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Herdsmen–Farmers Violence: Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Livelihood Recovery in Nigeria

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Abstract

Existing scholarship on violent conflicts between cattle herders and rural farmers has largely focused on the causes of such conflict, including weapon proliferation, porous borders, and state complicity, as well as on its immediate and post-violent effects. Limited attention has been paid to the effects of post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) on the livelihood recovery of the affected population. Post-conflict reconstruction encompasses the processes and strategies aimed at transforming post-conflict communities toward sustainable peace by addressing the relational, structural, economic, and social challenges encountered during and after conflicts. Drawing on qualitative data from thirty-five purposively and snowball-selected participants, this study examined the PCR interventions implemented by the government and other stakeholders in a community in South-Eastern Nigeria affected by herders–farmers conflict. The analysis focused on four dimensions of PCR: security; justice and reconciliation; social and economic well-being; and governance and participation. The findings reveal a pronounced asymmetry in reconstruction: although PCR interventions contributed to improved security and, to a limited extent, relief assistance, significant gaps remain in ensuring justice, rebuilding livelihoods, restoring trust, and enabling genuine community participation. This imbalance – prioritizing security while neglecting justice, reconciliation, and sustainable livelihood recovery – helps explain the persistence of adversarial relations and the failure of interventions to translate into durable recovery. The study underscores the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainable post-conflict reconstruction strategies – spanning all four dimensions – to enhance livelihood recovery and prevent the recurrence of protracted conflicts in rural communities.

Keywords: *Post-conflict reconstruction, Livelihood recovery, Herders, Farmers, Conflict, Security*

Introduction

Traditionally, herders and crop farmers enjoyed a symbiotic relationship: crop farmers would invite herdsmen to their farms after harvest to fertilise the land with cattle excrement, and in return the herdsmen would feed their cattle on the leftover crops (Eneyo et al., 2023; Gadzama et al., 2018). However, this harmonious relationship has deteriorated over time, and communal conflicts between herders and crop farmers have become a persistent feature of the socio-political landscape of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in agrarian communities where land and natural resources form the bedrock of livelihoods (Barigbon & Isaac-Deki, 2024). In Nigeria, for example, these clashes were once concentrated in the Middle Belt and northern parts of the country; they have increasingly spread to other regions, including the South-East. Many Nigerian states – especially those in the north – have faced numerous challenges, including insurgency, cattle rustling, inordinate population growth, desertification, drought, and other climate-related issues. These challenges have driven herdsmen from their traditional home areas to migrate elsewhere in search of grazing land for their livestock.



Consequently, communities that historically had limited direct interaction with herders are now witnessing clashes with them. For example, the south-eastern states of Nigeria – including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo – have witnessed a troubling rise in violent encounters between sedentary farming communities and nomadic pastoralists, leading to loss of life, destruction of property, and heightened ethno-regional tensions. Between 2016 and June 2021, the conflict directly resulted in more than 150 deaths of herders and farmers in the South-East (Uzodimma, 2021). It has also claimed large numbers of injured and missing persons. Thousands have been displaced, with countless properties burnt and crop farms destroyed.

These clashes often escalate into violent confrontations, leaving behind devastating human, social, and economic consequences. Nimbo, a community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, South-East Nigeria, is one such locality that has experienced violent attacks linked to the herders–rural farmers dispute. The increased influx of herders and their cattle into the community's farmland led to growing competition between crop farmers and herders for farming and grazing land. This competition resulted in a series of clashes that snowballed into the armed invasion of the community on 25 April 2016 (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). The invasion led to about 40 casualties, the destruction of property, the displacement of hundreds of farmers, and the disruption of community cohesion and economic activities (Odalonu, 2020; Vanguard, 2016; Ajala & Murphy, 2025; Chukwu et al., 2022). About seven villages in Nimbo were attacked, and ten residential houses and two churches were burnt (Vanguard, 2016).

Despite the bloodshed, destruction, and psychological pain witnessed during this invasion, the two parties in the conflict still co-exist. This raises questions about the adequacy and inclusiveness of post-conflict reconstruction interventions in the community. The implications of violent conflict extend well beyond the immediate loss of lives, property, and the displacement of community members. In agrarian societies, violent conflict destabilizes communities and the survival of inhabitants by undermining access to land, destroying productive assets, eroding social trust, disrupting agricultural cycles, and jeopardizing long-term sustainability. These effects may lead to heightened poverty, food insecurity, and a deepening of community vulnerabilities. In this context, post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) becomes an essential pathway for recovery.

Post-conflict reconstruction involves deliberate interventions aimed at rebuilding physical infrastructure, restoring social cohesion, re-establishing security, and reviving livelihoods in the aftermath of conflict. Beyond replacing what has been lost, effective PCR seeks to address the structural causes of violence and create enabling conditions for sustainable development. For rural farming communities such as Nimbo, PCR is therefore central to ensuring that agricultural systems and livelihood strategies are restored, diversified, and safeguarded against future shocks.

There is a dearth of empirical research linking PCR interventions with livelihood recovery, especially in newly affected regions of Africa. Post-conflict studies on herders–farmers conflicts have largely focused on examining the causes and impacts of the conflicts on the social, economic, and political structures of affected communities (Ojo et al., 2023; Ojewale, 2023; Idris et al., 2024; Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018; Mamah et al., 2016; Mojisola, 2019). While understanding the costs of conflict is essential during the post-conflict period, gaining

comprehensive knowledge of PCR interventions and their potential consequences for livelihood recovery is equally important. Such knowledge not only deepens insights into conflict dynamics and peacebuilding theories but also informs policies and programmes aimed at achieving livelihood recovery.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the PCR interventions deployed by government and other stakeholders to mitigate hostilities in a community that witnessed the herder–rural farmers conflict, as well as the impact of these interventions on the livelihood recovery of community members. The section that follows further explains the herders–farmers conflict and PCR. Section three provides an explanation of the research method adopted for the study. The fourth section presents the results and discussion of the findings, while the final section concludes the paper.

