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Research Article

THE INTENSITY OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT AND ITS EFFECTS ON FOOD SECURITY: THE CASE OF ESU COMMUNITY, CAMEROON

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Abstract

Purpose of Study: This study explores the relationship between farmers-herder conflict and food security in the ESU community of Fungom Sub-Division, North West Region, Cameroon. The overall goal is to investigate the extent to which the farmer-herder conflict affects food security in the Esu community in the Fungom sub-division of the North West region of Cameroon. **Problem Statement:** Farmers and herders in the ESU community are engaged in constant conflict, which negatively impacts their living conditions and livelihoods. All government efforts to resolve the conflict have proven unsuccessful. Furthermore, this ongoing conflict has dire consequences for food security in the region. **Methodology:** the target population includes community members, households, farmers, herders and internally displaced persons (IDP). 380 community members in Esu were selected through proportionate stratified sampling, and 23 key informants were purposively selected. This study employed a descriptive survey design, using a mixed-methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The study employs both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. **Result:** the study establishes that loss of life during the conflict has, therefore, affected food affordability and accessibility. At the same time, property destruction has affected food affordability, accessibility, and availability, while displacement has affected food accessibility, balanced diet, and availability. The intensity of the conflict has affected all food security indicators.

Keywords: Conflict intensity, Farmer-herder conflict, Food security, ESU community, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

Shelter, food, and clothing have always been essential human necessities and a crucial aspect of human security. It is incumbent upon any government, leadership, or family to ensure its citizens and families have food security. The importance of food security to national development cannot be overstated; this is one reason to mainstream food security into development conversations and actions worldwide. The discussion on food security is not a recent issue. Several debates and interventions on food security have been held, including the 1974 World Food Conference and the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS). Interestingly, Swaminathan (2003) notes that approximately 186 countries have signed and committed to food security, aiming to halve the number of malnourished and hungry people by 2025, but this dream has not been achieved. Tim and Joachim (2013) describe the state of global food security, intimating that 2 billion people of the world are food insecure, experiencing extreme poverty, hunger and a cycle of violence, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. A more recent situation on food security in 2021 and 2023 is painted by The Food and Agriculture Organisation's reports (FAO), which estimates that in 2021, 29.3 per cent of the world's population faced food insecurity, and 8. 828 million people (10.5 per cent of the world population) faced hunger. (FAO, 2022). In 2023, approximately 757 million people faced severe hunger, representing one person in eleven worldwide and one in five in Africa (FAO *et al.,* 2024). The above projections on global food insecurity, especially in Africa, paint a gloomy picture that, in my opinion, requires ongoing interventions. Several factors contribute to global food insecurity.

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However, I am interested in the variable of conflict, which Hendrickson et al. (2020) have clearly identified as a significant factor contributing to food insecurity globally, particularly in Africa. Most importantly, they underscore that farmer-herder conflicts, driven by competition over resources and population growth, are frequent and violent, affecting food security. Globally, disputes between American farmers and ranchers have their origins in the history of agriculture, which began with the settlement of the American West and its subsequent expansion. Conflicts over land usage, water access, and grazing rights have become increasingly common in recent years (Nelson & Bruskotter, 2020). In areas such as Texas, Wyoming, and Montana, disputes between farmers and cattle owners are frequent, resulting in lawsuits, vandalism, and, on rare occasions, violence. Noble and Redford (2019) note that the conflict impacts environmental conservation and contributes to ecosystem degradation. They equally indicate that North America is battling food security challenges. In Europe, conflicts between farmers and herders are frequently characterised by rural depopulation, land abandonment, and biodiversity preservation. There are conflicts between pastoralists who support traditional grazing methods and agriculturalists who seek to increase land use in the Alps, Pyrenees, and Carpathians. Some pastoralists preserve endangered animals, such as wolves and bears, by preventing access to common areas, which fuels disputes between European farmers and herders. These disputes illustrate how agricultural policies, environmental laws, and cultural heritage impact European resource management and land-use strategies (Lipper *et al.,* 2019). There are rampant violent conflicts between farmers and herders on the continent of Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa experiences severe conflicts between farmers and herders due to its reliance on livestock and agricultural farming for livelihoods and food security. Nkwi et al. (2020)

