ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY IN MANAGING HERDSMEN-FARMERS' CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: GOVERNANCE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Herdsmen-Farmers conflict has become a recurring issues in Nigeria, leading to loss of property, lives and means of livelihoods. The study specifically examines the capacity of Local Government in managing Herdsmen-Farmers conflicts using governance theory perspective. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative (mixed) methods of data collection and analysis. Cochran's sampling technique was adopted due to the inability to ascertain the actual population, to distribute 240 copies of questionnaire to local government officials, community leaders and traditional rulers to deduce information on the research objectives. An in-depth interview was conducted with the selected local government officials, traditional rulers, community leaders and security personnel. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic analysis for interview responses. The results of the analysis showed that while local government's policy & regulatory framework has a negative but significant effect on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria, its resource capacity, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholder participation have positive but insignificant effect on the capacity of the local government to effectively manage herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria. The study concludes that local government does not have required policy and regulatory framework which is necessary for managing herdsmen-farmers conflicts but, their resources, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholders' participation cannot significantly manage those conflicts, even though they are in place as expected by governance theory.

Keywords: Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict, Conflict Management, Local Government, Governance Theory, Community

1. Introduction

Herdsmen-Farmers' conflict has become a recurring issues in Nigeria, leading to loss of property, lives and means of livelihoods. This has become a cause for concern for all levels of government, especially local governments, as the third tier and closest level of government to the grassroots and local areas, and a critical stakeholder where such incidents are taken place (Ojo, 2022; Shiyanbade et al, 2023). However, their capacity to manage such conflict is often questioned by scholars, policy makers, administrators, public commentators and researchers, leading to this study of assessing the capacity of Local Government in managing Herdsmen-Farmers conflicts in Nigeria, from governance theory perspective.
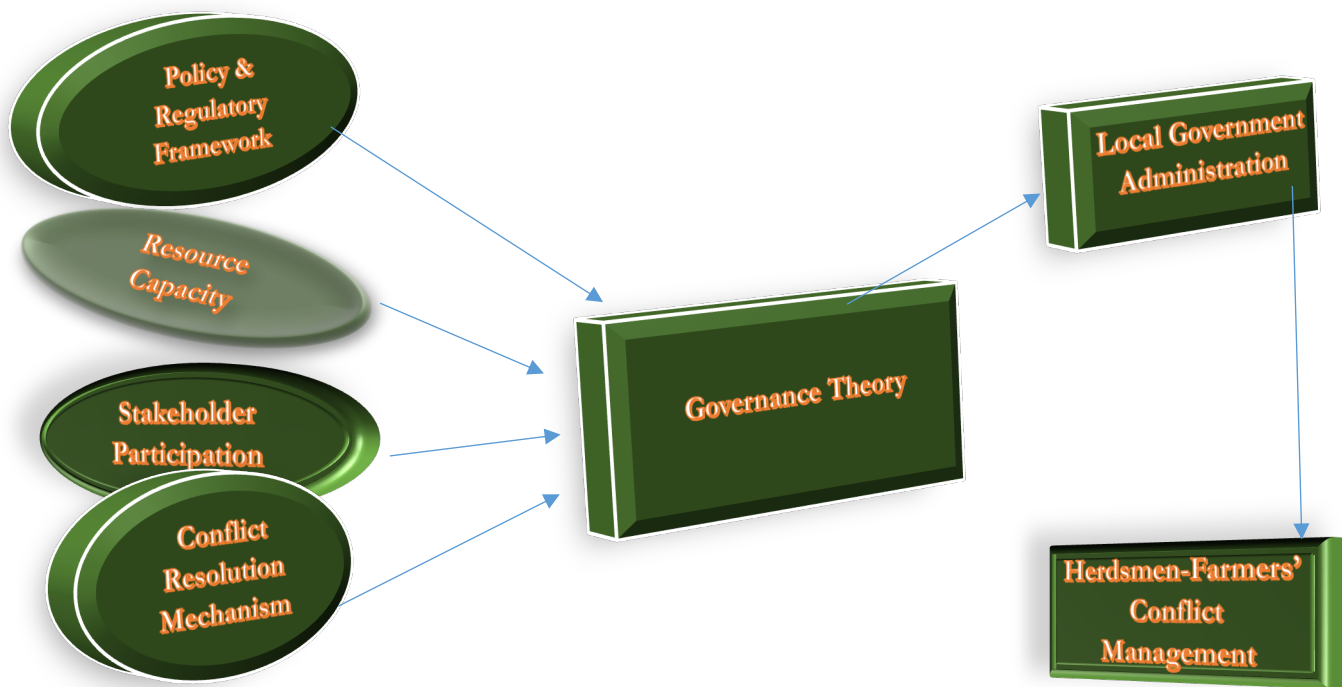
The conflict, argued (Abdussalam & Ntagu, 2024), driven largely on competition for resources especially water and land has distorted agricultural and other economic activities, resulted to a significant loss of properties and lives, creating unrest in many part of Nigeria and impeding economic activities for national development. Fueled by many factors including climate change, poor governance, urbanisation and population growth (Augustine & Blessing, 2020; Makinde & Olabode, 2020), herdsmen and farmers conflict has resulted to over 100,000 in deaths and more than a hundreds of thousands in displaced persons (International Crisis Group, 2018). Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (2020) reported that about 60% of herdsmen has experienced attack from farmers and about 70% of farmers has experienced attack from herdsmen in Nigeria. The report relayed that 70%

