



EFFECTS OF FARMERS – HERDERS’ CONFLICT ON CULTURAL HERITAGE IN DONGA LGA TARABA STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Donga Local Government Area in Taraba State, Nigeria, has experienced persistent farmers-herders’ conflicts over the years, leading to significant disruptions to the region’s cultural heritage. These conflicts, fuelled by competition over land, water resources and other natural resources, have resulted in loss of lives, displacement of rural communities, and destruction of cultural sites and practices. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of farmers-herders conflict on the cultural heritage of Donga LGA and explore possible solutions to mitigate these effects. The researcher: adopted a purposive and convenient sampling method and survey approach to select affected communities and gather opinions from local leaders and residents through structured questionnaires, interviews and direct observation. A questionnaire was designed and a total of 500 copies were administered to respondents, and 20 respondents were interviewed. Findings from the study revealed that the conflicts have led to the abandonment of traditional architecture, traditional festivals, rituals, and social gatherings, thereby weakening the transmission of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. Sacred sites, ancestral landmarks, and communal meeting places have been destroyed or rendered inaccessible due to on-going violence. The displacement of communities has also interrupted the intergenerational transfer of cultural values and practices, leading to gradual cultural erosion. To address these challenges, it is recommended that the Taraba State government and local stakeholders initiate peace-building measures, strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms, and promote dialogue between farmers and herders.

Keywords: Farmers-herders conflict, cultural heritage, displacement, rural communities, Donga LGA, Taraba State.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is widely recognized as a cornerstone of identity, social cohesion, and sustainable development. According to UNESCO (2022), cultural heritage encompasses not only tangible monuments, sites, and artefacts but also intangible practices, expressions, and knowledge systems that define communities. In today’s rapidly globalizing world, the preservation of cultural heritage faces unprecedented challenges, particularly in conflict zones where violence and resource disputes threaten to erase centuries of accumulated history and tradition (Smith, 2021). Conflicts, whether driven by territorial, economic, or ideological

motives, often lead to the destruction of cultural landmarks, thereby disrupting the intergenerational transmission of values and knowledge that are essential for community continuity.

Within Africa, the challenge of safeguarding cultural heritage is amplified by socio-economic disparities and political instability. The continent boasts an immense diversity of indigenous cultures and traditions; however, it is also prone to recurrent conflicts over natural resources such as land and water. In many African nations, these resource-based disputes have evolved into protracted conflicts that not only cause severe human and economic losses but also result in the degradation of cultural heritage (Adebola and Ibrahim, 2018). The violence and displacement associated with these conflicts disrupt traditional practices and rituals, erode long-held community bonds, and fragment the cultural landscapes that have sustained ethnic identities for generations (UNESCO, 2022).

In Nigeria, the farmer's herders' conflict has emerged as one of the most critical issues undermining both national security and cultural preservation. Over recent decades, clashes between pastoralists and agriculturalists have intensified, fuelled by competition for scarce natural resources and exacerbated by rapid population growth and environmental degradation (Oluwole, 2019). While much of the scholarly discourse has centred on the economic repercussions and security challenges posed by these conflicts, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding their impact on Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. The Nigerian cultural landscape, characterized by a vibrant mosaic of ethnic traditions, languages, and customs, is increasingly vulnerable as violence forces communities to abandon ancestral lands and disrupts the traditional channels of cultural transmission (Bello and Musa, 2020).

Taraba State, situated in the north-eastern region of Nigeria, is renowned for its cultural diversity and historical richness. However, the benefits of this cultural wealth are now threatened by the farmers–herders conflict. In Taraba State, on-going disputes have led to significant disruptions in community life, undermining traditional festivals, rituals, and the preservation of sacred sites that form the essence of local identity (Okoli and Orinya, 2021). The state's cultural heritage, once a vital driver of both social cohesion and economic development through cultural tourism, now faces the risk of irreversible loss as violence compels communities to migrate and traditional practices to fade away.

Donga Local Government Area (LGA) within Taraba State epitomizes the complex interplay between conflict and cultural erosion. Historically, Donga LGA has been a repository of indigenous traditions, characterized by unique architectural styles, vibrant festivals, and communal rituals that have bound its diverse communities together for generations. However, sustained violent encounters between farmers and herders have precipitated not only the loss of lives and properties but have also disrupted the continuity of cultural practices (Bello and Musa, 2020). The forced displacement of community members has further severed the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, thereby eroding the very fabric of local identity. Given these multifaceted challenges, there is an urgent need for comprehensive research that addresses both the cultural and socio-economic dimensions of the farmer's herder's conflict. (Adebola and Ibrahim, 2018; Okoli and Orinya, 2021).

This study therefore seeks to bridge the research gap by investigating the impact of farmer–herders' conflict on the cultural heritage of Donga LGA and exploring practical strategies for its preservation and revitalization. The research focuses on two central questions, namely how have farmers–herder conflicts contributed to the erosion of cultural heritage in Donga

LGA? And what sustainable measures can be implemented to safeguard and restore endangered cultural practices and sites?