state that conflict over limited resources has worsened the farmers-herders conflict in the region. The conflicts have become insurgencies in nations such as Nigeria and Mali. Most importantly, these conflicts breed negative ethnicity between black farming communities and Arab pastoralists (Benjaminsen & Boubacar, 2021). A case in point is Cameroon, which experiences farmer-herder conflicts in the North West, North, and Far North regions (Mbih, 2020). Of interest to this study is the Fungom sub-division in the North West Region, where these conflicts have, in recent years, caused significant challenges to rural livelihoods (Akumbom *et al.,* 2020). These findings are supported by the global report on the food crisis, conducted between June and August 2024. The findings were that over 2.5 million people in Cameroon are expected to experience food insecurity (WFP, 2024). Most importantly, Zih (2024) notes that the Esu community is among the areas in the Fungom sub-division adversely affected by farmer-herder conflicts. The situation has persisted since 1980. However, the same study provides evidence that this was not the case from 1940 to 1960, when farmers and herders in the region coexisted peacefully. Thus, the study attributes the current situation to ideological differences, the scarcity of natural resources, the demarcation of land into farming and grazing areas, and the government's introduction of mixed farming. This study aims to establish the extent to which the intensity of the conflict has affected food security in the area.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Esu community faces ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders, significantly disrupting their living conditions and livelihoods. According to Kum (2018), coexistence was peaceful from 1940 to 1950, but tensions surfaced by the late 1950s. The establishment of the Esu Elba individual ranch in 1987 exacerbated the strife, resulting in physical confrontations, loss of life, property destruction, and mass displacement. As noted by Zih (2024), this conflict has persisted for nearly 37 years, with government efforts to mediate proving ineffective. The military's involvement, arresting individuals from both factions, has heightened tensions and prompted an exodus of young people from the area. This persistent conflict severely undermines food security, as farmers allege that herders' livestock graze on essential crops and pollute water sources, thereby reducing agricultural output. This situation perpetuates a cycle of poverty and instability, hindering families' ability to meet their nutritional needs and threatening both the immediate food supply and long-term agricultural viability and community unity. Recent reports from Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV, 2023) indicate that over 1,000 individuals have been internally displaced, constituting approximately 2.56% of Esu's population, and have sought refuge in local displacement camps. The ongoing hunger crisis prompted a call for government action to address the community's dire circumstances. Without strategic interventions, the cycle of conflict threatens to impede all developmental aspects in the region. Despite governmental attempts to mediate the situation, confrontations between farmers and herders remain prevalent, as highlighted by Kum (2018). This ongoing discord casts doubt on the feasibility of achieving the goals of Cameroon Vision 2035, which strives for a unified, peaceful, and stable nation. The study emphasises the critical need for peace building efforts and advocates for urgent action. Furthermore, the limited research on the intensity of this conflict underscores the necessity for comprehensive investigations to develop effective interventions. To address the implications of the farmer-herder dispute on food security, this study aims to empirically assess the conflict's impact and propose solutions to foster peace and enhance food security within the Esu community.

Objectives

- Establish the extent to which loss of life as a result of the conflict has impacted food security in Esu Community, Cameroon.
- Examine the effect of the destruction of properties as a result of the conflict on food security in the Esu community, Cameroon.
- Evaluate how the displacement of people as a result of the conflict has impacted food security in the Esu community, Cameroon.

Theoretical framework

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, has become a key concept in social psychology for examining issues such as intergroup conflict and discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory emphasises how group identity influences behaviour, attitudes, and relationships with other groups. According to this theory, people shape their self-identity through various social groups based on ethnicity, culture, or profession. Furthermore, Jetten et al. (2017) argue that the SIT strengths include its ability to explain intergroup behaviour and its complete framework for describing how group identities shape attitudes, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. This theory addresses specific objective one: to understand the underlying causes of farmer-herder conflict, and specific objective two: to establish the intensity of the conflict and its effects on food security. Zih (2024) discusses the conflict in Esu and notes that other factors, such as migration and the distinction between local and Fulani herders, also fuel it. This explains why examining issues of group dynamics and social identity is relevant to Esu and to the theoretical framework of this study. Social Identity provides a solid framework for understanding group dynamics and their impact on relationships. Building relationships by enhancing group dynamics and identities, and addressing resource scarcity, are crucial elements to consider together for a comprehensive approach to the multifaceted nature of the farmer-herder conflict.

However, Reicher et al. (2005) critique the theory for minimising individual differences and failing to account for the complexity of each person's identity, interests, and behaviours. Moreover, situational and contextual factors can significantly affect intergroup relations and conflicts, yet they have not been adequately considered in the theory

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Loss of lives and food security

Globally, farmer-herder conflicts have been linked with food insecurity. The intensity of the conflict ranges from the loss of lives to property damage and the displacement of people. In Asia, for example, Laurance et al. (2018) note that the farmers-grazers conflict has affected the livelihoods of the community.

The writer provides an example of the conflict between palm oil plantation owners, grazers, and Indigenous communities, illustrating how it has impacted food security in Southeast Asia. The palm plantation owners are in constant conflict with the grazers, who accuse them of encroaching on grazing land. The conflict has resulted in loss of life and negatively impacted palm oil production, as farmers fear accessing their land, which is the community's primary source of income. This conflict has contributed to poverty and food shortages in the country. The connection between the intensity of the farmer-herder conflict and food security is also evident in Africa.

The constant casualty expresses the intensity of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. Okwulu et al. (2024) investigated the causes and effects of these conflicts, as well as their socioeconomic impact on food security and household income. Its findings established that as a result of the conflicts, many people lost their lives. Some have been physically injured and now live with disabilities because of the conflict, which has contributed to food insecurity. Additionally, the evidence includes a low food supply and high food costs. The immediate effects of the conflict, including the loss of lives, have a multiplier effect on two key food security indicators: food availability and affordability. As a result, the study proposes enhancing food security and household income to address this violence. Most importantly, conflict-resolution strategies, inclusive land-use policies, and dialogue and cooperation among farmers and herders are also worth considering.