Herdsmen/Crop Farmers' Clashes

Conflict poses a significant obstacle to progress, economic growth, political stability, and overall socio-economic development (Abbas, 2018). One factor that might have contributed to conflicts in many Nigerian communities is the struggle for the use of agricultural land (Ugwueze, Omenma, & Okwueze, 2022). In most regions of Nigeria, agricultural activities have remained traditional subsistence farming and centuries-old nomadic animal herding practices, due to continued deindustrialization and inadequate infrastructure (Sahara Reporters, 2021; Tayo & Nasrullah, 2016). The growing competition for land use has exacerbated these conflicts. Historically, pastoralists in northern Nigeria followed seasonal migration patterns to designated grazing areas. However, circumstances such as urbanisation, crop expansion, corrupt land acquisition, and climate change have reduced these grazing areas, leading to competition over the available land. As a result, herders are forced to seek alternative pastures and water sources outside designated areas, leading to violent clashes with crop farmers in both northern and southern Nigeria (Bello, 2022; Abbas, 2014; Ingawa, Ega, & Erhabor, 1999; Gadzama et al., 2018; Tayo & Nasrullah, 2016). Other factors fuelling the crisis include historical grievances, population explosion, ethno-religious intolerance, ineffective conflict-resolution mechanisms, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Ali, 2023; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

According to the Human Rights Watch (2013), approximately 3,000 lives were lost between 2010 and 2013 due to clashes between herders and farmers. In Benue State alone, the toll was higher, with 4,194 deaths, 2,957 injuries, 195,576 houses destroyed, and 30 churches razed between 2014 and 2016 (Genyi, 2017). National data from the Nigeria Security Watch (2020), corroborated by the Nigeria Security Tracker (2020), reveal 6,274 incidents and 3,087 fatalities between 2014 and 2019, with the majority of these incidents occurring in Benue State. Aid to the Church in Need (2025) reports that 119 attacks were registered between 2 January and 27 December 2024 in Benue State, resulting in significant harm across various communities in Makurdi and other areas. The attacks led to at least 414 fatalities, four reported cases of rape, the abduction of 35 persons, and injuries to many others. Abduction or kidnapping often leads to ransom requests, which have become a daily business in Nigeria. The crisis in Southern Kaduna has also affected cattle herders, with the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association reporting that over 6,000 cows have been lost in the region (Uroko, 2018). These incidents highlight the severity of the situation and the need for effective solutions to address the root causes of violence and kidnapping in the region.

Consequent upon these attacks, many residents of affected areas often flee to safer locations. This mass displacement can have significant consequences, including loss of productivity, as internally displaced persons often struggle to maintain their livelihoods (Ikezie & Ezeah, 2017). Apart from the loss of human lives and material and capital resources, there are also social and psychological implications regarding humanitarian crises (Eneyo et al., 2023; Odalanu, 2020; Mamah et al., 2016; Mojisola, 2019).

Most agrarian communities in Nigeria have experienced violent encounters associated with herders–farmers relations. Across many states, herders have been reported to graze cattle indiscriminately, destroy crops, obstruct transportation routes, assault local residents, and, in some instances, perpetrate sexual violence. Where resistance to these activities occurs, such encounters have occasionally escalated into deadly attacks on rural communities (Muhammed et al., 2023). The frequency of these conflicts and their associated human tolls are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Incidences of Herder–Farmer Conflict in Nigeria, 2015–2023

Region	Number of attacks	Deaths	People displaced
North-East	460	891	901,000
North-Central	1,105	3,840	4.2 million
North-West	743	1,094	1.1 million
South-East	487	756	655,000
South-South	335	464	512,000
South-West	443	512	474,000
TOTAL	3,573	7,557	7,842,000

Source: Ogayi & Ediri (2025).

The consequences of these clashes are far-reaching, affecting not only the immediate victims but also the broader community. Major consequences include loss of life, loss of cattle, destruction of crops and property, the displacement of people, and a threat to national unity (Bello, 2022; Eneyo et al., 2023; Gadzama et al., 2018; Ali, 2023). The violence and insecurity caused by these clashes have negative impacts on social cohesion, economic development, and food security in the affected areas.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) refers to the process of rebuilding and recovering a country, community, or society after a conflict, such as war, invasion, or insurgency. It is understood as a broad, multi-dimensional approach to rebuilding societies that have experienced violent conflict, emphasizing the restoration of security, governance, economic recovery, justice, and social cohesion (Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Lederach, 1997). PCR goes beyond physical rehabilitation to include political reforms, reintegration of displaced persons, reconciliation among divided groups, and the rebuilding of community trust (Paris, 2004; Barakat & Zyck, 2009). The goal of PCR is to establish a stable and peaceful environment, promote economic growth, and ensure the well-being of the affected

population in a community threatened by incessant attacks, crises, conflict, invasion, and war (Fischer, 2004). The term *post-conflict* does not imply that the underlying causes of conflict have been eradicated or that hostilities have ceased entirely. Instead, it often signifies a temporary reduction in violence or a brief window of opportunity for peace, which can quickly close if not managed effectively (Fischer, 2004; Hamre & Sullivan, 2002).

Following violent conflict, various terms describe key humanitarian and development tasks: reconstruction, recovery, rehabilitation, resettlement, repatriation, and reintegration. The primary goal of these efforts is to establish peace and restore stability, enabling communities to rebuild and thrive. PCR interventions should centrally aim at transforming the failed community, state, or society into a new entity, addressing the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of life (Jabareen, 2013).

Multidimensional approaches and tasks are needed to engender and sustain peace in a post-conflict context, thus preventing future outbreaks of violence (Fischer, 2004; Hendricks & Omenma, 2019). The tasks are delivered through many actors in PCR, including local communities, government, the international community, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and the private sector. These actors are expected to work together, each playing its unique role, to ensure a coordinated and effective response to post-conflict challenges (Egbe, 2024).

PCR consists of four distinct yet interrelated dimensions: **security**; **justice and reconciliation**; **social and economic well-being**; and **governance and participation** (Egbe, 2024; Hamre & Sullivan, 2002). This study organises its investigation and analysis around these four core dimensions.