of those conflict was due to poor governance and 80% was due to competition for resources. However, good governance is expected to resolve resources mismanagement and poor administration, which necessitate this study, at the local government level.

Several studies has evaluated implications of herdsmen and farmers conflict and its management in Nigeria. Ofuoku and Isife (2009) revealed that inadequate rainfall, lack of coping mechanism and poor grazing land triggered conflict between herders and farmers. The study fails to assess the capacity of local government in managing such conflict. Oli et al (2018) discovered a negative impact of the herdsmen-farmers conflict on national development in Nigeria, and Awotokun et al., (2020) argued on the need for novel approach to manage conflicts between herders and farmers, with a lacuna of not assessing local government capacity for such management. Okoro (2018); Ogungbenro et al (2024); Minda and Tyonongo (2025) provided evidence for the need to strengthened traditional institution as an effective measures in the management of the herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. Sabo (2022) revealed that trespasses on farms and destruction of crops were the most causes of herdsmen-farmers conflict and negatively impact on Doma local government, Benue State, Nigeria, and Yusuf et al (2022) provided evidence that the Nigerian state's capacity to resolve herdsmen-farmers conflicts has been weakened by the dividing interest of the ruling elite. Yusuf qualitatively focused on the Nigerian state, creating a gap for this study to quantitatively focus on local government capacity. Offiah (2024) discovered a significant effect of herdsmen-farmers conflict on the economic development of Nigeria. The gap intends to fill by this study is the governance theory's (a contemporary theory of public administration) assumption on all levels of government in delivering their constitutional mandates, which needs assessment at local government level. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no known literature has been able to use governance theory to assess local government capacity in Nigeria, especially on herdsmen-farmers' conflict management, hence this study.

Governance theory does not have a single founder but rather evolved through contributions from multiple scholars and researchers such as Kan Kooiman, Mark Bevir and R. W. Rhodes (Nomor and Ominyi, 2021). It emerged in the late 1980s to early 1990s as a response to the limitations of traditional public administration and bureaucracy. Governance is not monopolized by the state; power is shared among various actors. Effective governance requires cooperation among governments, private sector, NGOs, and citizens. Governance includes formal and informal processes beyond state apparatus. Governance theory assumes interdependence and complexity, diversity of actors, partnership and network, strong institutional framework, decentralisation and participation, among other, for good governance. The capacity of local government on the assumption of governance theory is that all stakeholders, policy and institutional framework, resources capability, conflict management strategies, diversified actors and accountability mechanism on resources management should be in place and deployed for herdsmen-farmers conflict management. The theory emphasised the importance of participatory decision-making, effective institutional policy or framework and accountability mechanism for good governance. In the provision of local needs like conflict management, local government must have resources capacity, policy framework, stakeholders' participation and partnership as well as resource to deliver peaceful co-existence of herdsmen and farmers for socio-economic and national development. The study seeks to assess the capacity of local government in Nigeria, from the assumption of governance theory, in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict and other conflicts. This study contribute to the understanding of the capacity of local government in managing conflicts in Nigeria, beyond only herdsmen-farmers' conflict. It provided an insight into challenges facing local government in managing conflicts, and how policy makers, local government administrators, higher level of government, traditional rulers and non-governmental organisations, among others can support local government to improve its capacity for managing conflicts in Nigeria. The assumption of the study is that (Ho), Local Government lacks capacity to manage herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria, as against governance theory assumption.

