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AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS LIMITING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY STAKEHOLDER INSTITUTIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS IN BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the factors limiting the effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State. Anchored on Stakeholder Theory, the research aims to identify and examine the specific public relations strategies utilized by stakeholder institutions within selected communities, assess the perceived effectiveness of these strategies, and determine the key challenges hindering successful conflict management. Employing a descriptive survey design, the study sampled a population of 350 respondents comprising community members, traditional leaders, government officials, and representatives of stakeholder institutions. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with a mean cut-off point of 2.50 was established for decision-making purposes: any item with a mean score of 2.50 or higher was accepted as agreement. The findings indicate that stakeholder institutions actively deploy multiple public relations strategies to address the conflicts, with respondents generally perceiving these efforts as somewhat effective but highlighting the need for substantial improvements. Several challenges, including inadequate stakeholder engagement, communication gaps, mistrust, socio-cultural complexities, and resource constraints, were identified as significant barriers to the success of public relations initiatives in conflict resolution. The study concludes that while current strategies have made some impact, their effectiveness remains limited by these persistent challenges. The study recommends fostering inclusive stakeholder participation, enhancing communication transparency, building trust through community involvement, and adopting innovative communication tools to improve the overall effectiveness of public relations efforts in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State.

Keywords: Public relations strategies, stakeholder institutions, farmer-herder conflicts, conflict management, stakeholder theory, Benue State.

1.1 Introduction

The conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria have been exacerbated by a combination of environmental, socio-economic, and political factors, leading to violent clashes, displacement of communities, and loss of lives and livelihoods. The role of stakeholder institutions, including government agencies, security agencies, traditional rulers, and non-governmental organizations, in managing and mitigating these conflicts through public relations strategies has become increasingly crucial. However, despite the deployment of various public relations initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue, building trust, and promoting peaceful coexistence, the effectiveness of these strategies remains questionable. It has been argued that underlying factors such as poor communication, cultural misunderstandings, inadequate stakeholder engagement, and resource limitations hinder the success of these public relations efforts (Ojo & Olanipekun, 2020).

Recent studies highlight that ineffective communication channels and the lack of culturally sensitive messaging often result in mistrust and suspicion among conflicting groups, thereby undermining peace-building efforts (Adebayo & Oladipo, 2021). Furthermore, the failure of stakeholder institutions to adequately involve local communities and traditional leaders in the planning and implementation of peace strategies diminishes their legitimacy and acceptance. Resource constraints, including inadequate funding and personnel, also impede the ability of institutions to sustain long-term peace initiatives. The political dimension, characterized by competing interests and lack of political will, further complicates the management of these conflicts (Olawale & Akinola, 2022).

Additionally, the rise of misinformation and propaganda through social media and other informal communication channels has created new challenges for stakeholder institutions in managing public perceptions and countering false narratives. These factors collectively contribute to a scenario where public relations strategies fail to achieve their intended objectives, thus prolonging conflicts and hindering sustainable peace in the affected communities. Understanding these hindering factors is vital for developing more effective, culturally appropriate, and inclusive public relations strategies that can foster enduring peace and stability in Benue State. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of adopting integrated communication models that involve community participation, transparency, and continuous engagement with all stakeholders involved in conflict management (Uche & Eze, 2023). Therefore, exploring the specific factors that undermine the effectiveness of current public relations efforts by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State is both timely and essential for informing policy and practice.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The persistent farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State continue to pose significant threats to peace, security, and socio-economic stability within the affected communities. Despite the efforts of various stakeholder institutions, including government agencies, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations, to deploy public relations strategies aimed at mitigating tensions and fostering understanding, these conflicts persist with alarming frequency and intensity (Akinbode & Olaleye, 2021). This raises concerns about the effectiveness of the communication approaches employed and the underlying factors that may hinder their success. One of the core issues is the inadequate alignment of public relations strategies with the local socio-cultural and political contexts, which diminishes their credibility and acceptance among community members (Ojo & Ojo, 2022). Additionally, resource limitations, such as insufficient funding, personnel, and

