stakeholders include farmers, herders, traditional rulers, security agencies, and government officials. Engagement levels vary, with some stakeholders actively involved, while others exhibit limited participation due to mistrust, resource constraints, and socio-political tensions. The strategies currently in place have had mixed success, often hampered by inadequate coordination and socio-cultural barriers. Major challenges identified include poor communication, lack of trust, political interference, and resource limitations. The study concludes that effective stakeholder engagement is vital for sustainable conflict resolution, and recommends fostering inclusive dialogue platforms, capacity building for stakeholders, enhanced communication channels, and policies that promote trust and cooperation.

Keywords: Stakeholders' engagement, farmer-herders conflicts, Stakeholder Theory, Benue State.

Introduction

Farmer-herders conflicts have emerged as a significant socio-economic and security challenge, not only in Nigeria but across various regions of Africa and globally. These conflicts are primarily driven by competition over land, water, and other natural resources, intensified by climate change, demographic pressures, and socio-political factors (IFPRI, 2019). Globally, pastoralist and farming communities often find themselves in conflict due to overlapping land use rights and environmental stressors, which threaten food security and social stability (Nori et al., 2012).

In Africa, the conflict between farmers and herders is a widespread phenomenon, particularly in the Sahel and East African regions, where rapid population growth and climate variability have exacerbated pastoralist-farmer tensions (Keenan et al., 2015). Countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan have experienced recurring violence rooted in resource scarcity and land tenure disputes, with devastating impacts on communities and national stability (Adeleke & Oladipo, 2021).

Nigeria, located at the heart of Africa's pastoralist-farmer conflicts, faces persistent violence and displacement due to these disputes. The country's diverse ethnic composition and land use practices have contributed to frequent clashes, especially in the Middle Belt region, including Benue State. The Nigerian government has recognized the need for stakeholder engagement, community participation, and integrated conflict management strategies to address these issues (Adebayo & Akinyoade, 2019).

Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of Nigeria," is significantly affected by farmer-herder conflicts, which threaten agricultural productivity and peace. The conflicts are fueled by competition over arable land, water sources, and grazing routes, worsened by climate change and population growth. Effective stakeholder engagement involving government agencies, local communities, traditional leaders, security forces, and civil society organizations is crucial for sustainable conflict resolution (Ogbu, 2018). Recognizing the complexity of these conflicts and adopting a participatory approach enhances the prospects for peace and development in the region.

Statement of the Problem

Farmer-herders conflicts have become a persistent and escalating challenge in Benue State, Nigeria, leading to significant socio-economic and security concerns (Arene et al., 2018). These conflicts are primarily driven by competition over land, water resources, and grazing routes, exacerbated by rapid population growth, climate change, and pastoralist expansion (Omogbe & Ojo, 2020). Despite the recognition of the critical role that stakeholders' engagement plays in conflict mitigation, there remains a considerable gap in effective participatory mechanisms involving farmers, herders, government agencies, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations (Umar & Abubakar, 2019).

The lack of inclusive engagement strategies has often resulted in unresolved disputes, violence, displacement, and economic disruption within Benue State (Ikelegbe & Ogbodo, 2017). Existing approaches tend to be top-down, ignoring local knowledge and the socio-cultural dynamics that underpin these conflicts (Adamu, 2019). Consequently, there is an urgent need to examine how stakeholder engagement can be optimized to foster sustainable conflict management and promote peaceful coexistence among farmers and herders in the region. This study aims to address the gap by investigating the extent, challenges, and opportunities of stakeholder engagement in managing farmer-herders conflicts in Benue State, thereby contributing to the development of more inclusive and effective conflict resolution frameworks.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study centered on "Stakeholders' Engagement and the Management of Farmer-Herders Conflicts in selected communities in Benue State". The specific objectives include:

- I. To identify key stakeholders involved in the farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State.
- II. To examine the level of stakeholders' engagement in farmer-herders conflict management processes in selected communities in Benue State.
- III. To assess the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State.
- IV. To analyze the challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflict in selected communities in Benue State.