- **Security** addresses all aspects of public safety, in particular the establishment of a safe and secure environment and the development of legitimate and stable institutions targeted at safeguarding the lives and properties of community members during the post-conflict period. Security encompasses the provision of collective and individual security and is the precondition for achieving successful outcomes in the other dimensions.
- **Social and economic well-being** addresses fundamental social and economic needs, in particular the provision of emergency relief, the restoration of essential services to the population, laying the foundation for a viable economy, and the initiation of inclusive, sustainable development programmes. Well-being entails protecting the population from starvation, disease, and the elements. As the situation stabilizes, attention shifts from humanitarian relief to long-term social and economic development.
- **Justice and reconciliation** addresses the need for an impartial and accountable legal system and for dealing with past abuses, in particular the creation of effective law enforcement, an open judicial system, fair laws, humane corrections systems, and formal and informal mechanisms for resolving grievances arising from conflict. These tasks encompass the provision of mechanisms to redress grievances, exact appropriate penalties for previous acts, and build capacity to promulgate and enforce the rule of law. Justice and reconciliation also include extraordinary and traditional efforts to reconcile victims and perpetrators of conflict.
- **Governance and participation** addresses the need for legitimate, effective political and administrative institutions and participatory processes. Governance involves setting

rules and procedures for political decision-making and delivering public services in an efficient and transparent manner. Participation encompasses the process for giving voice to the population through the development of civil society, including the generation and exchange of ideas through advocacy groups, civic associations, and the media.

These four dimensions of PCR provide an analytical lens through which the experiences of communities affected by herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria can be examined.

A useful way to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of these four dimensions of PCR is by examining **livelihood recovery**. Livelihood recovery refers to the process through which individuals, households, and communities restore and rebuild their means of living after a crisis or conflict. It involves re-establishing access to critical assets such as land, livestock, savings, and infrastructure; reviving productive activities such as farming, trading, and herding; and strengthening security, trust, social cohesion, and the resilience of affected populations to cope with future shocks (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Ellis, 2000).

Unlike immediate relief gained from temporary assistance, livelihood recovery emphasizes restoration, rehabilitation, and the transition toward sustainable livelihood strategies. It is therefore a critical outcome of post-conflict reconstruction, as it enables affected populations not only to survive but also to rebuild stable and productive lives (DFID, 1999; World Bank, 2017). Examining the adequacy and effectiveness of the four dimensions of PCR through livelihood recovery is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context, where herder–farmer conflicts not only destroy physical infrastructure but also disrupt social relations and economic survival. It also provides a structured way to interpret the findings of this study.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach. The researchers used in-depth interviews to gather detailed information on the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of members of the Nimbo community regarding post-conflict reconstruction interventions and their impacts on livelihood recovery following the herders–farmers conflict.

Area of Study

Nimbo is an agrarian community in South-East Nigeria. The community has fertile land and a vast expanse stretching towards the Enugu–Kogi state border. The area's agricultural potential led to the establishment of a farm settlement under the former Eastern Regional Government's agrarian initiative (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). The establishment of the farm settlement led to a continued influx of farmers into Nimbo and surrounding communities since 1922. The area recently became a home for pastoralists. The community engages in shifting cultivation, which enabled herders to graze in the areas where farming was not done in each cropping season. This was a win-win strategy for both the farmers and the cattle herders until more herders moved into the community. The increased population of herders and cows gave rise to increased competition over the available land resources, resulting in violent conflict between the two parties (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018).

Sample

The researchers used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select participants from the affected villages (Nimbo Ngwoko, Ugwuigoro, Ekwuru, Ebor, Enugu Nimbo, Umuome, and Ugwuachara). Five categories of participants were represented in the study: (a) community leaders or community policy makers, (b) farmers, (c) victims of the invasion (those who lost relations, lost property, or were injured during the invasion), (d) members of the community vigilante, and (e) traders. Each village was represented by five participants, making a total of 35 participants.

Instrument

The instrument for the study (an in-depth interview guide) was designed to understand the post-conflict reconstruction interventions deployed by the government and other stakeholders in Nimbo and their impact on livelihood recovery. Phenomenologically designed probes accompanied the questions to elicit real-life experiences as part of the responses (Neubauer et al., 2019). For instance, questions asked included: "From your own observation, what are the PCR interventions deployed by government in your community? What did the government do to improve the security of life and property in Nimbo after the invasion?" "From your observation, what did the government do to compensate the victims of the invasion?" "How did the actions taken by government and other stakeholders improve the socio-economic conditions of your community members?" "How did the interventions deployed by other stakeholders improve social and economic activities?" "From what you have experienced so far, how safe and secure is your community?" "In what ways does the current relationship between your community and the herders impact your economic life?" These and other questions were captured in the in-depth interview (IDI) guide. With in-depth interviews, participants could deeply share their personal experiences and perceptions about the subject matter (Tong et al., 2007).

Procedure and Data Collection

The interview guide was semi-structured, and the interviews were conducted between October 2024 and February 2025. Thirty-five in-depth interviews were conducted. All interviews used standardized tools that were collectively designed, pretested, and validated by the researchers through a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted with seven participants from the study area, who were later exempted from the main study. During the pilot study, the researchers carefully observed and noted questions that seemed confusing, required further explanation, or made participants uncomfortable. Thereafter, the questions were revised to improve clarity and validity and to improve the efficiency of the interview process.

The village leaders, officials of the market union, officials of the farmers' union, and the leaders of the community vigilante served as middlemen between the participants and the researchers, connecting the participants with the researchers and introducing them. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes at weekends.