Theoretical Framework

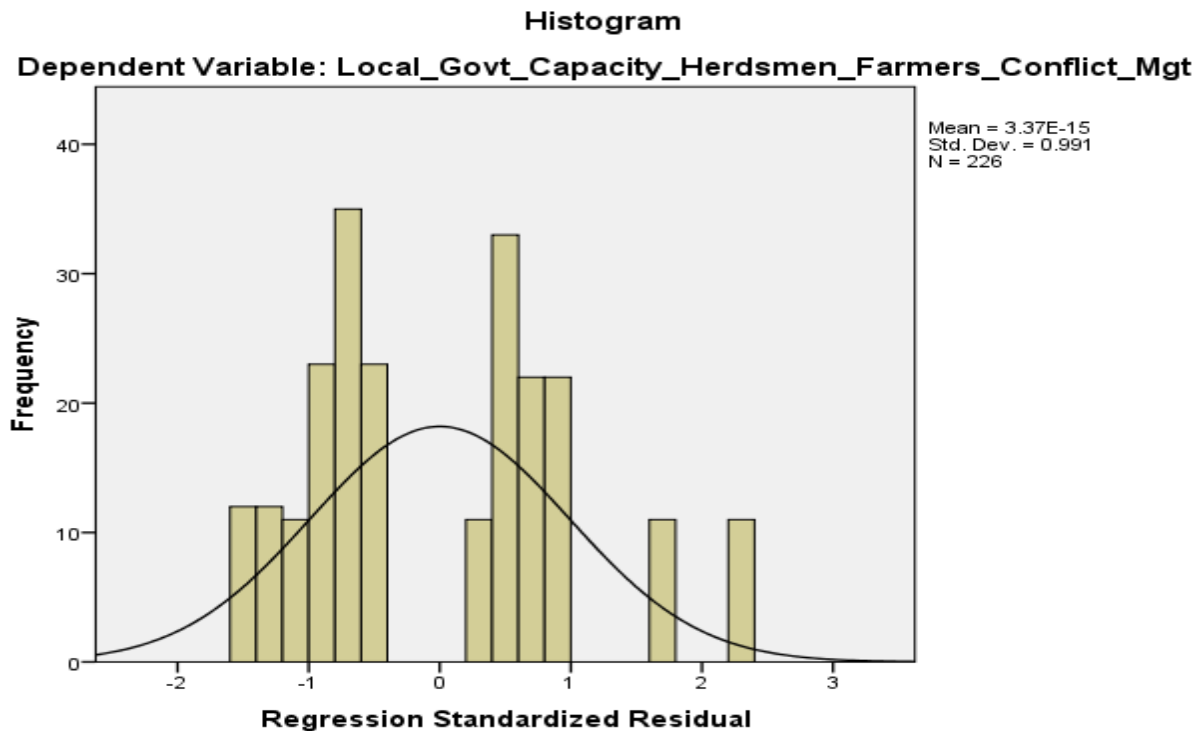*Source: Authors' extraction from Theoretical Framework.*

