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Influence of Public Enlightenment on Conflict Resolution between Fulani Herders and Farmers in North-Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of public enlightenment programmes on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-Central Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study targeted a population of 115,992 farmers and 49,664 nomadic Fulani across 36 conflict-prone Local Government Areas in the region. A stratified sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 500 respondents, out of which 455 completed and returned usable questionnaires. A structured 4-point scale questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection, with a reliability coefficient of 0.79 established through a pilot test. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 25. Findings from the study revealed that public enlightenment, particularly through video and radio programmes, plays a significant role in conflict resolution between herders and farmers. The regression analysis indicated a statistically significant but modest relationship ($R^2 = 0.154$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that while public enlightenment contributes to resolving conflicts, other factors may also be influential. The study concludes that media-driven enlightenment initiatives—supported by traditional and religious leaders—are vital tools in promoting peaceful coexistence and reducing violent clashes. It is recommended that targeted awareness campaigns be intensified through accessible platforms, including vernacular radio, religious outreach, and video-based programmes. These should emphasize peaceful coexistence, the socio-economic consequences of conflict, and the mutual benefits of cooperation. The active involvement of faith-based organizations and community influencers is also encouraged to foster trust and shared understanding among the conflicting groups.

Keywords: Public Enlightenment, Conflict Resolution, Fulani Herders, Farmers, North-Central Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

For decades, Fulani herders and sedentary farmers in North-Central Nigeria coexisted in a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship. Herders relied on seasonal migration with their cattle for pasture and water, often grazing on fallow farmlands or along unoccupied corridors. In return, farmers benefited from animal manure, which enriched the soil and boosted agricultural productivity. This arrangement not only enhanced food security but also supported socio-economic development and strengthened rural interdependence (Duru, 2018). Historically, this balance promoted peaceful cohabitation and cultural tolerance between the two groups across rural communities in the region. However, this fragile harmony has been severely eroded in recent years due to a confluence of environmental, demographic, and socio-economic pressures. Rapid population growth, urban expansion, climate change-induced desertification, and shrinking grazing routes have intensified competition over land and water resources. As herders increasingly encroach on farmlands and farmers erect barriers to protect their crops, disputes have escalated into violent clashes, often resulting in destruction of property, loss of lives, and mass displacements (Dimelu et al., 2017; Bagu & Katie, 2017). What was once cooperation has degenerated into hostility, threatening national cohesion, agricultural output, and local livelihoods? Empirical reports indicate that herder-farmer conflicts account for over one-third of communal violence in Nigeria within the past three decades (Yagana, 2016). States such as Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau have witnessed recurrent attacks, often exacerbated by the proliferation of weapons, ethno-religious tensions, and the failure of institutional conflict resolution mechanisms (Oli et al., 2018; Josiah, 2021). Numerous attacks have been documented, including the 2016 Agatu massacre and the 2018 Plateau killings, both resulting in mass casualties, internal displacement, and economic paralysis. These crises not only strain state resources but also undermine food security and rural resilience, aggravating poverty and insecurity. Traditional approaches such as military interventions, anti-grazing laws, and security task forces have provided short-term reprieve but failed to address the underlying causes of mistrust and ignorance between communities. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners have begun to recognize the role of public enlightenment particularly through mass media, religious leaders, and community-based education—as a non-violent and sustainable means of promoting peace, tolerance, and conflict de-escalation (Chepchirchir & Mberia, 2019; Anyanw, 2019). It was based that the researchers conducted this study,

Statement of the Problem

The increasing frequency and intensity of conflicts between Fulani herders and sedentary farmers in North-Central Nigeria have become a major threat to peace, food security, and sustainable development in the region. The initial mutually beneficial relationship has now deteriorated into recurrent violence, resulting in the destruction of lives, property, and trust among communities. Despite numerous interventions ranging from legislation to security deployment the crisis persists, largely due to underlying issues of mistrust, misinformation, cultural prejudice, and lack of grassroots-level awareness. Recent studies indicate that a significant driver of these conflicts is poor communication and limited understanding between the herding and farming communities (Ojo & Akinwale, 2021). Misinformation, ethnic profiling, and reactive narratives, especially during crises, often exacerbate tensions. Conventional interventions such as military deployment or enforcement of anti-open grazing laws, though useful, have had limited long-term success because they fail to address the root causes—ignorance, misperception, and lack of effective public education (Yusuf, 2022). Public enlightenment through mass media, religious leaders, and community-based campaigns has been identified as a potentially transformative tool in promoting peaceful coexistence and changing public attitudes (Ede & Iroanya, 2020). However, its influence in the specific context of the herder-farmer conflict in North-Central Nigeria has not been sufficiently studied or empirically validated. Therefore, this study specifically investigates the influence of public enlightenment on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-central Nigeria