Although the interview guides were created in English, they were translated into Igbo, and the interviews were conducted in Igbo, the native language of the Nimbo community. The

language was chosen to accommodate both literate and non-literate participants. The researchers were familiar with the local language of the study area. They also recruited research assistants (RAs) familiar with the local language, who took notes and handled the audio recording of the interviews. In-depth interviews were chosen for this qualitative study because the procedure gives insight into participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives, which are embedded in the social and cultural context (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Consent for Participation and Publication

Before each interview, the scope and essence of the research were communicated to participants based on the principle of full disclosure. For ethical reasons, participants gave written or verbal consent (for those unable to read and write) regarding their willingness to participate in the study and their preferred recording options (audio recording and/or note-taking). Signed informed consent was obtained from participants, and in cases where participants could not sign, oral informed consent was given. The details of anonymity and confidentiality were explained and promised to participants. Participants were also informed that anonymized data may be published.

Data Analysis

All IDIs were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English by the researchers. Transcription and description of what participants said were prioritized; to do this, the researchers presented the original data acquired from the field for verbatim translation from Igbo to English. The thematic analysis (TA) approach was adopted for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA involves examining data to uncover, analyse, and interpret recurring patterns of meaning, known as "themes." It offers a structured and straightforward process for coding and developing themes from qualitative data, enabling in-depth, nuanced, and comprehensive descriptions. Transcripts were read several times and reviewed against the original audio and documents to guarantee accuracy. The data were manually analysed. Codes were generated from the data, focusing on the research objectives. Similar codes were grouped into sub-themes and themes. Direct quotations were used to report findings, which helped to vividly capture participants' perspectives and experiences. Throughout data collection and analysis, participants' identification was used; however, these identifiers were omitted before presenting the results to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Demographic data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participants' Characteristic	Frequency (n=35)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	19	54.3
Female	16	45.7
Participants' ID		
Village Leader/Policy maker	8	22.9
Farmers	12	34.3

Participants' Characteristic	Frequency (n=35)	Percentage (%)
Victims of the invasion	6	17.1
Member of the community vigilante	4	11.4
Traders	5	14.3
Marital status		
Single	2	5.7
Married	25	71.4
Widowed	7	20.0
Divorced/separated	1	2.9
Age		
25–34	2	5.7
35–44	6	17.1
45–54	10	28.6
55–64	17	48.6
Educational qualification		
No formal education	1	2.9
1–6 years	14	40.0
7–12 years	17	48.6
13 years and above	3	8.6
Religion		
Christianity	34	97.1
No religion	1	2.9

Table 2 shows a descriptive summary of the demographic characteristics of the 35 respondents. The age range of the participants was 25–64 years, and the majority were male (n=19). The majority were married (n=25), and 17 participants had 7–12 years of formal education. Farmers constituted the largest participant category (n=12).

Findings

Government's Intervention in the First Dimension of PCR (Security)

The findings provided insight into the PCR interventions deployed by the government. Most participants indicated that the government did two major things to improve security in Nimbo: it built a police station and deployed forest guards to the farmlands and bushes. Below are some of their statements:

"One of the major roles the government played in restoring security in our community is that they built a police station in our community. We didn't have a police station in our community, but after the incident, they built a police station. It gave us a little hope and relief." (Farmer, male)

"The government recruited youth from different communities in Enugu state to guide their community. These security personnel are referred to as 'forest guards'. They are recruited to

guard the farmlands and other parts of the communities because the police and the military do not guard those places. Recently, they increased the number of forest guards from five to twenty." (Policy maker, male)

Other Stakeholders' Intervention in the First Dimension of PCR (Security)

The participants stated that the community made serious efforts to restore security. These efforts included donating resources and labour to fence the police station, donating a car for the policemen, and establishing a community vigilante. Below are some of their reports:

"Our community made serious efforts to restore security in our community by empowering some youth and deploying them to be in charge of the areas where our people farm. We refer to them as 'neighbourhood watch', and they serve as the community vigilante/police. They also serve as police informants, alerting the police anytime there is a crisis. We donated money, which we used to buy some arms for them, and we contribute money monthly to pay them a little stipend." (Farmer, female)

"The building used as the police station was not well constructed; because of that, anytime a police officer is posted to Nimbo station, the officer will write for transfer. We had to contribute money, other materials, and labour to fence the police station, but at a point, we all got tired of fixing the place." (Policy maker, male)

"The car used by the policemen in the police station was donated by an indigene of Nimbo. No car was sent to the police station by the government. Even when this car, donated by one of us, develops a fault, the policemen will ask us to contribute money to fix the car. Anytime there is any emergency security threat, and they fail to be responsive, if you ask them why, they will either tell you that the car has a problem or that there is no money to fuel the car. We used to contribute money to fuel the car." (Women's leader)

The community also tried to safeguard its members by establishing boundaries, leaving parts of the land for the herders to graze on, but the government ordered them to allow the herders to move freely:

"We have tried many times to create boundaries so that the herders will have designated areas where they can feed their cattle. This has not worked because each time they leave these designated areas to encroach on our farm, and we confront them, they will quickly report to the government, and our local government chairmen will call us and ask us to allow them to move freely." (Farmers' union leader, male)

This pattern is significant: while the government established formal security structures, the community itself bore a disproportionate share of the burden — funding, labour, and even the vehicles and fuel that formal security institutions required. This signals a partial transfer of security responsibility from the state to the community, an arrangement whose sustainability is questionable.

Government's Intervention in the Second Dimension of PCR (Justice and Reconciliation)

Most research participants reported that the state government attempted a dialogue with the two parties, but it failed. One participant said:

"The government tried to engage both parties in a dialogue, but didn't succeed. Our people were so annoyed. You can imagine the pain of a community losing 40 lives in one day for no known reason, and no one was caught because the community was abandoned by security personnel. Our people committed no crime, yet they were slaughtered like chickens. Our people rejected the government's call because of anger and pain." (Farmer, female)

The participants also explained that there was no post-conflict justice. The perpetrators of the attack disappeared into thin air, and the suspects who were arrested were later released from police custody:

"Our major concern and disappointment is that the perpetrators of this crime were not brought to book. Some Fulanis and Kanuri people were arrested a few days after the invasion around the boundary between our state and Kogi state. They had the live videos and pictures of the killings that happened on the day of the invasion in their phones, yet they were released and were never charged to court. That was when we realised that the herders have people in government backing them up. Till now, none of us can explain how the case ended." (Policy maker, male)

Another participant said:

"It is so disheartening that no one was caught or prosecuted for the mayhem unleashed on us. Is it spirits that committed this crime? It is unbelievable that people will commit this type of crime and go scot-free. The state governor promised us that we would get justice, but nothing has happened." (Farmer, female)

The participants also explained that there was no compensation for the victims:

"There was nothing like compensation. Some children became fatherless, some women became widows, and nothing was done to compensate them. Some children are still suffering because of the demise of their father. Those whose properties were destroyed were not compensated." (Farmer, female)

The total absence of prosecutions, despite the availability of incriminating evidence, signalled to the community that state institutions were either unwilling or unable to deliver accountability. This perception does not merely deny past justice; it actively undermines the legitimacy of the reconstruction process and fuels the distrust that pervades the community's ongoing relations.