2. Material and Method

This study adopted positivism philosophical assumption for the research design, approach and data collection. This is a deductive research that intends to empirically evaluate the assumption of governance theory on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria through scientific testing of hypothesis. Data was collected from Ibarapa North local government of Oyo State, Nigeria. Local government in Nigeria has a uniform structure, source of finance and area of jurisdiction and functions as stated in the Section 7, Fourth Schedule in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Therefore, capacity of local government in Nigeria can be measure by assessing any local government in Nigeria. Also, Ibarapa North local government has experienced herdsmen-farmers conflict, leading to loss of lives and properties, which makes it a perfect local government to collect data for this study. Makinde (2021) reported that herdsmen crisis in Igangan, Ayete and Tapa villages, all in Ibarapa North local government of Oyo State, has resulted to youth protest. This shows that the local government has experiences herdsmen-farmers conflict in the recent time. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative (mixed) methods of survey research design through questionnaire administration and conduct of interview for data collection and analysis. Cochran's sampling technique was adopted due to the inability to ascertain the actual population of community leaders, traditional rulers, local government officials and other stakeholders in herdsmen-farmers conflict, so as to distribute 240 copies of questionnaire to deduce information on the research objectives. Respondents for the questionnaire were purposively selected. The choice of purposive sampling procedure was due to the nature of the research as local government officials, traditional rulers and community leaders, among other stakeholders have different level of knowledge on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers conflict. The research instrument (questionnaire) contain 20 assertions of 5 assertions each on the construct generated from governance theory in the area of stakeholders' capacity, resource capacity, conflict resolution mechanism and, policy and regulatory framework in managing herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Items in the instrument was subjected to Cronbach Alpha's test to ensure internal consistency. Cronbach alpha's test was used to ascertain how closely related those items in the applied instruments are, as a group, as well as their consistency, or reliability. George and Mallery (2003, p.231) argued that the rule of decision on Cronbach Alpha's test is that >0.9 is Excellent, >0.8 is Good, >0.7 is Acceptable, >0.6 is Questionable, >0.5 is Poor and <0.5 is Unacceptable. The result of Cronbach Alpha's test is 0.924, showing an excellent level of reliability and internal consistency of the items in the research instrument used to assess the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflicts in Nigeria, from the assumptions of governance theory. In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with the purposively selected local government officials, traditional rulers, community leaders and security personnel, in assessing the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. Data collected were analysed using

inferential statistics of regression analysis for quantitative data collected, as well as thematic analysis for qualitative data from interview responses.

3. Findings

This section provided the analysis of data collected to assess the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria from the governance theory perspective. The analysis verify homogeneity of the data through histogram, and Durbin-Watson was used to check autocorrelation of the data and multicollinearity was checked through tolerance and VIF values for the items in the research instrument.

Histogram
Dependent Variable: Local_Govt_Capacity_Herdsmen_Farmers_Conflict_Mgt

Mean = 3.37E-15
Std. Dev. = 0.991
N = 226

The diagram above reveals the normality test result on the data gathered for the study. According to Stevens (2009), normality screening of data is an important early step before performing regression analysis on the research data. The histogram chart above indicates the result of the normality test on the dependent variable (Herdsmen-Farmers' conflict Management). Since the histogram is symmetric around the center, zero, the dependent variable (Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict Management) was normally distributed. This shows that the assumption of normality of data has been met, suitable for all types of statistical analysis.

Model Summaryᵇ

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.252ᵃ	.064	.047	.49316	.064	3.753	4	221	.006	1.249

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder_Participation, Conflict_Resolution_Mechanism, Resource_Capacity, Policy_Regulatory_Framework

b. Dependent Variable: Local_Govt_Capacity_Herdsmen_Farmers_Conflict_Mgt

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The assumption that residuals values are independent of one another demanded for statistical proof. Durbin-Watson was employed to check the regression output model summary to assess the uncorrelatedness of residuals. It is assumed that Durbin-Watson statistics value should be closer to 2.00 in order to satisfy the assumption of the absence of autocorrelation. The result in the table above shows that Durbin-Watson value stands at 1.249. This implied that the model is free from autocorrelation and is of good fit for statistical and inference usage.

The model summary table revealed multiple correlation coefficient (R) value of 0.252 showing a strong correlation. This indicates that Local Government Capacity measured through Policy & Regulatory Framework, Resource Capacity, Stakeholder Participation and Conflict Resolution Mechanism are responsible for 25% effective measures/mechanisms for managing Herdsmen-Farmers' conflict in Nigeria. R Square (R^2) value of 0.064 that

implies the multiple coefficient of determination of the variables shows that about 64% of the total variation in management of herdsmen-farmers' conflict is linked to or explained by the variations in available Policy & Regulatory Framework, Resource Capacity, Stakeholder Participation and Conflict Resolution Mechanism as captured in the study while variable not captured in the study accounted for 36%. The adjusted R^2 being 0.047 also shows that Policy & Regulatory Framework, Resource Capacity, Stakeholder Participation and Conflict Resolution Mechanism will still explain 47% of the variations in capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict even if other variables are included in the study. This shows that local government capacity have significant implication on Herdsmen-Farmers' conflict management in Nigeria.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.651	4	.913	3.753	.006^b
	Residual	53.748	221	.243		
	Total	57.398	225			