expertise in strategic communication, further constrain the scope and impact of these efforts (Eze et al., 2020). The prevalence of misinformation and rumors amplified via social media and informal channels complicates the dissemination of accurate information and undermines official peacebuilding messages (Adebisi & Adeoye, 2022). Moreover, ethnic and political biases influence how messages are received and interpreted, often exacerbating divisions rather than promoting unity (Ogu & Akinbo, 2021). Given these challenges, it is imperative to examine the specific factors that hinder the effectiveness of public relations strategies in this context. Understanding these factors can inform the development of more culturally sensitive, resource-efficient, and strategically coordinated communication approaches that are capable of managing and resolving conflicts more effectively within the communities of Benue State.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to analyse the factors limiting the effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in the management of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify and examine the specific public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts within the selected communities in Benue State.

2. To assess the perceived effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts within the selected communities in Benue State.

3. To determine the key factors that hinder the success of public relations efforts in the management of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State..

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What specific public relations strategies are employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts within the selected communities in Benue State?

2. How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of public relations strategies employed in managing farmer-herder conflicts within the selected communities in Benue State.?

3. What are the key factors that hinder the success of public relations efforts in managing farmer-herder conflicts?

2.1 Review of Related Literature

2.1.1 Specific public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State.

The management of farmer-herder conflicts through public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in Benue State has garnered increasing scholarly attention due to the persistent nature of these conflicts and their impact on social stability, economic development, and community cohesion. Public relations strategies in this context involve deliberate communication efforts aimed at fostering mutual understanding, reducing tensions, and promoting peaceful coexistence among conflicting groups. One prominent approach involves

dialogue and negotiation initiatives facilitated by government agencies, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations, which aim to create platforms for open communication and conflict resolution. Such initiatives are often complemented by community sensitization programs that emphasize conflict prevention, tolerance, and the importance of social harmony. These programs utilize various communication tools, including town hall meetings, radio broadcasts, and community forums, to reach diverse segments of the population and foster dialogue between farmers and herders.

Recent studies have highlighted the role of stakeholder engagement through strategic communication campaigns that emphasize transparency, inclusiveness, and cultural sensitivity. For example, the use of local radio stations to broadcast peace messages and conflict mitigation strategies has proven effective in reaching rural communities where traditional and informal communication channels dominate (Adebayo & Oladele, 2020). These radio programs often feature testimonies from community leaders, religious figures, and conflict resolution experts, which help to build trust and credibility among community members. Moreover, the deployment of community ambassadors—trusted local figures trained to mediate conflicts and disseminate peace messages—has been identified as a critical public relations strategy in managing the conflicts (Eze & Ogbu, 2020).

Stakeholder institutions have also adopted reputation management and image building as key strategies to enhance their credibility and influence in conflict-prone communities. For instance, government agencies and NGOs often organize peace rallies, cultural festivals, and sports activities aimed at promoting unity and demonstrating commitment to peaceful coexistence. These activities serve to create positive associations and reinforce the message that peace is a shared community goal. Additionally, the strategic use of social media platforms has become increasingly relevant in contemporary conflict management, allowing stakeholders to reach broader audiences quickly, respond to misinformation, and sustain ongoing peacebuilding efforts (Nwachukwu & Chinwe, 2022).

Furthermore, the institutionalization of conflict resolution mechanisms, such as community peace committees and traditional councils, reflects a strategic public relations effort to embed peacebuilding within local governance structures. These bodies function as communication bridges between the government and local communities, providing a formal avenue for grievance redress and ongoing dialogue. The effectiveness of these strategies depends largely on the degree of stakeholder participation, the cultural appropriateness of messages, and the consistency of communication efforts over time (Olu & Emechebe, 2021). Recent literature emphasizes the importance of adopting a multi-channel communication approach that integrates traditional, electronic, and interpersonal channels to effectively manage the complex socio-cultural dynamics underlying farmer-herder conflicts. It is also recognized that continuous engagement, capacity building of local mediators, and fostering trust are critical success factors for public relations strategies in conflict management.