Moving on to the Central African region, Manu and Tsi (2020) address the conflict between farmers and grazers regarding food security in the communities of Mezam, Santa, Bali, Tubah, and Bafut in Cameroon. The study reveals that the conflict has resulted in fatalities and population displacement. This outcome of the conflict has contributed to food shortages. 52.5% of respondents indicated that food supply shortages drove up prices in local markets, and 60% reported interruptions to livestock activities and the food production cycle (Manu & Tsi, 2020). The conflicts also affected the study area's rural development initiatives, including microcredit institutions, roads, bridges, electricity projects, storage facilities, marketplaces, and water supply. This study has focused on how farmer-herder conflict has resulted in the loss of lives, affecting food availability by reducing agricultural productivity and increasing the cost of livestock and farm goods. Therefore, the study has addressed key food security indicators, including availability and affordability. However, the study does not address other variables, such as food accessibility; it does, however, include crops and animals as components of food security. Moreover, the impact of the loss of lives on food security has not been adequately discussed. The current study aims to establish a clear connection between the direct effects of conflicts, such as fatalities and their impact on food security.

Destruction of Property and Food Security

To examine changes in productive cropland before and after the conflict began in 2011, Li et al. (2022) evaluate the conflict's impact on crop production in Syria. The study established that cropland near urban areas was severely affected and destroyed by the conflicts. After the conflict began, they observed increased yearly fluctuations and spatial heterogeneity in fertile agricultural land. Pre-war crop productivity and precipitation were correlated in fixed-effects models, whereas a counterfactual scenario constructed between 2012 and 2019 showed notable regional variation. This study examines the origins of conflicts and their impacts, including crop damage, but does not investigate the additional effects of crop devastation on food security (Li *et al.,* 2022). A study by Udo (2021) conducted in Nigeria examines the prolonged disputes between Nigerian farmers and herders. Applying the intractable conflict theory, the study evaluates the Complex dynamics at play. The study's results reveal the high cost of conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria, including the loss of lives, livestock, and farmland assets, which have significantly hindered the nation's agricultural output. Furthermore, insecurity has forced farmers to relocate, making their farmlands inaccessible. National food insecurity has increased due to these disturbances, contributing to a decline in agricultural production. To reduce tensions between farmers and herders, the study recommends implementing advanced, contemporary livestock management techniques as part of a comprehensive agricultural policy. This study has discussed the direct link between the destruction of property, including farmland, livestock, and residential homes, and its impact on food security. However, there is no substantive empirical evidence to justify the extent to which property destruction has affected food security. Furthermore, Otu et al. (2024) examine the consequences of the farmer-herder conflict on food security in Ghana. The study finds that farmers and herders have been severely affected by the conflict, resulting in significant livestock and crop losses and a decline in crop and animal production. The study also indicates that these effects spill over to other communities that depend on this area for food supply, adversely affecting food production and availability.

Displacement of People and Food Security

George and Adelaja (2022), who studied the Nigerian context, bring another perspective to this discourse. They examine how food availability is affected in communities hosting internally displaced people (IDPs). They argue that host community households' food consumption scores (FCS) increased with IDP inflow from natural disasters and communal violence, but FCS decreased with IDP influx from armed conflicts. This implies that farmer-header violent conflict and its impact on food security may go beyond the conflict areas to other communities, especially those hosting the displaced persons. These results underscore the importance of targeting interventions and policy responses to address the diverse challenges host communities face in conflict-affected areas, particularly those related to household welfare and food security. This study examines the repercussions of violent conflict on individuals, particularly disputes between farmers and herders. It proves that one consequence of armed conflict that may affect food security is the displacement of people.

Chikaire et al. (2021) examine the effect of conflict on food availability and note that the displacement of farmers due to conflict significantly impacts food security. Interviews with 300 farmers forced to relocate revealed that household food safety and security are significantly affected by conflict-induced displacement. Displaced farmers reported food shortages, food stock losses, disruptions to production processes, and decreased farm investment due to conflicts. Additionally, food products were more likely to become contaminated during conflict due to frequent handling with unclean hands or cooking with contaminated water, increasing the risk of food borne illness and decreasing food quality.

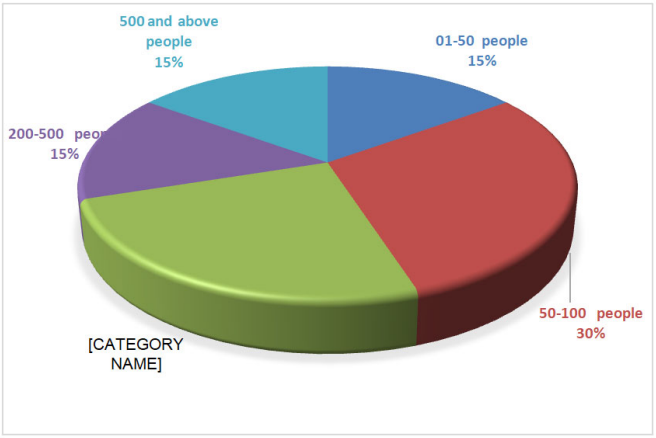
Although the study clarifies the difficulties relocated farmers face, it has flaws. The results are based on self-reported perceptions. Furthermore, neither the underlying reasons for resource-use disputes nor the larger socio-political framework in which they arise were examined in the study. Additional investigation into these matters may lead to more effective policy interventions and assistance programs for farmers displaced by conflict in affected areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires and an interview guide. A descriptive research design was ideal for understanding the what, who or where of the conflict situation (Mathers *et al.,* 2007). The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. From a target population of 39,629 residents across seven villages, Cochran's 1977 formula determined a sample size of 380 community members in Esu through proportionate stratified sampling. 23 key informants were purposively selected (12 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 11 leaders of farmers and herders). The data collection instruments were a survey questionnaire and an interview guide. Data analysis methods were descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Loss of Life and food security