Research Questions

The study was setup to answer the following research questions:

- I. Who are the key stakeholders involved in the farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State?
- II. What is the level of stakeholders' engagement in the farmer-herders conflict management processes in these communities?
- III. How effective are the current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State?
- IV. What are the challenges faced in stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflicts in these communities?

Review of Related Literature

Key stakeholders involved in the farmer-herders conflicts

Farmer-herders conflicts are complex and multifaceted, involving various stakeholders whose interests and actions influence the dynamics of these conflicts. Understanding these stakeholders is crucial for developing sustainable conflict resolution strategies.

Farmers: Farmers are primary stakeholders in these conflicts, relying on land for crop production. Their interests often center around land security, access to water, and protection from destruction of crops by herders' livestock (Oluwasina & Oluwasina, 2018). Farmers typically perceive herders as threats to their livelihood, especially when conflicts escalate to violence.

Herders: Herders, primarily Fulani pastoralists in West Africa, depend on grazing land and water resources for their livestock. Their mobility and traditional transhumance practices are vital for their livelihood (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010). Herders often view themselves as custodians of indigenous grazing rights but are sometimes accused of encroaching on farming land, leading to tensions.

Government and Security Agencies: Government institutions and security agencies are tasked with maintaining peace and enforcing laws related to land use and pastoral activities (Adebayo et al., 2020). Their role includes conflict mediation, law enforcement, and policy formulation. However, their effectiveness varies, often being criticized for bias or inefficiency.

Local Communities and Traditional Authorities: Local communities and traditional rulers play mediating roles and are often involved in customary dispute resolution. They possess indigenous knowledge systems that influence conflict

management (Okemakpo *et al.*, 2018). Their influence can either mitigate or exacerbate conflicts depending on their neutrality and authority.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society: NGOs and civil society groups are increasingly involved in advocacy, peacebuilding, and providing humanitarian aid. They facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties and promote sustainable land management practices (Ojanuga & Ajayi, 2019).

Land and Resource Management Institutions: Institutions responsible for land administration and resource management play a crucial role in defining land rights and access. Weak institutional frameworks often contribute to overlapping claims and disputes (Fasona & Omojola, 2017).

The level of stakeholders' engagement in farmer-herders conflict management processes

Farmer-herders conflicts have been a persistent issue in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa. These conflicts often arise due to competition for land, water, and other resources, leading to violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods (O'Brien *et al.*, 2019). Effective conflict management requires the active engagement of various stakeholders, including farmers, herders, government officials, and community leaders. Several studies have highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in conflict management. For instance, a study by O'Brien *et al.* (2019) in Kenya found that involving local communities in conflict management processes can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions. The study recommended that government officials, NGOs, and other stakeholders should engage with local communities to identify and address the root causes of conflicts.

Another study by Falzon (2017) in Nigeria found that stakeholder engagement is critical in resolving farmer-herders conflicts. The study suggested that the government, NGOs, and community leaders should work together to establish a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution.

A study by Mutongole *et al.* (2019) in Tanzania found that the level of stakeholder engagement can influence the effectiveness of conflict management. The study found that high levels of stakeholder engagement can lead to more effective conflict management, while low levels of engagement can lead to further escalation of conflicts. A study by Alemu *et al.* (2020) in Ethiopia found that the involvement of women in conflict management processes can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions. The study recommended that women should be involved in all stages of conflict management, from conflict prevention to resolution.

Several studies have categorized the level of stakeholder engagement in conflict management into different levels, including:

Low level of engagement: This level of engagement is characterized by minimal involvement of stakeholders in conflict management processes. A study by Alemu *et al.* (2020) found that low levels of stakeholder engagement can lead to further escalation of conflicts.

Moderate level of engagement: This level of engagement is characterized by some involvement of stakeholders in conflict management processes. A study by O'Brien *et al.* (2019) found that moderate levels of stakeholder engagement can lead to more effective conflict management.

High level of engagement: This level of engagement is characterized by high levels of involvement of stakeholders in conflict management processes. A study by Mutongole *et al.* (2019) found that high levels of stakeholder engagement can lead to more effective conflict management.