2.1.2 The perceived effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholders in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State

The perceived effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholders in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State depends largely on the affected communities receive and trust the messages. Public relations (PR) strategies, which include communication campaigns,

community engagement, dialogue facilitation, and partnership building, are crucial in fostering understanding, reducing tensions, and promoting peaceful coexistence among conflicting groups. Recent studies suggest that the effectiveness of these strategies largely depends on their cultural relevance, the level of stakeholder involvement, and the ability to address underlying socio-economic and environmental issues that fuel the conflicts.

In the context of Benue State, stakeholders such as government agencies, traditional rulers, security agencies, and civil society organizations have deployed various PR approaches aimed at conflict mitigation. One common strategy involves community dialogue sessions facilitated by traditional leaders and government officials, which are perceived to be effective in creating platforms for grievances to be aired and misunderstandings clarified. These dialogue forums are often seen as successful when they incorporate local customs, languages, and cultural norms, thereby increasing acceptance among community members (Adebayo & Oladele, 2020). Additionally, the deployment of information campaigns through local radio stations, town hall meetings, and community outreach programs has been viewed as effective in raising awareness about the importance of peaceful coexistence and the consequences of violence.

Recent research indicates that stakeholder collaboration and transparency significantly influence the perceived success of PR strategies. When stakeholders work in tandem and communicate transparently about their intentions, the community's trust in the interventions increases. For instance, studies by Okafor and Nwankwo (2021) highlight that when government agencies partner with traditional rulers and civil society groups to disseminate messages and coordinate peace efforts, the community perceives these strategies as more credible and impactful. Conversely, strategies that lack inclusivity or are perceived as top-down tend to have limited effectiveness, with communities viewing them as superficial or coercive.

The role of media, particularly local radio and social media platforms, has been identified as instrumental in shaping public perceptions of the peace initiatives. Recent work by Eze et al. (2022) demonstrates that media campaigns that are culturally sensitive and involve community members as narrators or participants tend to foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, thereby enhancing the perceived effectiveness of PR efforts. However, some studies also point out challenges such as misinformation, propaganda, and limited access to communication channels in remote areas, which can undermine the perceived success of these strategies (Ogunleye & Balogun, 2020).

Furthermore, the integration of conflict-sensitive communication that emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding has been shown to positively influence community perceptions. Stakeholders who adopt a participatory approach, involving community members in planning and implementation, are generally viewed as more effective in conflict management. This approach not only helps address immediate tensions but also builds long-term relationships based on trust and shared goals (Akinyemi et al., 2019). The effectiveness of public relations strategies in this context is thus heavily reliant on their ability to adapt to local realities, promote inclusivity, and foster genuine engagement rather than mere information dissemination.

Recent literature also emphasizes that the success of PR strategies in managing farmers-herders conflicts is intertwined with addressing the root causes of the conflicts, such as land disputes, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation. Strategies that focus solely on communication without tackling these underlying issues tend to have limited long-term impact and are perceived

as superficial by the communities involved (Njoku & Nwosu, 2022). Therefore, the perceived effectiveness of PR strategies is enhanced when they form part of a comprehensive approach that combines dialogue with socio-economic interventions. In summary, recent studies indicate that stakeholders' deployment of culturally sensitive, inclusive, and conflict-sensitive public relations strategies significantly influences community perceptions of their effectiveness in managing farmers-herders conflicts in Benue State. Strategies perceived as genuine, participatory, and addressing underlying issues tend to foster trust, reduce tensions, and promote peaceful coexistence. The success of these strategies hinges on stakeholder collaboration, transparency, media involvement, and the integration of communication with broader socio-economic and environmental interventions.

2.1.3 Factors that hinder the success of public relations efforts in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State

The success of public relations efforts in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State is often hampered by a complex interplay of socio-political, cultural, and communication-related factors. One of the primary challenges is the deep-rooted ethno-cultural and ethnic divisions that characterize the conflicts. These divisions often result in mistrust and suspicion among the different groups, making it difficult for public relations campaigns to foster understanding and reconciliation effectively. According to Ojo and Akinyele (2021), ethno-cultural biases and stereotypes significantly undermine the credibility and acceptance of communication efforts aimed at conflict resolution. The historical suspicion and mutual hostility between farmers and herders create a barrier to effective engagement, as stakeholders may perceive messages as biased or manipulative, thereby reducing their willingness to cooperate.