Source: Field Data 2025

Figure1. Number of People Who Died in the Conflict

The respondents' level of agreement was sought on the number of deaths. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents (30%) reported that about 50-100 people died in the farmers-herder conflict in the Esu community. This was followed by 25% of respondents reporting 100-200 deaths, while 15% each reported casualty in the ranges of 1-50 people, 200-500 people, and 500 or more people, respectively. The data indicate that most community members (55%) believe the conflict resulted in 50-200 deaths. The key informants support the above finding. One of them said, We are now experiencing a bit of calm. The conflict has been bloody, many people have died, through physical confrontations, attacks on houses. Others have lost body parts. In fact, people have really died (LF. M, 2025).

The key informant supports the above data and confirms the severe impact of the farmer-herder conflict in Esu. It highlights that the violence has led to numerous fatalities, including deaths caused by confrontations and the burning of homes by herders. Additionally, there are reports of physical injuries such as maiming and the loss of body parts, hands, legs, fingers, and eyes, reflecting the violent and traumatic nature of the conflict. These incidents not only cause individual suffering but also contribute to broader insecurity, which hampers agricultural activities.

Loss of life and Food Accessibility

The respondent's level of agreement was sought on the extent to which they have experienced difficulty accessing food due to community disruption caused by the deaths and the study finding shown in Table 4.3 indicate that the majority 117 of the respondents indicate very high extent, 89 high extent, 44 a moderate, 82 low extent and 48, indicate not at all not at all. The data indicate that 30.8% of respondents reported a very great extent, 23.4% reported a high extent, 11.6% Reported a Moderate Extent, 21.6% reported a low extent, and 12.6% reported not at all.

The key informants emphasise that conflict-related insecurity, stemming from deaths, directly affects agricultural productivity and food access, contributing to food insecurity. One of the respondents said:

I was not able to go to my farm to harvest my maize because I was afraid of being killed. All my maize in my farm got spoiled. Also, those who had food in their houses could not go to the market to sell the food, as others were also available to go buy food in the market. (LF, M. 2025). The study findings indicate difficulties accessing food, as 206 respondents (55.0%) report a high to very great extent of impact when loss of life has disrupted their ability to access food in person. This substantial majority indicates that mortality events have created significant barriers to accessing food, whether through disrupted transportation networks, closed markets, or compromised supply chains. The qualitative data support the above data. Respondents highlight that the loss of lives and the threat of attacks have created insecurity and fear among the people. This has led farmers to abandon their farms, leaving unharvested crops to rot in the fields. This situation reduces food availability and exacerbates food shortages. Additionally, insecurity hampers transportation to and from markets, making it difficult for people to buy and sell food, further disrupting food supply chains.

Loss of life and Food Affordability

The respondent's level of agreement was sought on the extent to which they have experienced difficulty in affording food due to community disruption caused by the deaths and the study finding shown in Table 4.3 indicates that a majority of the respondent, 154 indicate that they have been affected to a very high extent, 48, high extent, 52, moderate, 98 low extent, and 28 not affected at all. This translates to 40.5% of respondents indicating that they have been affected to a very great extent, 12.6% indicating a high extent, 13.7% moderate, 25.8% low, and 7.4% indicating that they have not been affected at all. Financial constraints related to food affordability were the most frequently reported dimension of food insecurity among respondents.

Table 1. Extent to Which the Loss of Life Has Affected Food Security

Question	Not At All	Low Extent	Moderate Extent	High Extent	Very High Extent
I have experienced difficulty accessing food due to community disruption caused by the deaths	48	82	44	89	117
I have experienced difficulty affording food due to community disruption caused by the deaths	28	98	52	48	154
I have experienced food availability challenges due to community disruption caused by the deaths	52	41	59	138	90
I have experienced poor dietary balance due to community disruption caused by the deaths	46	38	61	142	93

Source: Field Data 2025

An overwhelming 202 respondents (53.2%) report a high to very high extent of impact on their ability to afford as a result of loss of life, with 153 respondents (40.3%) indicating a very high extent of impact specifically. About 127 respondents (33.4%) reported experiencing low to no impact, suggesting that the loss of life may disproportionately affect specific segments of the population. The moderate impact category captures 50 respondents (13.2%). The assessment of food availability reveals significant supply-side challenges, with 228 respondents (60.5%) reporting a high to very high extent of impact on their ability to access food supplies. The distribution shows that 93 respondents (24.5%) experienced low to no impact, while 57 respondents (15.0%) reported moderate impact levels. The key informants support the above findings by elaborating on the theme of agricultural productivity decline, indicating that the loss of lives due to the conflict has affected food availability by reducing agricultural production. One of the participants said, I am now in the camp for internally displaced people. I have abandoned my farms due to the attacks and killings of farmers. Also, the destruction of houses and farmlands by herders has made me leave my house and farmlands to find refuge in this camp. I have been displaced; I can no longer farm. I now rely on food that is donated to us in the camp. My relatives who are still in the village do a little farming just next to the house. What amount of food can they produce…Some herders have relocated to other communities, while others have suspended their activities or reduced the number of herds (IDP. M, 2025).