In conclusion, the level of stakeholder engagement is critical in farmer-herders conflict management processes. Effective conflict management requires the active engagement of various stakeholders, including farmers, herders, government officials, and community leaders. The level of stakeholder engagement can influence the effectiveness of conflict management, with high levels of engagement leading to more effective and sustainable solutions.

The current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts

The current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts have been extensively studied in various literature reviews, with a significant focus on their effectiveness. A comprehensive review of these strategies reveals that while some have shown promise, others have been met with limited success. The use of community-based approaches has been highlighted as an effective strategy in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts (Ajayi, 2013). These approaches involve engaging local communities in conflict resolution and promoting dialogue between farmers and herders. For instance, a study by Ajayi (2013) found that community-based mediation led to a significant reduction in conflict incidents between farmers and herders in a rural community in Nigeria.

Another effective strategy is the use of compensation and restitution schemes. These schemes involve providing financial compensation or restitution to parties affected by conflicts (Munyao, 2017). A study by Munyao (2017) found that compensation schemes implemented by the government and local authorities in Kenya led to a significant reduction in conflict incidents and improved relationships between farmers and herders.

The use of technology, particularly mobile phone-based applications, has also been highlighted as an effective strategy in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts (Asfaw, 2019). These applications enable farmers and herders to report conflicts and access conflict resolution services. For instance, a study by Asfaw (2019) found that the use of a mobile phone-based

conflict resolution application in Ethiopia led to a significant reduction in conflict incidents and improved access to conflict resolution services.

In addition, the use of land use planning and zoning regulations has been highlighted as an effective strategy in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts (Ibrahim, 2016). These regulations involve designating specific areas for farming and grazing, reducing the likelihood of conflicts between farmers and herders. A study by Ibrahim (2016) found that land use planning and zoning regulations implemented by the government in a rural community in Nigeria led to a significant reduction in conflict incidents between farmers and herders.

Furthermore, the use of education and awareness-raising campaigns has been highlighted as an effective strategy in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts (Olaniyan, 2018). These campaigns involve educating farmers and herders about the causes and consequences of conflicts and promoting dialogue and understanding between the two groups. A study by Olaniyan (2018) found that education and awareness-raising campaigns implemented by local authorities in a rural community in Nigeria led to a significant reduction in conflict incidents and improved relationships between farmers and herders.

In conclusion, while the current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts have shown promise, their effectiveness varies depending on the context and location. A combination of community-based approaches, compensation and restitution schemes, technology, land use planning and zoning regulations, and education and awareness-raising campaigns is likely to be the most effective approach in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts.

Challenges faced in stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflicts

Stakeholder engagement in resolving farmer-herders conflicts presents numerous challenges that can hinder effective conflict resolution processes. One primary issue is the lack of trust and communication gaps among stakeholders, which often stem from historical grievances, cultural differences, and misperceptions. These trust deficits can lead to reluctance in participation or the withholding of vital information necessary for collaborative solutions (Olawoyin et al., 2020). Additionally, power imbalances among stakeholders, such as between local communities, government authorities, and commercial interests, can impede equitable participation and marginalize vulnerable groups like smallholder farmers and pastoralists (Adeleke & Oladipo, 2021).

Another significant challenge is the complexity of the conflicts themselves, which are often rooted in resource scarcity, land use disputes, and climate change impacts, making stakeholder interests multifaceted and sometimes conflicting. This complexity complicates the design and implementation of participatory processes that are inclusive and representative of all voices (Adeoti & Olawuyi, 2019). Furthermore, institutional and bureaucratic barriers, including inadequate policy frameworks, limited capacity of mediators, and lack of coordination among relevant agencies, can obstruct stakeholder involvement (Ogunmuyiwa et al., 2022).