Other Stakeholders' Intervention in the Second Dimension of PCR (Justice and Reconciliation)

Within the community itself, a distinct internal dimension of reconciliation emerged. Participants stated that the indigenes of Nimbo accused their traditional rulers of granting the herders authority to graze on Nimbo land, with some insinuating that the traditional rulers had been bribed by the cattle owners. This internal crisis was later settled by the traditional rulers:

"If we are to talk about what the stakeholders did to bring back peace after the conflict, I will say that the traditional rulers should be commended for 'taking the bullets thrown at them' after the crisis. A few months after the invasion, the herders came back with their cattle and continued grazing on our land. The traditional rulers were accused of being bribed by the herders. This accusation made the indigenes drag the traditional rulers. They were labelled all sorts of names, yet they never fought their subjects; instead, they devoted their energy and time to make sure that peace reigned. They were able to prove their innocence. This exonerated the traditional rulers and brought peace between them and us, their subjects." (Member of community vigilante, male)

Significantly, this internal reconciliation between the community and its own leaders contrasted sharply with the absence of any external reconciliation with the herders. The participants agreed that while the government attempted to reconcile them with the herders, this effort failed, and on their own part they made no move to reconcile with the herders:

"Government's effort to reconcile Nimbo community and the herders failed, and on our part we didn't make any move for reconciliation. We were so angered by the way the whole thing happened. We were abandoned by the security operatives. We made a security report that the herders are planning to attack us, but nothing was done. At the period the herders invaded our community there were neither policemen nor military men in the community. So when they were talking about dialogue, we couldn't oblige because we lost trust in the government." (Policy maker, male)

This illustrates that reconciliation in post-conflict settings operates at multiple levels: while informal, community-level mechanisms succeeded in restoring internal cohesion, the more difficult and consequential reconciliation between the two conflict parties remained entirely unaddressed. It is precisely this latter reconciliation that is a precondition for livelihood recovery.

Government's Intervention in the Third Dimension of PCR (Social and Economic Well-Being)

Regarding interventions to improve the social and economic well-being of community members, participants considered that the government did not do much. Here are some of their responses:

"The then Governor of our state visited our community after the incident and paid the hospital bills of the victims who were injured. Nothing was done about the buildings that

were destroyed and there was no compensation for those who lost their loved ones." (Victim, male)

"Enugu State government donated three million naira to the community and also brought food items such as rice and tubers of yam as a palliative for the victims and other community members. Many did not get a share of the money. The food items brought were also small; none of us was able to get up to 3 kg of rice." (Leader of Married Women Association)

"Government didn't do much. There are people whose houses were burnt down; nothing was done to make sure they have a place to sleep. There was no structure or houses built for those who were displaced because of the crisis. Some of the victims ran to neighbouring towns for shelter. Not much was done for the wives and children of the deceased." (Victim, female)

Other Stakeholders' Intervention in the Third Dimension (Social and Economic Well-Being) in Nimbo

The findings show that members of the community and other stakeholders made interventions geared towards the well-being of Nimbo residents. Participants indicated that faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and individual philanthropists supported the community through cash donations and foodstuffs. These are their expressions:

"Some kind-hearted individuals donated some money to the victims. I benefited from the money donated by the former governor of Anambra State, Governor Peter Obi. Even though it wasn't his state, he donated money to our community." (Victim, female)

Participants indicated that there were also donations from faith-based organisations:

"The Catholic Diocese of Nsukka donated money and the Bishop of the Diocese promised to train the children of those who lost their lives during the invasion. The church also brought palliatives such as foodstuffs." (Policy maker, male)

The findings also revealed that the victims benefited from the communal life that characterises most rural communities in Nigeria. Participants stated that apart from donations like money and foodstuffs, other kinds of help came from members of the community. Below are some of their expressions:

"Most of us whose houses were destroyed were accommodated by our neighbours. My yam barn and my motorcycle were burnt by the herders, but I didn't feel the impact much because of my cousin's assistance. He bought a new motorcycle for me and also gave me money to buy crops for cultivation." (Victim, male)

"I can say that the communal life in Nimbo really helped us during the post-invasion era. There were people whose houses were burnt down. These houses were built through community effort. Community members donated money and building materials, and some also provided labour. The churches that were burnt down were also rebuilt through the efforts of the church members." (Farmer, female)

The reliance on informal, community-based support rather than formal state intervention reveals a telling pattern: in the absence of adequate government assistance, recovery depended heavily on kinship networks, religious institutions, and personal philanthropy. While these forms of support provided essential immediate relief, they were necessarily limited in scope and could not substitute for comprehensive state-led reconstruction. Moreover, the failure to fulfil promised training – as the Bishop's pledge illustrates – reflects the ad hoc and non-binding character of much of this assistance.