Research Hypothesis

As a guide, this study formulated this null hypothesis

Public enlightenment campaign has no significant influence on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-central Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Public enlightenment is defined as the purposeful and strategic dissemination of information aimed at creating awareness, shaping attitudes, and encouraging behavioural change within communities. Asemah and Edegoh (2020) assert that public enlightenment serves as a critical mechanism in times of social unrest, enabling the diffusion of peace messaging, clarification of government policies, and suppression of rumours that may escalate conflict. In volatile environments, these messages can build community trust, promote empathy, and reduce tension. The study conducted by Athanas (2022) also reported that structured radio programming in Burundi significantly influenced ethnic conflict resolution by promoting dialogue, forgiveness, and social reintegration. Likewise, Chepchirchir and Mberia (2019) documented the effective role of Kalya FM in West Pokot County, Kenya, where targeted radio programmes mitigated recurring pastoralist conflict by educating communities on peacebuilding practices and early warning systems. Anyanwu (2019), in a study on Enugu State Broadcasting Service, observed that localized broadcasting in native languages helped increase understanding of peaceful alternatives to violent retaliation. Duru (2018) emphasized that visual public enlightenment tools such as mobile cinema have been impactful in Northern Nigeria, especially in rural areas where literacy levels are low and oral communication dominates. Another study conducted by Yagana (2016), it was argued that vernacular radio is particularly effective in disseminating information in herder-farmer communities, given the linguistic diversity and lack of internet access. However, Asemah and Edegoh (2020) warned that media could also inflame tensions if improperly managed. Thus, the credibility of content, neutrality of language, and community engagement are key to successful public enlightenment. Despite the growing use of public enlightenment tools, few empirical studies have quantitatively examined their effectiveness in resolving the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria. This study bridges this gap by assessing the statistical influence of media-based enlightenment efforts—specifically video and radio programming—on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-Central Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design, appropriate for examining the views of a large population and identifying relationships between variables in their natural settings. The population comprised 115,992 farmers and 49,664 Fulani herders across 36 conflict-prone LGAs in North-Central Nigeria. A total of 500 respondents were selected using a stratified sampling technique, ensuring proportional representation across socio-ethnic divides. Out of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 455 were returned and valid, yielding a 91% response rate. Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled Public Enlightenment and Conflict Resolution Scale (PECRS). The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and covered areas such as exposure to radio/video programmes and perceived impact on conflict resolution. Face and content validation were conducted by three experts in conflict studies and communication. A pilot study involving 30 respondents yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.79, indicating strong internal consistency. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Regression analysis was used to test null hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Null Hypothesis

Public enlightenment campaign has no significant influence on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-central Nigeria



Table 1: Regression analysis of Influence of Public Enlightenment on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-central Nigeria

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	p-value
.393 ^a	.154	.152	.000

Table 1 reveals the model summary of regression analysis of influence of public enlightenment on herders and farmers conflict resolution in North Central Nigeria. $R = 0.393$ shows a low correlation between the public enlightenment and herders and farmers conflict resolution in North Central Nigeria. $R^2 = 0.154$ indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. $R^2 = 0.154$ means the model explains 15.4% of the variance in the dependent variable, which is low. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.152$ suggests that the model explains 15.2% of the variance in the dependent variable. The p-value was .000, hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The outcome from the findings of the study which was on the influence of public enlightenment on conflict resolution between herders and farmers in North central Nigeria revealed that, video (cinema) awareness programs and radio enlightenment programmes on herders and farmers' conflict resolution in North-Central Nigeria was significant. The findings was in agreement with that of (Yagana, 2016) recognition of the critical role of media, particularly broadcasting services in creating awareness programs to address underlying conflict issues. The findings also illuminate the potential role of media on herders and farmers' conflict resolution as previously found by Ibrahim and Chaminda, (2017) as well as emphasizing the substantial role of vernacular media stations and radio broadcasting, particularly in socio-political conflict resolution when unhindered by regulations and broadcasting policies favour suitable programming Mamah et al, 2016. While opinions on mass media's overall effectiveness in resolving herders and farmers' conflicts varies, Otu and Dickson (2020) the potential of targeted and culturally sensitive interventions was recently acknowledged in herders and farmers conflict resolution (Anyanw, 2019).

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The findings from this study provide strong evidence that public enlightenment, particularly through radio and video outreach, has a significant positive influence on conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in North-Central Nigeria. While the effect size is modest, it demonstrates that communication strategies when culturally sensitive and locally driven can play a meaningful role in de-escalating tension and promoting peaceful coexistence. The involvement of trusted voices such as religious leaders and traditional rulers further enhances the impact of enlightenment efforts. Based on the outcome, it was recommended that all the three tiers of governments (Federal, State and Local Government) and Non-Governmental Organizations should integrate and encourage peace-oriented enlightenment campaigns into policy frameworks for conflict resolution

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