Cultural and socio-political factors also influence stakeholder engagement, where deeply embedded ethnic or communal identities may hinder consensus-building efforts. Resistance to change and fear of marginalization can further discourage stakeholders from engaging openly in dialogue (Eze et al., 2018). Finally, resource constraints such as limited financial, human, and technical resources can restrict the scope and effectiveness of engagement initiatives, leaving some stakeholders underrepresented or excluded altogether (Musa & Akinbile, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of local contexts, fostering inclusive participation, and strengthening institutional capacities to facilitate meaningful stakeholder engagement in conflict resolution processes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory originated from the work of R. Edward Freeman in the early 1980s, primarily through his seminal book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Freeman, 1984). The theory posits that organizations and institutions should recognize and address the interests of all stakeholders—individuals or groups affected by or capable of influencing organizational outcomes—rather than focusing solely on shareholders or economic gains. This perspective emphasizes the importance of building mutually beneficial relationships through effective communication, trust, and engagement. The premises of Stakeholder Theory revolve around the idea that organizations operate within a network of relationships, and their success depends on managing these relationships responsibly. It underscores that ethical considerations, social responsibilities, and proactive engagement are critical in achieving sustainable organizational goals. The theory also presumes that organizations can better navigate complex social issues by identifying key stakeholders, understanding their needs, and integrating their interests into decision-making processes.

Stakeholder Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding stakeholder engagement in the context of resolving farmer-herders conflicts in Benue State. This theory posits that various stakeholders, including farmers, herders, government agencies, local communities, and non-governmental organizations, have interdependent interests that influence conflict dynamics and resolution processes (Freeman, 1984). In the study of such conflicts, Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of identifying, understanding, and effectively managing the diverse interests and influences of all relevant parties to foster sustainable peace and cooperation.

In the context of Benue State, where farmer-herders conflicts have been persistent and complex, Stakeholder Theory underscores the necessity of inclusive dialogue and participatory decision-making. Engaging stakeholders such as local

farmers, herders, traditional rulers, and government officials can facilitate mutual understanding and trust, which are critical for conflict mitigation (Alao & Omotayo, 2020). The theory also highlights that stakeholders possess varying degrees of power, legitimacy, and urgency, which should be considered when designing conflict resolution strategies (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997).

Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory advocates for a relational approach to conflict resolution, where fostering ongoing relationships and collaboration among stakeholders leads to more effective and long-lasting solutions. By recognizing the interests and concerns of all parties, conflict resolution efforts can move beyond mere suppression of violence to addressing underlying issues such as land access, resource rights, and security concerns (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Overall, applying Stakeholder Theory in this context provides a comprehensive perspective that emphasizes inclusivity, mutual respect, and strategic engagement as essential components of resolving farmer-herders conflicts in Benue State.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, facilitating the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to explore how stakeholders' engagement contributes to the management of farmer-herders conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State which include, Agatu, Guma, Kwande and Gwer West. These communities were selected due to the high incident of herder-farmers crises in these communities. A mixed-method approach was integrated to complement and enrich the quantitative findings with in-depth qualitative insights. The target population comprised local farmers and herders, traditional rulers, community leaders and elders, Government officials, Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups involved in peacebuilding, security personnel and the local judiciary or conflict resolution committees. Structured questionnaires were developed to gather data from a sample of 350 participants of these various stakeholders that utilized a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), to Strongly Disagree (SD). In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 selected stakeholders in selected communities in Benue State to obtain comprehensive qualitative data on their experiences with resolution of farmer-herders conflict in Benue State. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling was adopted to select the respondents for the study.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaires, content validation was performed through review and refinement by research professionals from Moses Orshio Adasu University and the University of Mkar. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.80, indicating high internal consistency and confirming the instrument's reliability for this study. Out of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 350 responses were retrieved, representing a response rate of 95%. Data analysis involved calculating percentages, means, and standard deviations. A mean cut-off point of 2.50 was established for decision-making purposes: any item with a mean score of 2.50 or higher was considered to demonstrate a significant effect, while scores below 2.50 were regarded as not significant. This threshold ensures that only effects reaching or exceeding the 2.50 mark are interpreted as meaningful, facilitating clearer and more accurate decision-making. Qualitative data from the in-depth interviews were analyzed through thematic content analysis of the written transcripts, providing a detailed understanding of stakeholders' perspectives on resolution of farmer-herders conflict in Benue State.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographic Data of the Respondents