Another critical factor that hampers the success of public relations initiatives is the limited capacity and skills of the practitioners involved. Many of the public relations officers lack the necessary training in conflict-sensitive communication, stakeholder engagement, and cultural competence. The work of Nwosu and Onyema (2020) highlights that inadequate training and resource constraints limit the ability of public relations practitioners to design and implement effective communication strategies tailored to the local context. Consequently, messages may be poorly crafted, misinterpreted, or fail to resonate with the target audience, thereby reducing the overall impact of the campaigns.

The proliferation of misinformation and false narratives on social media and other informal communication channels also poses a significant challenge. Misinformation often propagates stereotypes, exaggerates grievances, and incites violence, making it difficult for official public relations efforts to counteract these negative perceptions. As observed by Afolabi (2022), social media platforms serve as breeding grounds for rumors and fake news, which can escalate tensions and undermine government and community-led peacebuilding initiatives. When public relations messages are drowned out by misinformation, their effectiveness in calming tensions and promoting dialogue diminishes considerably.

Furthermore, political interference and the politicization of farmer-herder conflicts complicate public relations efforts. Political actors often exploit these conflicts for electoral gains or to push partisan agendas, which reduces the space for neutral and constructive communication. According to Obi and Uche (2019), politicization leads to conflicting messages from different stakeholders, eroding trust and undermining the neutrality essential for effective conflict

management. Public relations efforts are thus often perceived as partisan or biased, which discourages community participation and hampers the building of mutual understanding.

The absence of a comprehensive and coordinated communication strategy also limits the effectiveness of public relations efforts. Many initiatives are reactive rather than proactive, focusing on crisis management rather than conflict prevention and resolution. This piecemeal approach results in inconsistent messaging and fragmented efforts, which fail to address the underlying causes of the conflicts. Oladipo and Adegoke (2021) argue that sustainable peacebuilding requires a strategic and multi-stakeholder communication framework that promotes dialogue, trust, and shared understanding over time.

Language barriers and low literacy levels among some rural populations further impede effective communication. Many of the messages are delivered in official or dominant languages that are not understood by all community members, especially in rural and marginalized areas. As noted by Ijeoma and Eze (2020), failure to use local languages or culturally relevant communication methods diminishes message penetration and community engagement, thereby reducing the success rate of public relations efforts.

Finally, the lack of community participation and ownership in designing and implementing communication strategies reduces their effectiveness. When communities are passive recipients rather than active participants, there is limited buy-in and trust in the messages conveyed. Ojo and Akinyele (2021) emphasize that participatory communication approaches that involve community leaders and members at every stage of the process are more likely to foster ownership, trust, and sustainable peace. In summary, the success of public relations efforts in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State is hindered by ethno-cultural divisions, inadequate capacity of practitioners, misinformation, political interference, poor strategic planning, language barriers, and limited community participation. Addressing these factors requires a holistic and culturally sensitive approach that emphasizes community engagement, capacity building, strategic communication, and the use of local languages and channels.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complex dynamics involved in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, particularly in the context of public relations efforts. Originally introduced by Freeman (1984), Stakeholder Theory posits that organizations and institutions must recognize and address the interests of all parties affected by their actions to achieve sustainable success. In the context of public relations, especially in conflict management, this theory emphasizes the importance of identifying, understanding, and engaging with diverse stakeholders who have varying levels of influence and interest in the issues at hand.

Applying Stakeholder Theory to the farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State involves recognizing that multiple groups—including local farmers, herders, government agencies, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and international bodies—hold stakes that influence the conflict's trajectory and resolution efforts. Effective public relations strategies require a nuanced understanding of these stakeholders' perceptions, expectations, and power dynamics. For instance, farmers and herders often perceive each other as adversaries, which is compounded by issues such as resource scarcity, land disputes, and ethnic tensions. These perceptions can be

mitigated through targeted communication that fosters dialogue, mutual understanding, and trust among stakeholders.