a. Dependent Variable: Local_Govt_Capacity_Herdsmen_Farmers_Conflict_Mgt
b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder_Participation, Conflict_Resolution_Mechanism, Resource_Capacity, Policy_Regulatory_Framework
Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) table revealed the statistical significance of the regression model using a one-way ANOVA. The regression model possesses four degrees of freedom as a result of multiple number of factors. While the total degrees of freedom equal N-1, or 3.753 degrees, the error term has 221 degrees. Hence, the model accounts for a significant amount of the variance in the dependent variable (management of herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria) with a strong correlation between the independent (Local Government Capacity) and dependent (management of herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria) variables [$F(1, 221)=3.753$, $P<0.05$]. The F-statistics measures the adequacy and fitness of the model used in the study stood and the values is 3.753 with corresponding p-value of 0.006 which is significant at 5%; this reveals that the model is fit for the data.

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	2.545	.514		4.952	.000					
Policy_Regulatory_Framework	-.155	.070	-.158	-2.220	.027	-.208	-.148	-.145	.837	1.195
Resource_Capacity	.063	.061	.071	1.036	.301	.049	.070	.067	.892	1.121
Conflict_Resolution_Mechanism	.129	.069	.137	1.862	.064	.173	.124	.121	.784	1.275
Stakeholder_Participation	.054	.056	.064	.975	.330	.055	.065	.063	.993	1.007

a. Dependent Variable: Local_Govt_Capacity_Herdsmen_Farmers_Conflict_Mgt
Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The coefficient table reveals the relationship between each component independent variable and the dependent variable (herdsmen-farmers' conflict management) of the study. The correlations column shows the zero-order, partial and part correlation. Zero-order correlation is the Pearson r value of the predictor (Policy & Regulatory Framework, Resource Capacity, Stakeholder Participation and Conflict Resolution Mechanism), partial correlation is the correlation between the residual variance and individual predictor, and part correlation is the semi-partial correlation representing the unique association between the dependent variable and each predictor.

To the left side of the coefficient table, regression coefficients are shown statistically. The results depicts an association between independent (predictor) variables and the dependent (herdsmen-farmers' conflict management) variable. Policy & regulatory framework were revealed to have an unstandardized coefficient value of -0.155 with P-value of 0.027, which implies the inability of policy & regulatory framework in the local government to significantly address herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. On the other hand, resource capacity also shown to have an unstandardized coefficient value of 0.063 with a corresponding p-value of 0.301. This depicts that resource capacity available to the local government in Nigeria accounted for about 6.3% of their capacity but no significant effect in the management of herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria. Equally, the analysis

also revealed that conflict resolution mechanism has an unstandardized coefficient value of 0.129 with a p-value of 0.064. This data shows that institutionalization of conflict resolution mechanism in local government in Nigeria accounted for only 12% of their capacity and insignificantly influence the ability of local government in Nigeria to effectively manage herdsmen-farmers' conflict. On the final note, the findings shows that stakeholder participation possesses an unstandardized coefficient value of 0.054 with a p-value of 0.330, showing that stakeholder participation in local governance towards the management of herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria result to 5.4% and not statistically significant. The results of the analysis showed that while local government's policy & regulatory framework has a negative but significant effect on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria, but resource capacity, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholder participation have positive but insignificant effect on the capacity of the local government to effectively manage herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria. The implication of the analysis is that local government does not have required policy and regulatory framework for managing herdsmen-farmers conflicts, their resources, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholders' participation cannot significantly manage those conflicts, even though they are in place as expected by governance theory.