Loss of life and Food availability

The respondents were asked how much they agreed with the statement about the availability of food during community disturbances caused by deaths, as indicated by the study findings presented in Table 4.3. The majority of respondents, 138, indicate they are affected to a great extent, 90 very high, 59 moderate, 41 low and 52 not at all. This translates to 36.3% affected to a great extent, 23.7% very high, 15.5% moderate, 10.8% low extent, and 13.7% not affected at all. The key informant supports the above findings, noting that the conflict has seriously affected food production, thereby reducing food availability. One of the key informants said:

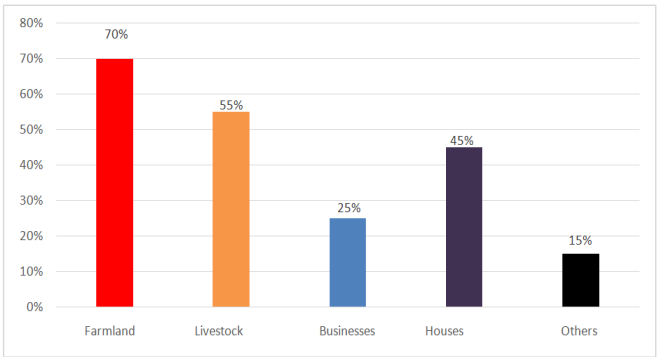
Sometimes you go to the market, but you cannot find any food to buy. The farmers do not have enough food for their families. How will they have excess to sell to other people? Also, people are afraid to approach farmers, and because of that, they are unable to cultivate anything. (LF, M. 2025).

Loss of life Balance dietary

Respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the statement on maintaining a balanced diet during community disruptions caused by deaths, as shown in Table 3.

The majority of the respondents, 142, indicate that they have been affected to a high extent, 93 very high, 61 moderate, 38 low extent, and 46 indicate that they have not been affected in any way. This data translates to 24.5% very high, 37.4% high, 16.1% moderate, 10.0% low extent, 12.1% not at all. The data of dietary balance impacts reveals that 238 respondents (62.6%) experience a high to very high extent of difficulty maintaining balanced diets following the loss of life. The pattern shows that 83 respondents (21.8%) experienced low to no impact, while 59 respondents (15.5%) reported moderate impact levels. The key informants support the above findings, reporting that it is difficult to have a three-square meal. Moreover, people eat what is available without considering whether they have a balanced diet. One of them said, "*Sometimes we eat just maize for the day without any protein or vegetables. We are worried about having something to eat and not a balanced diet.*" (LF, M. 2025).

The mortality indicator has seriously affected food security across all its dimensions. The conflict has fundamentally altered access to agricultural land due to fear of attacks by both farmers and herders. This situation is significantly reducing community food production capacity as farmers avoid farms and herders have relocated elsewhere. In contrast, others have reduced the size of their herds. Moreover, the displaced farmers now cultivate on temporary land allocations from relatives and community members, which restricts their ability to invest in long-term agricultural improvements or permanent crop cultivation. This temporary land access, combined with the inherently lower fertility of available plots, has led to substantial reductions in yields relative to pre-conflict agricultural output. The predominance of severe impacts on dietary balance suggests that loss of life has affected not only food quantity but also food quality and variety. This may reflect the loss of individuals with nutritional knowledge, cooking skills, or access to diverse food sources, leading to simplified or less nutritious dietary patterns among survivors.



Source: Field Data 2025

Figure 2. Intensity of the conflict with respect to destruction of property and food security

Table 2. Extent to which the destruction of property has affected food security

Question	Not At All	Low Extent	Moderate Extent	High Extent	Very High Extent
I am not able to access food because of the destruction of properties	46	78	46	92	118
I cannot afford food because of the destruction of properties	25	102	50	50	153
I cannot see food because of the destruction of properties	56	37	57	143	87
I have not been able to have a balanced diet because of the destruction of properties	50	33	59	149	89

Source: Field Data 2025

In essence, dietary balance is the most widely affected dimension, with 238 respondents (62.6%) reporting a high to very high impact, followed closely by food availability, with 230 respondents (60.5%). Food affordability affects 202 respondents (53.2%) at high to very high levels, while food access impacts 209 respondents (55.0%) severely. Destruction of property directly affects food security. The majority of respondents (70%) reported that farmland was destroyed during the farmer-herder conflict, making it the most affected property type in the Esu community. This was followed by livestock destruction reported by 55% of respondents, while 45% reported house destruction and 25% reported business losses. The high rate of farmland destruction directly reflects the conflict's agricultural nature, as competing land use between farmers and herders has caused widespread damage to cultivated areas. Livestock losses, reported by over half the respondents, indicate that herders have also suffered significant economic damage to their primary assets. The substantial reporting of house destruction (45%) suggests that the conflict has extended beyond economic disputes to affect residential areas, forcing community members from their homes.