Recent studies underscore that stakeholder engagement is crucial for conflict resolution, especially in multi-ethnic and socio-politically charged environments like Benue State. Adegbite and Ogunsola (2020) argue that inclusive communication strategies that involve all relevant stakeholders can reduce misinformation, build consensus, and promote collaborative problem-solving. Furthermore, stakeholder analysis helps public relations practitioners identify key influencers and potential allies who can facilitate peacebuilding efforts or, conversely, amplify tensions if ignored. This aligns with the core premise of Stakeholder Theory that organizations must not only recognize stakeholders but actively manage relationships to foster positive outcomes.

In the specific context of managing farmer-herder conflicts, public relations efforts guided by Stakeholder Theory should focus on creating platforms for dialogue, disseminating accurate information, and engaging traditional authorities who command community trust. Recent research by Akinyemi et al. (2021) highlights that failure to adequately map and involve stakeholders often results in superficial interventions that lack legitimacy and sustainability. Consequently, public relations strategies that incorporate stakeholder feedback, address concerns transparently, and promote inclusive participation are more likely to succeed in reducing tensions and fostering peace.

Stakeholder Theory also emphasizes the importance of balancing competing interests and managing expectations. In Benue State, where conflicts are deeply rooted in socio-economic and cultural issues, public relations efforts must be sensitive to local norms and power structures. As noted by Adeyemi and Oluwafemi (2022), leveraging traditional communication channels and community leaders enhances legitimacy and acceptance of peace initiatives. This approach aligns with the stakeholder concept that trust and credibility are critical for influencing stakeholder behavior and fostering long-term peace.

Recent literature further suggests that technology and social media can be powerful tools for stakeholder engagement, enabling real-time communication and broad participation. However, the risk of misinformation and polarization remains high, necessitating strategic management of stakeholder narratives, as highlighted by Oladipo and Adebayo (2023). Therefore, a stakeholder-centric approach in public relations must be adaptive, culturally sensitive, and inclusive to effectively address the multifaceted nature of farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State.

In conclusion, Stakeholder Theory offers valuable insights into the factors that hinder the success of public relations efforts in managing farmer-herder conflicts. Recognizing the diverse interests and influences of all stakeholders, engaging them through transparent and inclusive communication, and managing their expectations are essential for fostering sustainable peace. Recent research emphasizes that conflict resolution in such contexts requires a nuanced understanding of local socio-cultural dynamics and active stakeholder participation to build trust, legitimacy, and long-term collaboration.

3.1 Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, facilitating the collection of quantitative data to explore factors affecting the success of stakeholders' engagement in the management of farmer-herders conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State which include, Agatu, Guma, Kwande and Gwer West. These communities were selected due to the high incidence of herder-farmer crises in these communities. A mixed-method approach was integrated to complement and enrich the quantitative findings with in-depth qualitative insights.

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The target population comprised local farmers and herders, traditional rulers, community leaders and elders, government officials, non governmental organizations and civil society groups involved in peacebuilding, security personnel and the local judiciary or conflict resolution committees. Structured questionnaires were developed to gather data from a sample of 350 participants of these various stakeholders that utilized a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), to Strongly Disagree (SD). In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 selected stakeholders in selected communities in Benue State to obtain comprehensive qualitative data on their experiences with resolution of farmer-herders conflict in Benue State. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling technique were adopted to select the respondents for the study.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaires, content validation was performed through review and refinement by research professionals from Moses Orshio Adasu University and the University of Mkar. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.80, indicating high internal consistency and confirming the instrument's reliability for this study. Out of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 350 responses were retrieved, representing a response rate of 97.2%. Data analysis involved calculating percentages, means, and standard deviations. A mean cut-off point of 2.50 was established for decision-making purposes: any item with a mean score of 2.50 or higher was accepted as agreement, while scores below 2.50 were rejected.