Interventions in the Fourth Dimension of PCR (Governance and Participation)

Participants expressed their displeasure at how the government makes decisions concerning herdsmen and farmers without involving the farmers:

"There is nothing like participation. Aside the time we were called for dialogue within the period that the invasion happened, there has never been a time we were called upon and asked questions about this issue again. Government just take decision that they feel is ok for everyone without making an attempt to hear our voice. Recently the state government had a meeting with the Local Government Chairman. In the meeting, they told him that the state government is making plans to establish ranches in our community. No traditional ruler from Nimbo was invited for that meeting; no farmer from Nimbo was invited; the Local Government Chairman who was invited for the meeting is from another community. When he informed our people about the outcome of the meeting, our people embarked on peaceful protest, resisting the establishment of ranches. We are still waiting for the outcome." (Policy maker, male)

The participants also felt that most decisions taken on issues relating to farmer–herder clashes always favour the herders. They believe that the owners of the cattle have great influence on government officials and that this is why officials always side with the herders:

"Our decisions, strategies and opinions do not matter at all. Government always take decisions to favour the herders. Can you imagine that there was a day we caught two herders grazing on a newly cultivated farm. We asked them to leave and exchanged words with them. The next day, we were invited to the police station to make a statement. We were detained for two days at the police station, just for asking them to leave that particular farm. There was no fight, and we didn't tamper with their cattle, but we were detained and warned by the policemen there not to disturb the herders again. Anytime we have a little clash with the cattle herders, it is either policemen are asked to go and arrest our people or our community leaders are called for interrogation in the government house." (Member of community vigilante, male)

These accounts reveal a profound governance deficit. Decisions affecting the community's land and livelihoods were made without its representation, while its members facing clashes perceived a systematic bias in favour of the herders. The proposed establishment of ranches in the community – a significant land-use decision – was made without consulting the very farmers whose land and livelihoods would be most affected. This exclusion not only violated the participatory principle of PCR; it actively alienated the community and generated resistance (the peaceful protest) to a potentially productive intervention.

Notably, no other-stakeholder interventions were reported in this dimension. Neither NGOs, faith-based organisations, nor the private sector were perceived as having facilitated community participation in decision-making. This gap itself is a significant finding: governance and participation – the dimension most directly concerned with giving affected populations a voice – received the least attention from all reconstruction actors.

PCR Interventions and Livelihood Recovery

We investigated how interventions have improved livelihood recovery in the community. The majority of participants stated that most of the interventions provided only temporary relief rather than fostering sustainable livelihood recovery. Measures such as the payment of hospital bills for injured victims and the distribution of money and food items offered short-term assistance but did not contribute to long-term livelihood restoration. There was no shift from humanitarian relief to improvement in the socio-economic well-being of community members. One participant said:

"I agree that some of us benefited from the donations and also payment of hospital bills, but those are just short-term assistance. They do not translate to livelihood recovery. People's farms and households were destroyed; some women lost their husbands; some children lost their parents; yet nothing much was done to help them recover and live their normal life again." (Victim, female)

"I know of one leader of a faith-based organisation that promised to train the children who lost their fathers, but for years now, we haven't seen him fulfilling this promise. Some of these children were unable to complete their secondary education because they had no one to train them." (Farmer, female)

Participants consistently emphasized that security remains one of the weakest aspects of post-conflict reconstruction in the community. A central concern was the disparity in weaponry: herders were reported to possess more sophisticated arms than the community vigilantes and forest guards, thereby undermining local security efforts. Furthermore, participants described the police as poorly equipped and insufficiently empowered to respond effectively to emergencies. One frequently cited example was that police officers sometimes requested community members to contribute money to buy fuel for their vehicles before attending to urgent situations. Another concern was that police officers and soldiers deployed in the community seldom patrol the farmlands – the primary sites of clashes between herders and farmers – instead restricting their presence to the main roads, leaving the farmlands largely unprotected. This, according to participants, has contributed to delayed responses, increased vulnerability, and a general lack of confidence in formal security institutions. These are some of their reports:

"Most of the policemen and soldiers deployed to our community stay along the express roads, mounting roadblocks and checking bus drivers and okada riders. One can hardly see them around the farm area where the clashes occur. They don't respond to emergencies on time. The community vigilantes who patrol within the farm areas are not adequately equipped to do their job. The herders carry more sophisticated weapons than the community vigilantes. We are always afraid to go to the farm. It is important to send police

or soldiers to the farmland at least twice a week. This will help in checking the activities of the herders and also encourage farmers to work in their farms with less fear." (Farmer, male)

"The formal security institution has failed our community. Anytime there is any emergency security threat, and they fail to be responsive, if you ask them why, they will either tell you that their car has a problem or that there is no money to buy fuel for the car. We used to contribute money to fuel the car." (Member of community vigilante, male)

The majority of research participants also reported that the PCR interventions implemented by government agencies and other stakeholders have not translated into meaningful livelihood recovery, as the community continues to grapple with multiple challenges. They emphasized that no intervention has successfully facilitated reconciliation with the herders, and both groups still perceive one another as adversaries. This persistent hostility has heightened insecurity and contributed to a range of adverse outcomes, including trauma, poverty, hunger, sexual violence, killings, kidnappings, communal crises, and low school enrolment. One participant narrated the situation thus:

"We have no good relationship with the herders. How can one be a friend to someone who forcefully took over one's land? What we are experiencing is total subjugation. We can't move freely again in our community. We see them as enemies because of their numerous nefarious acts. No single month passes without us hearing stories about sexual violence, destruction of crops, attacks or kidnapping in our community. And because of the atrocities they are committing against us, we have abandoned our farmlands for them. Though we feel safer farming around our residential areas, we do not have a large expanse of land around our residential area. This has negatively affected both food availability and our income. Our economic trees, such as palm trees and breadfruit, are perishing in the farmland because of the fear of the herders." (Farmer, female)

Another participant stated that the herders also see them as enemies and are always ready to fight:

"Since the crisis of April 25, 2016, the herders see us as enemies. Each time they move around with their cattle, they are always prepared as if they are going for battle. Any little confrontation, they will bring out their machete and gun. Those who insist on farming in those lands are accompanied by forest guards or other security men in the community. Sometimes, even when the forest guards accompany us to the farm, we are afraid because we know the herders use more sophisticated guns than the forest guards." (Farmer, female)