Destruction of property and Food accessibility

The respondent's level of agreement was sought regarding the extent to which they have experienced difficulty accessing food due to community disruption caused by property destruction, and the study's findings are shown in Table 4.4. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents (118) report very high, 92 high, 46 moderate, 78 low, and 46 not affected. The study found that 118 (31.1%) of the respondents indicated that to a very high extent, they are unable to access food due to property destruction**.** This was supported by 118 (31.1%), indicating to a very high extent, 92 (24.2%) who reported that to a high extent, they cannot access food due to property destruction. Only 46 respondents (12.1%) reported no impact, while 78 (20.5%) experienced a low level of impact. 46 respondents (12.1%) reported a moderate impact on food accessibility. The key informant describes how the destruction of their farmlands has affected people's ability to access food. One of the key informants said, *"How can I access food if I cannot access my land? How can I access food when my farm has been destroyed?" (LF, M. 2025).*

Destruction of property and Food affordability

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the challenges they face in affording food due to community disruptions caused by property damage. The study results in Table 4.4 indicate that 153 (40.3%) participants experience challenges to a very great extent; they cannot afford food due to property damage. Approximately 50 (13.2%) reported experiencing significant affordability challenges**.** In essence, 203 respondents (53.5%) experienced high to very high levels of food affordability problems due to property destruction.

About 25 respondents (6.6%) were not affected at all, while 102 respondents (26.8%) experienced low affordability issues, and 50 respondents (13.2%) reported a moderate level of impact. The key informants presented the same situation, discussing the themes of market disruption and food price inflation. Some of the respondents note that destruction of property, including farm land and animals, due to the conflict has resulted in a decline in agricultural production, both in farm products and animals. The effect of this is high prices for farm products, dairy products, and meat. Reduced agricultural output has created supply shortages in local markets, leading to higher food prices that make food affordable for community members. One of the leaders of a herders group said*, "The conflicts have reduced the supply of food both for home consumption and for the Market, resulting in high prices. Buying maize to make food is expensive; sometimes I cannot afford it"* (LH.M, 2025).

Destruction of property and food availability

The respondent's level of agreement was sought on the extent to which they have experienced the challenge of food due to community disruption caused by the destruction of property, and the study finding is shown in Table 4 In the area of food availability, the study found that to a very high extent, 87 (22.9%) respondents miss food because of property destruction**.** This was strongly supported by 143 (37.6%) who reported a high extent of food visibility problems. At the same time, 37 (9.7%) experienced a low extent of impact. Similar to 89 (23.4%) who indicated that to a very high extent, they have not been able to maintain a balanced diet due to property destruction. This was supported by 149 (39.2%) who reported significant challenges with balanced diets.

The key informants agree with the above data, as most describe how difficult it has become to afford food in a situation where farmlands, houses, and animals have been destroyed. One of them said:

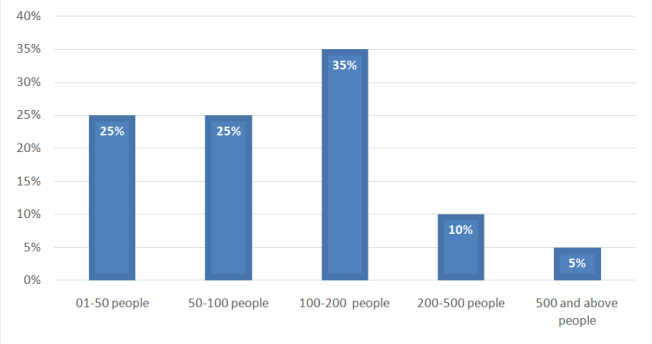
The food itself is not available; farmland has been destroyed. Houses have been destroyed, making people homeless and far from their farmlands, and they are not able to cultivate. Herders have reduced their cattle numbers due to fear. The destruction caused by this conflict has made food very scarce. We have limited food, and many people are hungry (LF, M. 2025).

Destruction of property and a balanced diet

The respondent's level of agreement with this indicator was sought to establish the extent to which property destruction during the conflict has affected people's ability to maintain a balanced diet. The study finding, shown in Table 4.4 above, indicates that the majority of respondents, 149, have been affected to a great extent. 89 said to a very great extent, 59 moderate, 33 low and 50 not affected in any way. This

translates to about 39.2% highly affected, 23.4% very highly affected, 15.5% moderate, 8.7% low, and 13.2% not affected at all. The key informants also indicated that property destruction has affected their eating habits and the types of food available. One of the said:

My family and I cannot afford to eat three times a day. When you talk about a balanced diet, that is out of place in this situation. We are more concerned with what to eat to fight hunger than with the quality of what is available. Sometimes we eat just cassava without soup or vegetables. In sort we eat what is available *(*IDP.M, 2025).