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4.1 Results

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on the public relations strategies utilised by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer herder conflicts

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	∑	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	Stakeholder institutions regularly used community engagement for conflict resolution.	200 (800)	100 (300)	30 (60)	20 (20)	1180	350	3.37	0.86	**Accepted**
2	Stakeholder institutions use community meetings to disseminate information about peacebuilding initiatives.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	1220	350	3.49	0.69	**Accepted**
3	Public relations campaigns are effectively used by stakeholder institutions to promote peaceful coexistence.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	1160	350	3.32	0.52	**Accepted**
4	Stakeholder institutions collaborate with traditional leaders to communicate conflict resolution strategies.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	1257	350	3.59	0.51	**Accepted**
5	Media outlets are actively utilized by stakeholder institutions to raise awareness about peace initiatives.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	1220	350	3.48	0.69	**Accepted**
6	Stakeholder institutions provide educational programs to inform the public about conflict management.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	1256	350	3.58	0.51	**Accepted**
	Cluster Mean									**3.47**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026* **Mean Benchmark = 2.50**

The data presented in Table 1 reflect respondents' overall perceptions of the extent to which public relations strategies are utilized by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts within the selected communities of Benue State. The mean ratings for items 1 to 6 are 3.37, 3.49, 3.31, 3.59, 3.49, and 3.59, respectively, with standard deviations 0.51 to 0.86. The cluster mean score of 3.47, which surpasses the predetermined mean benchmark of 2.50, indicates a general agreement among respondents that various public relations strategies are indeed being employed by stakeholder institutions in these communities. Since all the mean ratings are above the threshold of 2.50, it can be concluded that there is a consensus that stakeholder institutions actively utilize multiple public relations strategies to manage the farmer-

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herder conflicts. The slightly higher scores for items 4 and 6 suggest that collaboration with traditional leaders and educational programmes are perceived as more frequently or effectively employed. The standard deviations indicate some degree of variability in responses, but overall, the data support the presence of active public relations efforts in the conflict management processes within these communities.

Table 2: Respondents views on the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State (n=350)

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	∑	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	The involvement of traditional rulers has helped reduce violence in farmer-herder conflicts.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	1220	350	3.49	0.69	**Accepted**
2	Government intervention has been effective in managing conflicts between farmers and herders.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	1160	350	3.31	0.52	**Accepted**
3	Engagement of local communities in conflict resolution has led to sustainable peace.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	1257	350	3.59	0.51	**Accepted**
4	The participation of women and youth in stakeholder meetings improves conflict management outcomes.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	1160	350	3.31	0.52	**Accepted**
5	Stakeholders respect and adhere to agreements reached during conflict resolution processes.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	1257	350	3.59	0.51	**Accepted**
	Cluster Mean									**3.46**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026* **Mean Benchmark = 2.50**

Table 2 presents the mean ratings reflecting respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements about the effectiveness of current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herders conflicts in selected communities in Benue State. The mean scores for items 1 through 5 are 3.49, 3.31, 3.59, 3.31and 3.59, with corresponding standard deviations of 0.69, 0.52, 0.51, 0.52 and 0.51. The overall cluster mean score is 3.46, which exceeds the benchmark of 2.50 and is therefore accepted. This indicates that the respondents generally perceive the current stakeholder strategies in mitigating farmer-herder conflicts in the selected communities in Benue State as effective.

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Table 3: Respondents views on the challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflict in selected communities in Benue State (n=350)

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	∑	N	($\bar{x}$)	SD	Decision
1	There is a lack of adequate communication among stakeholders involved in conflicts.	200 (800)	100 (300)	30 (60)	20 (20)	1180	350	3.37	0.86	**Accepted**
2	Some stakeholders do not have sufficient influence to affect conflict resolution positively.	200 (800)	130 (390)	10 (20)	10 (10)	1220	350	3.49	0.69	**Accepted**
3	Cultural and traditional differences hinder effective stakeholder collaboration.	120 (480)	220 (660)	10 (20)	0 (0)	1160	350	3.31	0.52	**Accepted**
4	Stakeholders often prioritize their interests over the collective goal of peace.	210 (840)	138 (414)	1 (2)	1 (1)	1257	350	3.59	0.51	**Accepted**
5	The government provides enough support and resources for stakeholder engagement in conflict management.	150 (600)	200 (600)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1200	350	3.43	0.49	**Accepted**
	Cluster Mean									**3.44**