Participants also explained that insecurity has severely disrupted local markets. Fear of attacks has discouraged people from travelling to or participating in market activities, resulting in low patronage. In some cases, markets that once served as vibrant economic hubs are gradually declining and, according to participants, some are at risk of extinction. This decline has further weakened livelihoods and deepened poverty within the community. One participant reported:

"We have many markets in our community that have been challenged because of this crisis. I want to speak specifically about Opanda market. Opanda is a well-established popular market that has been in existence since the early seventies. It is a major market where farmers from our community sell their harvested food crops like yam, cassava and

vegetables to people from other communities and states. Now, the market is going into extinction. The farmers do not have many food crops to sell there because of the under-production caused by insecurity. The insecurity that has existed and threatened the community is known to many people, including the traders who come to buy food products. People are scared of visiting the market because of the activities of the herdsmen. All the markets in our community are facing different challenges because of insecurity." (Trader, female)

The poor post-conflict reconstruction did not only affect livelihood recovery but also had other negative implications, such as trauma and disunity among community members. One participant narrated how the situation is affecting her mental health:

"The crises between us and the herders has caused us a lot of trauma. No one sleeps here with both eyes closed. I remember running away from my house with my children around 1 a.m. just because we heard strange voices around our house. This has happened twice. I don't know when all these are going to end." (Farmer, female)

Participants enumerated how the unhealthy relationship has brought disunity and a lack of trust among community members:

"Apart from the trauma, poverty, and hunger that the unhealthy relationship between us and the herders has caused us, it has also caused disunity among the indigenes of Nimbo. From time to time, we see a family pointing accusing fingers at another family, accusing them of being informants to the herders. This kind of accusation has caused problems between different families." (Member of community vigilante, male)

Taken together, these accounts show that, viewed through the livelihood-recovery lens, PCR in Nimbo has fallen short on every meaningful indicator. The four dimensions are not independent silos but mutually reinforcing: the absence of justice undermined trust; the absence of trust undermined reconciliation; the absence of reconciliation and security undermined people's willingness to farm; and the abandonment of farmland undermined livelihoods, in turn deepening poverty, hunger, and trauma — and further eroding the social cohesion on which recovery depends. The persistence of the conflict dynamics, rather than their resolution, has become the defining feature of the post-conflict period.

Discussion

This study aimed to ascertain the post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) interventions deployed in Nimbo community after the invasion by the herders and to evaluate the impacts of PCR on livelihood recovery, to inform research, policy, and practice. The findings reveal a pronounced asymmetry in reconstruction: security interventions were implemented and partially effective, while justice, reconciliation, sustainable livelihood recovery, and genuine participation were largely neglected. This imbalance helps explain why, years after the invasion, the community still lives in fear, has not reconciled with the herders, and continues to see its livelihoods erode.

The prioritization of security over other dimensions. The major government interventions to improve security were the deployment of police and military personnel and the

recruitment of forest guards from the community. In Nigeria, deploying security personnel is a prevalent method of restoring peace to conflict-affected communities. While this approach can quell immediate tensions, it often falls short of establishing sustainable, long-term peace (Muhammed et al., 2023). Police and military intervention in a crisis-ridden situation is acknowledged worldwide to be effective in dousing tensions, but it does not guarantee lasting peace; many Nigerian states are experiencing protracted herder–farmer conflict even with the combined deployment of military and police (Odo, 2012; Lawal et al., 2024). Sometimes security interventions are underfunded or donor-driven, with short project cycles.

The findings further reveal that the community recruited youths as community police or vigilantes, generally referred to as neighbourhood watch, who were actively involved in securing lives and property. However, their capacity to ensure effective security was significantly constrained by inadequate equipment. Participants consistently reported that the herders possessed more sophisticated weapons than these local security actors, creating a serious imbalance in security capacity. This is consistent with studies highlighting the vulnerability of community-based security groups in rural and conflict-prone areas of Nigeria; although local vigilante groups often provide the first line of defence around farm areas, they are poorly armed compared with herders and insurgent groups (UNDP, 2023; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004; Ogunnubi et al., 2016). Although these local security actors contribute to maintaining order, their inability to match the herders' firepower and mobility limits their overall effectiveness in ensuring sustainable security and improving livelihood recovery. The findings reveal that the herders move around with sophisticated weapons instead of sticks, yet no serious effort has been made to disarm them or punish those caught with arms. The frequent clashes in Nigeria are attributed to the government's inability to control arms proliferation (Ajala & Murphy, 2025). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has exacerbated this imbalance, leaving community security providers at a disadvantage (Edeko, 2011; Mohammed, 2017). Ending illicit arms flows and establishing firm state control are essential for stability in Nigeria; unlawful access to small arms and light weapons intensifies violent conflicts and hinders peace efforts by making armed groups resilient and audacious.

The failure of the justice dimension and its consequences. The findings showed that there was no post-conflict justice, as the perpetrators of the crime were not punished and the suspects who were arrested were later released. Secondly, the Enugu State Government's failure to issue a white paper on the findings of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry that investigated the crisis depicts a lack of political will for post-conflict justice (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). Post-conflict justice refers to the legal and societal processes undertaken after a conflict to address human rights violations, ensure accountability for crimes committed, promote reconciliation, and affirm the sanctity and inherent value of human life (Hanna & Higonnet, 2008; United Nations, 2004). The inability of the government and other stakeholders to propagate justice is one reason for the protracted conflict. Failures to bring culprits to justice also fuel a sense of impunity and may lead to the repetition of the same behaviour that threatens peace. This corroborates the finding of Mbogo et al. (2025) that the lack of a coordinated effort to arrest and prosecute inciters of violence in inter-ethnic conflict in Kenya undermined peace-building. Collier et al. (2008) also attribute the lack of justice to weak institutions, arguing that weak institutions struggle to provide security and justice, allowing grievances to persist. The United Nations Charter reflects a global consensus that

individuals responsible for severe human rights violations should be held accountable, regardless of whether the atrocities occurred during war or peace (Gates et al., 2007). Additionally, psychological and political rationales support the need for accountability in post-conflict situations: from a psychological perspective, justice can facilitate healing and reconciliation by addressing past traumas; politically, failing to uphold justice can erode the legitimacy of post-conflict governments and potentially lead to future violence (Mani, 2005).