Source: Field Data 2025

Figure 3. Intensity of the Conflict with Respect to Displacement of People and Food Security

The majority of respondents (35%) reported that 100-200 people were displaced by the farmers-herdsmen conflict in the Esu community, the highest proportion. This was followed by equal proportions of respondents (25% each) reporting displacement of 1-50 people and 50-100 people, respectively. Fewer respondents reported larger displacement numbers: 10% indicated 200-500 people were displaced, and only 5% reported displacement of 500 or more people. The data shows that most community members (85%) believe the displacement affected fewer than 200 people, with the peak being in the 100-200 range, suggesting a significant but contained displacement crisis. The displacement of people due to conflict has significantly impacted food security. Many farmers are now displaced and residing in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, lacking access to their homes and farmlands. This displacement prevents them from cultivating crops, reducing food production and availability in the community. Consequently, the inability to farm and the loss of productive land contribute to food shortages, heightening food insecurity among displaced populations and the broader affected communities. One of the leaders of the farmers' groups said that "*the displacement of people has seriously affected, especially farmers, from planning because they have lost their farm lands and houses*" (LF. M, 2025).

Displacement of People and food accessibility

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the challenge they face in accessing food due to displacement caused by the conflict. The study findings, as shown in Table 4.5, indicate that the majority of people, 134, have been affected to a very great extent, 95 to a great extent, 51 to a moderate extent, and 63 to a low extent. 37 have not been affected at all. This translates to 35.3% of respondents indicated a very great extent they are unable to access food due to the displacement of people. This was supported by 25.0% who reported a great extent of impact, 13.4% moderate, 16.6% low, and 9.7% not affected at all.

The key informant expressed the same sentiments as they explained how the displacement of people has affected them from accessing food. One of the said:

I cannot access my farm because I am now staying in the camp. I now live far away from my farm. I cannot risk my life to go to my farm, where I am not sure there are any crops left. (IDP, F, 2025).

Displacement of People and Food Affordability and

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the challenge of affording food due to displacement caused by the conflict. The study findings, as shown in Table 4.5, indicate that the majority of people (92) have been affected to a very high extent, 74 to a high extent, 56 to a moderate extent, and 86 to a low extent. 70 have not been affected at all. This translates to 24.7% of respondents indicated a very great extent they are unable to afford food due to the displacement of people. This was supported by 19.5% who reported a high extent of impact, 14.7% moderate, 12.6% low, 18.4% not affected in any way.

The key informants expressed the same experience, thereby supporting the quantitative data, as respondents explained how affording food has become difficult due to the conflict. One of the key informants said:

There is limited food, people are displaced and are not able to cultivate the way they used to. This situation has made food and meat expensive and difficult to buy, even as they are unable to cultivate their own food because they have been displaced. (LF. M, 2025).

Displacement of People and Food Availability

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the difficulty they experience in obtaining food due to displacement caused by the conflict.

Table 3. Extent to which the displacement of people has affected food security

Question	Not At All	Low Extent	Moderate Extent	High Extent	Very High Extent
I am not able to access food because of the displacement of people	37 (9.7%)	63 (16.6%)	51 (13.4%)	95 (25.0%)	134 (35.3%)
I am not able to afford food because of the displacement of people	70 (18.4%)	86 (22.6%)	56 (14.7%)	74 (19.5%)	94 (24.7%)
I am not able to have food because of the displacement of people	100 (26.3%)	81 (21.3%)	46 (12.1%)	79 (20.8%)	74 (19.5%)
I am not able to have a balanced diet because of the displacement of people	44 (11.6%)	69 (18.2%)	61 (16.1%)	101 (26.6%)	105 (27.6%)

Source: Field data 2025

The study results, displayed in Table 4.5, reveal that 79 reported a great extent of impact, and 74 reported very high food-availability problems due to displacement. Additionally, 46 respondents rated displacement as moderate, 81 as low, and the majority (100) indicated that displacement has not affected food availability. This translates to 26.3% of respondents who say displacement has not affected food availability, 21.3% indicate a low extent, 12.1% moderate, 20.8% high, and 19.5% very high.

The informants disagree with the above findings. Most reports indicate that displacement has seriously affected food availability in various ways. One of them said:

Displacement of People and balance diet

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the difficulty they experience in maintaining a balanced diet due to displacement caused by the conflict. The study results, displayed in Table 4.5, reveal that the majority, 105, indicated that, to a very great extent, they have been unable to maintain a balanced diet due to challenges associated with displacement. 101 indicated a great extent, 61 indicated moderate, 69 indicated low, and 44 indicated not affected at all. This translates to 27.6% of respondents who say displacement has severely affected their ability to maintain a balanced diet, 18.2% indicate a low extent, 16.1% moderate, 26.6% high, and 11.6% not affected in any way.

The key informants agree with the above findings and also explained how displacement has prevented them from having a balanced diet. One of them said:

Foodstuffs (such as sweet potatoes and a certain species of cocoyam) that we used to grow only to feed our pigs are now becoming our staple food. One has to stress to have food that lasts until the next harvesting season (LF. M, 2025).