S/ N	Variables	No of respondents	(%)
1	Age	18-30 years	80
		31-42 years	100
		43 and above years	170
		Total	350
2	Gender	Male	182
		Female	168
		Total	350
3	Educational Qualification	No Formal education	15
		Primary level	36
		Secondary level	103
		Tertiary level	196
		Total	350
			100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data shows that out of the 350 respondents, 80 individuals (22.8%) were aged 18-30 years, 100 individuals (28.5%) were aged 31-42 years, and 170 individuals (48.5%) fell within the 43 years and above. Regarding gender distribution, 182 respondents (52.0%) were male, while 168 respondents (48.0%) were female. In terms of educational attainment, the data indicates that 15 respondents (4.2%) had no formal education, 36 respondents (10.2%) completed primary education, 103 respondents (29.4%) attained secondary education, and 196 respondents (56.0%) had attained tertiary education.

Table 2: Respondents view on the key stakeholders involved in the farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State (n=350)

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Σ	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	Farmers in my community actively participate in conflict resolution meetings related to farmer-herder disputes.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	12 20	35 0	3.4 8	1.8 6	Accepted
2	Herders are adequately represented in community decision-making processes concerning land and resource management.	200 (800)	100 (300)	30 (60)	20 (20)	11 80	35 0	3.3 7	1.8 3	Accepted
3	Traditional rulers play a significant role in mediating conflicts between farmers and herders.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	12 56	35 0	3.5 8	1.8 9	Accepted
4	Government agencies and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actively engage with community members to promote peace and conflict resolution.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	12 20	35 0	3.4 8	1.8 6	Accepted
5	Security agencies prioritize engaging local stakeholders during peacebuilding efforts..	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	12 56	35 0	3.5 8	1.8 9	Accepted
Cluster Mean										3.48

*Source: Field Survey, 2026***Mean Bench Mark = 2.50**

Table 2 presents the mean ratings reflecting respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement with statements concerning the key stakeholders involved in the farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State. The mean scores for the responses to items 1 through 5 are 3.48, 3.37, 3.58, 3.48, and 3.58, respectively, with corresponding standard deviations of 1.86, 1.83, 1.89, 1.86, and 1.89. The overall cluster mean score is 3.48, which falls above the predetermined benchmark of 2.50 and was therefore accepted. This indicates that, the various key stakeholders such as local farmers and herders, community leaders, traditional authorities, security agencies, local government officials, and non-governmental organizations are involved in the resolution of farmer-herders conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State. Each of these groups plays a critical role in either perpetuating or helping to resolve the conflicts through their actions, policies, and interventions. Ensuring open dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, and implementing sustainable conflict resolution strategies are essential steps toward fostering peace and stability in the affected communities.

Table 3: Respondents view on the level of stakeholders' engagement in farmer-herders conflict management processes in selected communities in Benue State (n = 350)

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Σ	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	Stakeholders in the community actively participate in dialogue sessions aimed at resolving farmer-herders conflicts.	30 (120)	20 (60)	100 (200)	200 (200)	58 0	35 0	1.6 5	1.2 8	Rejected
2	Traditional rulers and community leaders are regularly involved in conflict resolution initiatives.	20 (80)	20 (60)	205 (410)	105 (105)	65 5	35 0	1.8 7	1.3 6	Rejected
3	Government agencies frequently consult local farmers and herders when designing conflict management strategies.	10 (40)	38 (114)	201 (402)	101 (101)	65 7	35 0	1.8 8	1.3 7	Rejected
4	Non-governmental organizations are consistently engaged in peacebuilding activities within the communities.	20 (80)	40 (120)	205 (410)	85 (105)	71 5	35 0	2.0 4	1.4 2	Rejected
Cluster Mean										3.43