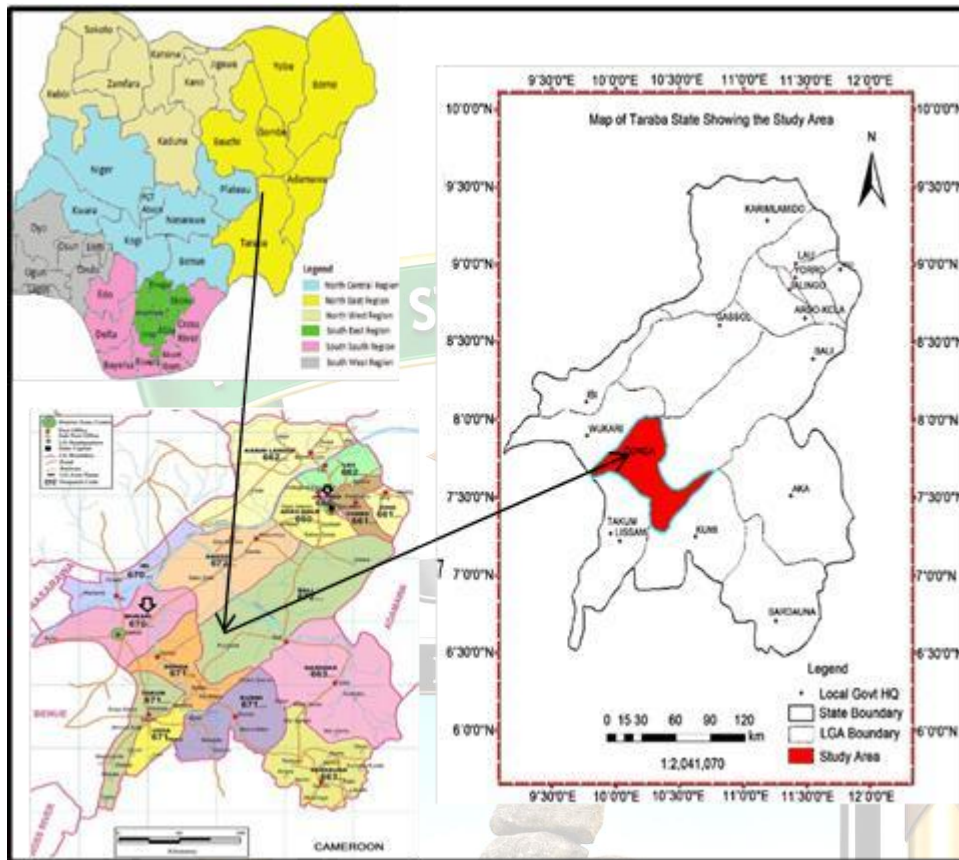


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Donga Local Government Area

Source: Adapted from Taraba State Government publications and local heritage documentation (2019).

History, Language and Culture

Donga Local Government Area, located in the southern part of Taraba State, Nigeria, has a rich historical and cultural background. The area was historically inhabited by various ethnic groups, many of whom migrated due to intertribal conflicts, environmental pressures, and the search for arable land (Blench, 2006). It later became part of the old Wukari Federation, a Jukun-dominated polity with significant regional influence prior to and during colonial rule (Napa, 1997). During the British colonial era, Donga emerged as an administrative and trade center, integrating multiple ethnic groups and fostering intercultural relations. Situated within Nigeria's Middle Belt an area renowned for its cultural plurality Donga is no exception in terms of ethnolinguistic diversity. Major ethnic groups include the Tiv, Jukun, Chamba, Ichen, and Hausa (Gboza, 2011). Although these groups have coexisted for decades, competition over land and political power has occasionally sparked conflict (Blench, 2006).

The region's languages are reflective of this diversity. Tiv, the language of the largest ethnic group in the area, belongs to the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Jukun is part of the Jukunoid subgroup of the same family, while Chamba belongs to the Adamawa branch. Hausa, from the Chadic family within the Afro-Asiatic phylum, is widely spoken and serves as the region's lingua franca (Williamson and Blench, 2000).

Donga is culturally vibrant, with each ethnic group maintaining distinct traditions. For example, the Tiv are known for *kwagh-hir*, a form of dramatic storytelling using puppets, while the Jukun celebrate elaborate masquerades during traditional festivals (Agu, 2010). Most of the local population engages in farming, cultivating crops such as yams, maize, guinea corn, and millet. The religious composition of the area includes traditional African beliefs, Christianity, and Islam, all of which influence the local culture and social life (Gboza, 2011).