Source: *Field Survey, 2026* **Mean Benchmark = 2.50**

Table 5 displays the mean ratings reflecting respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements regarding the challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of farmer-herders conflict in selected communities in Benue State. The mean scores for items 1 to 5 are 3.49, 3.31, 3.59 and 3.43, with corresponding standard deviations of 0.86, 0.69, 0.52, 0.51, and 0.49. The overall cluster mean score is 3.44, which exceeds the benchmark of 2.50 and is therefore accepted. This suggests that there several challenges to stakeholder engagement in the resolution of the farmer-herders conflict in the selected communities in Benue State. Overcoming these challenges requires concerted efforts to build trust, enhance communication, strengthen institutional capacities, and promote inclusive dialogue to facilitate sustainable peace and conflict resolution in the affected communities.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings from the analysis of factors limiting the effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State reveal a complex landscape characterized by active engagement but also significant challenges. The study aimed to identify and examine the specific public relations strategies used by stakeholder

institutions, assess their perceived effectiveness, and determine the key factors hindering their success.

Stakeholder institutions in Benue State employ a range of public relations strategies to manage the ongoing farmer-herder conflicts. These strategies include community dialogue forums, engagement with traditional leaders, dissemination of information through local radio broadcasts, and the use of local mediators and peace committees. Respondents indicated that these approaches are deliberately designed to foster dialogue, build trust, and promote mutual understanding among conflicting parties. For example, community dialogue sessions facilitated by traditional rulers and government officials serve as platforms for airing grievances, clarifying misconceptions, and exploring collaborative solutions. Additionally, stakeholder institutions leverage local media channels to reach a wider audience with peace messages and conflict mitigation information.

The perceived limitations of current public relations efforts are compounded by several key factors that hinder their overall success. Among these, inadequate stakeholder engagement emerged as a significant challenge. Many stakeholders, especially those directly involved in the conflicts, often feel excluded from decision-making processes, which diminishes their trust and willingness to participate actively in peace initiatives. Furthermore, there are challenges related to resource constraints, including limited funding and logistical support, which restrict the frequency and scope of engagement activities. Respondents also pointed out that cultural and socio-political dynamics, such as deep-rooted ethnic tensions and suspicion of government motives, often undermine stakeholder cooperation. Another critical factor identified is the lack of sustained follow-up and monitoring mechanisms; many strategies are implemented as one-off events without structured evaluation or long-term engagement plans, reducing their sustainability and impact.

Moreover, communication barriers, including language differences, low literacy levels, and misinformation, further complicate stakeholder engagement efforts. Respondents highlighted that messages sometimes fail to resonate with local communities due to cultural insensitivity or misunderstanding, which hampers the effectiveness of public relations strategies. The absence of a coordinated approach among stakeholder institutions was also noted as a significant impediment, leading to fragmented efforts that lack synergy and shared objectives. In summary, while stakeholder institutions actively employ multiple public relations strategies to manage farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, the perceived effectiveness of these efforts was rated high. The challenges of inadequate stakeholder engagement, resource limitations, socio-cultural tensions, poor follow-up, and communication barriers significantly hinder the success of conflict management initiatives. To enhance the effectiveness of public relations strategies, there is a need for more inclusive, sustained, and culturally sensitive engagement approaches, supported by adequate resources and robust monitoring mechanisms. Addressing these factors is crucial for transforming episodic conflict mitigation efforts into sustainable peacebuilding initiatives in the affected communities of Benue State.

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of factors limiting the effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by stakeholder institutions in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State reveals that multiple intertwined challenges hinder the achievement of sustainable peace and conflict

resolution. These include inadequate stakeholder engagement, miscommunication, mistrust among communities, socio-cultural and political complexities, and limited capacity of institutions to implement strategic communication interventions effectively. Additionally, the proliferation of misinformation further complicates efforts to foster understanding and cooperation among conflicting parties. To enhance the efficacy of public relations strategies, it is essential for stakeholder institutions to adopt a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and transparent approach that actively involves all relevant parties. Building trust, leveraging traditional authority structures, and employing innovative communication platforms are crucial steps toward addressing the root causes of the conflicts and promoting lasting peace. The findings underscore the need for continuous evaluation, capacity building, and genuine stakeholder participation to overcome existing limitations and ensure that public relations efforts contribute meaningfully to conflict management and social cohesion in Benue State.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

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

Limitations of the Study

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

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

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

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

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