*Source: Field Survey, 2026***Mean Bench Mark = 2.50**

Table 3 presents the mean ratings reflecting respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement with statements regarding the level of stakeholders' engagement in farmer-herders conflict management processes in selected communities in Benue State. The mean scores for the responses to items 1 through 4 are 1.65, 1.87, 1.88 and 2.04, respectively, with corresponding standard deviations of 1.28, 1.36, 1.37, 1.37, and 1.42. The overall cluster mean score is 1.87, which falls below the predetermined benchmark of 2.50 and was therefore rejected. This indicates that, overall, there is a low level of stakeholders' engagement in farmer-herders conflict management processes in selected communities in Benue State, as the mean ratings are below the acceptable threshold. The respondents' assessments indicate that the level of stakeholders' engagement in the farmer-herders conflict management processes in the selected communities in Benue State show limited involvement. Overall, the findings suggest that there is a need for increased and more coordinated engagement among all stakeholders to effectively manage and resolve the conflicts. Enhancing stakeholder participation and fostering collaborative efforts are crucial for establishing sustainable peace and stability in the affected communities.

Table 4: Respondents view on the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State (n=350)

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Σ	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	The involvement of traditional rulers has helped reduce violence in farmer-herder conflicts.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	122 0	35 0	3.4 8	1.8 6	Accepted
2	Government intervention has been effective in managing conflicts between farmers and herders.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	116 5	35 0	3.3 2	1.8 2	Accepted
3	Engagement of local communities in conflict resolution has led to sustainable peace.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	125 6	35 0	3.5 8	1.8 9	Accepted
4	The participation of women and youth in stakeholder meetings improves conflict management outcomes.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	116 5	35 0	3.3 2	1.8 2	Accepted
5	Stakeholders respect and adhere to agreements reached during conflict resolution processes.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	125 6	35 0	3.5 8	1.8 9	Accepted
Cluster Mean										3.43

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Mean Bench Mark = 2.50

Table 4 presents the mean ratings reflecting respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements about the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State. The mean scores for items 1 through 5 are 3.37, 3.48, 3.32, 3.58, 3.32, 3.58, and 3.37, with corresponding standard deviations of 1.83, 1.86, 1.82, 1.89, 1.82, 1.89, and 1.83. The overall cluster mean score is 3.43, which exceeds the benchmark of 2.50 and is therefore accepted. This indicates that the respondents generally perceive the current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State as somewhat effective but still requiring significant improvement.

Table 5: Respondents view on the challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflict in selected communities in Benue State (n=350)

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Σ	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	There is a lack of adequate communication among stakeholders involved in conflicts.	200 (800)	100 (300)	30 (60)	20 (20)	118 0	35 0	3.3 7	1.8 3	Accepted
2	Some stakeholders do not have sufficient influence to affect conflict resolution positively.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	122 0	35 0	3.4 8	1.8 6	Accepted
3	Cultural and traditional differences hinder effective stakeholder collaboration.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	116 5	35 0	3.3 2	1.8 2	Accepted
4	Stakeholders often prioritize their interests over the collective goal of peace.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	125 6	35 0	3.5 8	1.8 9	Accepted

Continuation of Table 5

5	The government provides enough support and resources for stakeholder engagement in conflict management.	150 (600)	200 (600)	0 (0)	0 (0)	120 0	35 0	3.4 2	1.8 4	Accepted
Cluster Mean										3.43

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Mean Bench Mark = 2.50

Table 5 displays the mean ratings reflecting respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements regarding the challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflict in selected communities in Benue State. The mean scores for items 1 to 5 are 3.37, 3.48, 3.32, 3.58, and 3.42, with corresponding standard deviations of 1.83, 1.86, 1.82, 1.89, and 1.84. The overall cluster mean score is 3.43, which exceeds the benchmark of 2.50 and is therefore accepted. This suggests that there several challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of the farmer-herders conflict in the selected communities in Benue State. Overcoming these challenges requires concerted efforts to build trust, enhance communication, strengthen institutional capacities, and promote inclusive dialogue to facilitate sustainable peace and conflict resolution in the affected communities.