Examining the intensity of the conflict and its impact on food security, the study found that reported deaths, reported by 55% of community members, were a primary indicator of conflict intensity. Losses were not merely numerical (between 50 and 200 people) but deeply personal, leading to psychological trauma, intergroup hatred, and the erosion of familial and communal structures. These figures were substantiated by IDP testimonies and leaders, where individuals reported the loss of close family members, particularly breadwinners and children, accompanied by severe psychological trauma and validated by testimonies from internally displaced persons (IDPs). These findings resonate with studies by Okwulu et al. (2024) and Manu & Tsi (2020), who established that the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria and Cameroon, respectively, led to widespread fatalities, disability, and psychological scars. The connection between fatalities and food security is twofold. First, the death of breadwinners directly reduced the agricultural labour force and household income, compromising food affordability. Second, insecurity discouraged farming activities, further disrupting food availability and accessibility. These findings reinforce the assertion that conflict-induced mortality significantly weakens both supply-side and demand-side dimensions of food security, a reality echoed across Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia (Laurance *et al.,* 2018). The destruction of productive assets, including farmlands (70%), livestock (55%), and homes (45%), was consistently reported by community members and corroborated by IDPs and local leaders. IDPs detailed how the forced abandonment of productive lands led to the loss of all assets and economic displacement, leaving them reliant on temporary, less fertile land allocations. Leaders confirmed that such destruction directly reduces food availability and disrupts market supply chains. This level of property damage aligns with findings from Udo (2021) and Otu et al. (2024), who documented substantial losses in agricultural output due to the destruction of land and livestock. In Esu, the implications for food security were particularly severe: food access, affordability, availability, and dietary diversity were all negatively affected. Community members reported difficulty accessing food due to market closures, price inflation, and reduced agricultural productivity. This supports Liu et al. (2022) observation in communi
Syria that conflict leads to spatial and temporal shifts in cropland use and productivity. According to the results, the displacement of people, affecting an estimated 100–200 individuals, introduced a new dynamic in food insecurity. Although seemingly moderate in scale, the displacement had disproportionately high impacts on food access and nutritional well-being. Approximately 60.3% of respondents reported experiencing high to very high difficulties accessing food due to displacement, while over half reported serious challenges affording or maintaining a balanced diet. These results are consistent with those of Chikaire et al. (2021) and George & Adelaja (2022), who argue that displacement disrupts production and storage, leads to losses, and puts pressure on host communities' food systems. In Esu, displaced farmers cultivate marginal lands under temporary arrangements, which limit both the range and volume of crops they can grow. This precarious situation mirrors the concerns of Chikaire et al. (2021) about reduced farm investment, food safety risks, and overall agricultural decline. Without institutional support such as IDP camps or long-term resettlement policies, food security in both displaced and host communities remains acutely vulnerable. Financial hardship and social disruption were strongly articulated by IDPs and confirmed by leaders of farmers and herder groups. With many reporting high or very high levels of food affordability challenges, the link between conflict-driven income loss and food insecurity is clear. IDPs expressed that the destruction of their agricultural livelihoods and limited access to markets created a deep financial strain, leading to poor nutrition and the withdrawal of children from school. Loss of life during the conflict has, therefore, affected food affordability and accessibility. At the same time, property destruction has affected food affordability, accessibility, and availability, while displacement has affected food accessibility, balanced diet, and availability. The intensity of the conflict has affected all food security indicators.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the severity of the conflict, especially the loss of lives, has a profound effect on food security, with over half the community reporting fatalities as a key indicator of conflict intensity. 30.8% reported greater difficulty accessing food due to loss of life, 40.5% faced affordability challenges, 23.7% faced availability challenges, and 62.5% faced dietary balance challenges as a result of the conflict. Alongside loss of life, widespread destruction of vital assets such as farms, livestock, and homes has led to significant livelihood disruptions, reducing food production and market supply. 31.1% could not access food due to property damage, 40.3% could not afford food, 37.6% faced challenges with food availability, and 23.4% faced balanced

dietary challenges. Displacement of people has had an outsized impact on access to food and nutrition, with displaced farmers forced to rely on marginal lands under precarious conditions. Without adequate institutional support, both displaced and local communities face heightened vulnerability to food shortages, affordability issues, and nutritional deficits. 35.3% of respondents cannot access food, 24.7% cannot afford it, 26.3% face challenges with food availability, and 26.6% face dietary balance challenges. Additionally, the loss of income due to livelihood destruction and market restrictions has contributed to financial hardship, poor nutrition, and social instability. Overall, the conflict's intensity directly compromises all aspects of food security: availability, access, affordability, and dietary diversity. According to the study findings, the farmer-herder conflict in Esu is reflected in widespread loss of life, destruction of property, and displacement of people, which have affected food accessibility, affordability, availability, and a balanced diet. The evidence underscores that the intensity of the conflict has severely compromised food security in all its aspects.

Recommendations

Based on the summary of findings and the conclusion, this study recommends that local and national governments should invest in promoting sustainable land-use practices and facilitating access to resources for both groups. Additionally, providing education and training in conflict de-escalation and cooperative farming techniques can foster mutual understanding and cooperation, ultimately improving food security and stability.

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