In the Nigerian context, the lack of accountability for perpetrators of communal violence exacerbates distrust between communities while simultaneously incentivizing further violent acts (Orimiye & Bala, 2024; Akinwale, 2010). The absence of credible justice mechanisms not only delays reconciliation but also sustains the conditions for recurring violence. The findings reveal that no intervention has successfully facilitated reconciliation with the herders, and both groups still perceive one another as adversaries, contributing to the protracted conflict. Without meaningful dialogue, truth-telling, and justice, unresolved grievances persist and intergroup relations remain fragile, thereby decreasing the likelihood of livelihood recovery (Lederach, 1997; Jeong, 2005).

The inadequacy of the social and economic well-being dimension. With respect to interventions for social and economic well-being, the findings disclose that government and other stakeholders donated funds for hospital bills and food items as palliatives. Some participants disclosed that not all the victims received a share of the food items distributed. This aligns with Ohida et al. (2023), who found that food and beverages are the least-delivered items by state and aid organisations to disaster victims in Nigeria. These interventions were largely ad hoc and short-lived, failing to prioritize long-term strategies for economic empowerment and livelihood recovery. This aligns with scholarship underscoring that palliative relief measures, while useful for immediate humanitarian needs, are insufficient for addressing the structural drivers of vulnerability and improving livelihood recovery in post-conflict contexts (Macrae, 2001; Uvin, 2002). Livelihood recovery requires restoring productive activities, including farming, markets, trade, and education systems. When livelihoods remain insecure and poverty deepens, communities become more susceptible to renewed conflict (Addison & Brück, 2009).

The governance and participation deficit. Perhaps the least-addressed dimension, governance and participation saw no reported interventions from any stakeholder. Participants described a uniformly top-down approach in which decisions about land and livelihoods – including the proposal to establish ranches – were made without community representation. This echoes the broader critique that many PCR interventions are designed top-down with little involvement of community members and thus fail to align with community needs and priorities (Paffenholz, 2015). The community's peaceful protest against the ranch proposal illustrates how exclusion breeds resistance, even to potentially beneficial interventions.

Leverage recovery as an outcome. Most interventions did not translate into meaningful livelihood recovery in Nimbo. Because of the continuous clash with the herders, community members have abandoned major farmlands for fear of becoming victims of the herders' atrocities. This has disrupted sources of livelihood and significantly decreased crop and livestock production, leading to food insecurity. This supports the view that conflicts are a growing cause of chronic underproduction and food insecurity, where prolonged conflicts

prevent farming and marketing and where land, waterworks, markets, infrastructure, and human communities have been destroyed (Ellis, 2000; Chukwu et al., 2022). The markets in the community are deserted and going into extinction. These findings corroborate many studies (Ali, 2023; Eneyo et al., 2023; Muhammed et al., 2023; International Crisis Group, 2021) that outline the impacts of herdsmen–farming-community clashes in Nigeria, including trauma, loss of life, loss of property, displacement, hunger, and poverty. Similarly, Igoli et al. (2023) reported that the conflict between herders and farming communities directly affected seven states of North-Western Nigeria – Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara – leading to the destruction of lives and properties, the displacement of people, a growing number of widows and widowers, and orphaned children.

Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that most PCR interventions were characterized by limited community ownership and designed in a top-down manner by governments, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and philanthropists, with little involvement of community members. As a result, they failed to align with community needs and priorities. While short-term interventions may provide temporary relief, they are insufficient to secure lasting peace and restore productive activities such as farming, herding, market trading, and education. Without addressing structural drivers of conflict, fostering reconciliation, strengthening institutions, and restoring livelihoods, communities remain vulnerable to renewed cycles of violence.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Nigeria is increasingly plagued by widespread conflicts between herders and farmers, with far-reaching and devastating consequences. Despite public outcry against the deteriorating state of security, many rural communities in the country continue to battle the challenges of banditry and herder–farmer conflicts. The impact of these conflicts is multifaceted, encompassing socio-economic and psychological challenges such as food insecurity, poverty, humanitarian crises, trauma, and disunity, as well as posing a significant threat to national unity, integration, and social cohesion.

The case of Nimbo demonstrates that effective post-conflict reconstruction leading to livelihood recovery hinges on a balanced, multifaceted approach across all four dimensions. This includes fostering genuine reconciliation; improving security by combining the services of both the state and community police; providing the necessary facilities and funds to improve the socio-economic activities and well-being of the affected population; holding individuals responsible for severe human rights violations accountable for their actions; compensating victims; rebuilding the structures destroyed during the conflict; and ensuring genuine community participation in decision-making. Moreover, stringent measures must be taken to curb the illicit arms trade and the proliferation of weapons, as these often facilitate heinous crimes such as mass killings, kidnappings, gender-based violence, cattle rustling, and the destruction of agricultural land.

With the increasing spate of insecurity, the Nigerian state has been challenged to rise to its constitutional responsibility of protecting citizens. This, if actualized, will guarantee the safety of herders and farmers and improve livelihoods in the country. Without a shift from security-focused, top-down relief toward inclusive, justice-centered, and sustainable

reconstruction, communities such as Nimbo will remain trapped in a cycle of fear, distrust, and poverty — a post-conflict state in name that has not, in practice, moved beyond conflict.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, it is a single-community case study; while this allows for depth, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other herder–farmer conflict zones in Nigeria, which may have distinct dynamics. Second, the data are self-reported and retrospective, gathered eight to nine years after the 2016 invasion; recall bias and the passage of time may have shaped participants' accounts. Third, there is a potential for social-desirability bias, particularly where participants discussed the roles of government officials and traditional rulers. Finally, participants were not asked to identify which PCR interventions were most important to them, so the relative priority they assign to the four dimensions cannot be established from this data. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods or comparative multi-community design and explore the community's own ranking of reconstruction priorities.

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