Analysis of Qualitative Data from key selected Stakeholders.

From the qualitative data, it is evident that the key stakeholders involved in the farmer-herders conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State encompass a diverse array of groups. Local farmers and herders are the primary parties directly engaged in the conflict, with community leaders and traditional authorities playing pivotal roles in mediating disputes and advocating for peace within their communities. Security agencies such as the police and military are also involved, primarily to restore order and enforce law and policy. Local government officials and policymakers are recognized as crucial stakeholders responsible for crafting and implementing strategies aimed at conflict resolution. Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups contribute by facilitating dialogue, providing humanitarian support, and advocating for sustainable peace initiatives.

Regarding the level of stakeholders' engagement, qualitative responses reveal a mixed picture. While some stakeholders, particularly traditional leaders and community elders, actively participate in conflict management processes, others, including security agencies and government officials, are often perceived as minimally involved or reactive rather than proactive. Engagement tends to be sporadic, with many stakeholders acknowledging limited opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaboration. There are instances where community members feel excluded from decision-making processes, which hampers the development of sustainable peace strategies. Overall, stakeholder engagement remains largely informal and fragmented, highlighting the need for more structured and inclusive platforms for dialogue.

The effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating the conflicts is viewed with cautious optimism by respondents. Some strategies, such as peace committees, dialogue forums, and community sensitization programs, have yielded positive outcomes in reducing hostilities temporarily. However, respondents generally agree that these efforts are not sufficient to address the root causes of the conflict or to sustain peace in the long term. Many responses indicate that these strategies often lack consistency, adequate funding, and political backing, which limits their impact. Additionally, the failure to address underlying socio-economic grievances and ethnic tensions diminishes the effectiveness of current approaches, leaving the conflicts prone to resurgence.

Several challenges to stakeholder engagement emerged distinctly from the data. A significant obstacle is the deep-rooted mistrust among the conflicting parties and stakeholders, which hampers open communication and collaborative efforts. Limited resources and capacity constraints among stakeholders, including inadequate training and funding, further impede effective engagement. Political interference and favoritism sometimes hinder impartial conflict management. Socio-economic disparities, ethnic divisions, and historical grievances also pose persistent barriers, making it difficult to foster genuine dialogue and consensus. Respondents emphasized that these complex challenges require a holistic and inclusive approach to enhance stakeholder participation and develop sustainable solutions to the farmer-herders conflicts.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that a diverse range of key stakeholders are actively involved in the farmer-herders conflicts within the selected communities in Benue State. These stakeholders include local farmers, herders, community leaders, traditional authorities, security agencies, local government officials, and non-governmental organizations. Each group plays a distinct role, either as part of the conflict dynamic or in efforts aimed at resolution. Farmers and herders are directly involved in the conflict, while community leaders and traditional authorities often serve as mediators or representatives of community interests. Security agencies are tasked with maintaining law and order, although their involvement is sometimes viewed as insufficient or biased, which impacts the overall conflict management process.

The level of stakeholder engagement in conflict management processes varies across communities. While some stakeholders actively participate in dialogue platforms and conflict resolution initiatives, others exhibit limited involvement due to a lack of awareness, capacity, or trust. Community leaders and traditional authorities tend to be more engaged in mediating disputes, but engagement from security agencies and government officials remains inconsistent. The engagement of non-governmental organizations and civil society groups is also sporadic, often hindered by resource constraints and limited access to conflict zones. Overall, stakeholder participation in conflict resolution processes is fragmented, affecting the coherence and sustainability of peace initiatives.

The effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating the conflicts appears mixed. Some community-based approaches, such as dialogue forums and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, have yielded positive outcomes in certain areas. However, these strategies are often not comprehensive or inclusive enough to address the complex and multifaceted nature of the conflicts. The reliance on traditional authority figures and ad hoc interventions may succeed temporarily but do not provide sustainable solutions. Additionally, the limited capacity of stakeholders, especially security agencies and local institutions, hampers the implementation of long-term conflict management strategies. Consequently, conflicts tend to recur or escalate despite ongoing efforts, indicating that current strategies need enhancement and integration. This study is aligned with Stakeholder Theory which emphasizes the importance of recognizing all parties involved as integral to conflict resolution.