The result of interview responses provided an additional information on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The interview responses was analysed using thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke framework. Three themes were generated; policy, partnership and participation as well as resources; to assess the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. On policy which focused on various bye laws formulated by the local government to support other levels of government in tackling the menace of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. It was extracted that "*there are laws within the local government, formulated by the legislative arm, for the purpose of tackling herdsmen-farmer's conflict. In fact, other communal or tribal issues have peculiar laws within the local government, for peaceful coexistence of all tribes or ethnicity*". The extraction revealed that local government possess laws made by their legislative arm of government to manage herdsmen-farmers conflict. These laws are to maintain security and order within the local government jurisdiction, and ensure peaceful coexistence of many tribes within the local government. In another responses, it was extracted that "*this local government does not have specific law for managing herdsmen-farmers conflict, but there are laws for maintaining law and order within the local government. State government have such laws and implementable across all local government within this state*". This extract affirm that local government does not provide laws that is specifically for herdsmen-farmers conflict, as such laws has been made by the state government. However, the local government possess laws for maintenance of law and order within the local government.

On the second theme resources, meaning financial, human, equipment and other material in the possession of local government for implementing its policies and programme, and service delivery. It was extracted that *"local government cannot be boast of financial capacity to organize security structure like state for the management of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria"*. This affirms that local government lacks resources to manage herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. In another extract, it was quoted that "*local government does not have enough source of income to acquire both human and material resources to manage herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria*". This extraction revealed that local government does not have enough income to provide necessary facilities and personnel to manage and curb herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. On the third theme partnership and participation, which described the collaboration of local government with other stakeholders such as community leaders, traditional institutions, non-governmental organisation, religious and ethnic groups, among others, in their activities. From the interview responses, it was extracted that "*statutorily, there is a committee that chairman of local government will preside monthly that comprise of religious leaders, community leaders, among others, for the purpose of maintaining security of lives and property within the local government*". This extraction revealed that local government has participation from stakeholders within the local area for collaboration on maintenance of law and order to protect lives and property.

4. Discussion

This section provides discussion on the findings from quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis in relation to the existing literature and theoretical argument of the study. This shows area of congruence and divergence in qualitative findings, quantitative analysis, existing literature and theoretical argument of the study.

Quantitative analysis result showed that local government's policy & regulatory framework has a negative but significant effect on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria, but resource capacity, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholder participation have positive but insignificant effect on the capacity of the local government to effectively manage herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria. The implication of the analysis is that local government does not have required policy and regulatory framework for managing herdsmen-farmers conflicts, their resources, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholders'

participation cannot significantly manage those conflicts, even though they are in place. However, the qualitative analysis from interview responses revealed that local government does not provide laws that is specifically for herdsmen-farmers conflict, as such laws has been made by the state government, but there are laws for maintenance of law and order within the local government. Also, local government lacks resources to manage herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, and there is participation from stakeholders within the local area for collaboration on maintenance of law and order to protect lives and property. These findings supported that assumptions of governance theory that interdependence and complexity, diversity of actors, partnership and network, strong institutional framework, decentralisation and participation, among other, are necessary for good governance. The capacity of local government on the assumption of governance theory is that all stakeholders, policy and institutional framework, resources capability, conflict management strategies, diversified actors and accountability mechanism on resources management should be in place and deployed for herdsmen-farmers conflict management. The theory emphasised the importance of participatory decision-making, effective institutional policy or framework and accountability mechanism for good governance, including eradication of herdsmen-farmers conflicts to improve socio-economic development within the local government areas in Nigeria.

5. Conclusions and Policy Implication

Assessing the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflicts in Nigeria has revealed a multifaceted and complex challenges. Driven largely on competition for resources especially water and land, herdsmen-farmers' conflict has distorted agricultural and other economic activities, resulted to a significant loss of properties and lives, creating unrest in many part of Nigeria with a significant implications on regional stability and economic activities as well as national development. Governance theory assumes that interdependence and complexity, diversity of actors, partnership and network, strong institutional framework, decentralisation and participation, among other, are necessary for good governance. The capacity of local government on the assumption of governance theory is that all stakeholders, policy and institutional framework, resources capability, conflict management strategies, diversified actors and accountability mechanism on resources management should be in place to have capacity in managing herdsmen-farmers conflict. However, the findings from the data collected revealed that, while local government's policy & regulatory framework has a negative but significant effect on the capacity of local government in managing herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria, resource capacity, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholder participation have positive but insignificant effect on the capacity of the local government to effectively manage herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria. The study concluded that local government does not have required policy and regulatory framework which is necessary for managing herdsmen-farmers conflicts but, their resources, conflict resolution mechanism and stakeholders' participation cannot significantly manage those conflicts, even though they are in place as expected by governance theory.

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