Several challenges hinder effective stakeholder engagement in resolving the farmer-herders conflicts. A prominent issue is the deep-rooted mistrust among stakeholders, often exacerbated by past conflicts, political interference, and socio-economic disparities. Poor communication and lack of transparent dialogue platforms also impede constructive engagement. Limited resources and capacity constraints among stakeholders, particularly in rural communities, restrict their ability to participate fully in conflict management processes. Furthermore, ethnic and cultural tensions, coupled with land and resource disputes, complicate consensus-building efforts. Political interference and inadequate enforcement of policies further undermine stakeholder collaboration. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to build trust, improve communication channels, strengthen institutional capacities, and promote inclusive participation to achieve sustainable conflict resolution. This finding is in agreement with Olawoyin *et al.*, (2020) who report that the trust deficits can lead to reluctance in participation or the withholding of vital information necessary for collaborative solutions. Also, Adeleke & Oladipo, (2021) who point out that power imbalance among stakeholders, such as between local communities, government authorities, and commercial interests, can impede equitable participation and marginalize vulnerable groups like smallholder farmers and pastoralists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of stakeholders' engagement and the management of farmer-herders conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State reveals that effective conflict resolution is largely dependent on the active participation and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders. The findings indicate that stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in identifying the root causes of conflicts, fostering mutual understanding, and developing sustainable solutions. However, challenges such as mistrust, poor communication, limited resources, and socio-political tensions significantly hinder the effectiveness of stakeholder involvement. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that emphasizes inclusivity, dialogue, capacity building, and trust-building among stakeholders. Strengthening these aspects can enhance the management strategies employed and contribute to the long-term peace and stability of the communities affected by farmer-herders conflicts. Overall, meaningful stakeholder engagement remains a key determinant in the successful management and resolution of these conflicts in Benue State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended:

- I. Efforts should be intensified to promote inclusive and participatory dialogue among all relevant stakeholders.
- II. They should be effort to establish a platform for regular communication and cooperation can foster mutual understanding and trust, which are essential for sustainable conflict resolution. There is also a need to strengthen the capacity of local authorities, community leaders, and security agencies through training and resource provision to effectively manage and mediate conflicts.
- III. Policymakers should develop and implement comprehensive conflict management frameworks that incorporate traditional, social, and legal approaches, ensuring that all stakeholders' interests are adequately represented.
- IV. It is equally important to foster collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and development partners to provide sustainable solutions that address the root causes of conflicts, such as land disputes and resource scarcity.

Limitations of the Study

The study on Stakeholders' Engagement and the Management of Farmer-Herders Conflicts in selected communities in Benue State faces several limitations that may affect the depth and generalizability of its findings. One notable limitation is the geographic scope, which is confined to specific communities within Benue State. This limited spatial coverage may restrict the applicability of the results to other regions with different socio-economic, cultural, or environmental contexts, thereby constraining the broader understanding of conflict dynamics and stakeholder engagement across the entire state or similar settings.

Another significant limitation stems from the reliance on self-reported data gathered through interviews. Such data are inherently subject to biases, including social desirability bias, recall bias, or respondents' reluctance to disclose sensitive information. These biases can influence the accuracy and objectivity of the information collected, potentially leading to an incomplete or skewed understanding of stakeholder perceptions, conflicts, and engagement strategies.

Additionally, the small interview sample size presents constraints on the study's robustness and representativeness. With a limited number of participants, the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and stakeholder roles may not be fully captured. This restricts the ability to generalize findings or to gain comprehensive insights into the complex nature of

farmer-herders conflicts and stakeholder interactions within the diverse communities of Benue State. Overall, while the study provides valuable insights into stakeholder engagement and conflict management, these limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation of the results and suggest avenues for future research, such as expanding the geographic coverage, increasing sample size, and incorporating triangulation methods to validate self-reported information.

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