Tourism in Donga Local Government Area

Donga Local Government Area, situated in southern Taraba State, Nigeria, offers visitors a blend of natural beauty, rich cultural heritage and a hospitable social environment (Gobin, 2022). Its warm tropical climate marked by a wet season from May to October and a dry season from November to April combined with moderate humidity creates a comfortable atmosphere for tourism throughout the year (Gobin, 2022).

a) General Attractions

Among the broad, non-site-specific qualities that draw tourists to Donga are its climate, security and hospitality. The area's annual average temperature of 27.1 °C and rainfall around 1,270 mm help visitors escape both the excessive heat of lower elevations and the chill of highlands elsewhere in Nigeria (Gobin, 2022). Strong traditional governance and communal cohesion have maintained consistently low crime rates, fostering a peaceful setting that reassures travelers (Gobin, 2022). Above all, local communities including the Chamba, Tiv, Ichen and Kpazon peoples are renowned for welcoming guests as honoured friends, often inviting them into family homesteads, markets and cultural exchanges (Gobin, 2022).

b) Site Attractions

Donga's fixed, tangible tourist sites range from natural landscapes to historical monuments. The remnants of the Donga City Wall, an eight-gate fortification built in 1902 for defence against inter-tribal raids and wildlife, stand as a testament to early Chamba engineering (Gobin, 2022). Nearby, the Kaki Wargi Hills along Suntai Road offer striking granite outcrops, cascading waterfalls and an elevated plateau covered in endemic shrubs, ideal for hiking and photography (Gobin, 2022). In Donga town itself, a venerable baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) over two centuries old holds profound spiritual significance and serves as a natural landmark (Gobin, 2022). The perennial Donga River originating on the Mambilla Plateau and expanding to 400 m in width feeds an oxbow lake that supports seasonal fishing festivals and birdlife, while the adjacent Donga River Basin Forest, home to over 190 bird species and diverse mammals, has become a premier bird-watching and ecotourism destination (Clarke, 2024).

c) Event Attractions

Event attractions in Donga are periodic cultural celebrations that showcase the area's living traditions. The most notable is the Purma Festival, held decennially by the Chamba people to honour ancestral heritage. During Purma, elaborate masquerades, drumming ensembles, warrior processions with spears and regalia, and communal feasting transform Donga into a vibrant open-air theatre of history and spirituality (Gobin, 2022). Because its timing and location are determined by traditional councils, visitors planning to attend must align their travel with the festival schedule.

Donga Local Government Area (LGA) in Taraba State, Nigeria, spans approximately 2,500 km² with an average elevation of around 800 meters, encompassing a diverse landscape of undulating hills, expansive plains, and rugged terrains (Taraba State Ministry of Lands and

Survey, 2022). This varied topography supports a dual economy based on agriculture and pastoralism, which has historically fostered recurring farmers' herders' conflicts that threaten the region's cultural heritage. Key culturally significant sites, such as the Gayama-Ekah, Gankwe, Nugwi, and Kaki Wargi hilltops, along with abandoned settlements like Ude in Kumbo and Nya-Kwala, represent the area's rich historical legacy and indigenous traditions.

The climate in Donga LGA is tropical, characterized by a pronounced rainy season from April to October and a dry season from November to March, with the elevated terrain contributing to milder temperatures that influence local agricultural practices and cultural activities (Taraba State Government, 2019). Numerous small streams and seasonal watercourses crisscross the area, supporting both crop irrigation and livestock grazing, though competition over these water resources intensifies local disputes.

Vegetation in the region is marked by a forest savanna mosaic, while indigenous fauna reflect its rich biodiversity. Historically, Donga LGA has nurtured a vibrant cultural heritage shaped by diverse ethnic groups and traditional practices. Its economy relies on agriculture, natural resource extraction, and emerging tourism, with attractions ranging from scenic landscapes to vibrant cultural festivals and historical landmarks (Okoro and Ibrahim, 2015; Bassey, 2012).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bello and Musa's (2020) work, titled "Cultural Erosion in Conflict Zones: A Case Study from Nigeria," was conducted in various rural communities affected by recurring conflicts. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined surveys, field observations, and in-depth interviews with community residents and leaders, they documented significant cultural erosion marked by the abandonment of traditional architecture, festivals, and rituals. Their study revealed that forced community relocation due to violence severely disrupts the intergenerational transmission of cultural practices, leading them to recommend targeted cultural preservation programs and greater governmental intervention. Unlike their broad examination of cultural erosion in Nigeria, the current study hones in on the specific impact of farmers-herders conflicts on the cultural heritage of Donga LGA.

Oluwole (2019), in his study "Farmers-Herders Conflict and Its Socio-Cultural Impacts in Nigeria," conducted research across multiple conflict hotspots, including areas in Taraba State. Employing a mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, he found that such conflicts not only result in economic and human losses but also significantly disrupt traditional ceremonies, communal spaces, and other cultural practices essential for social cohesion. Oluwole recommended developing integrated policy frameworks that address both economic and cultural dimensions, with an emphasis on community-based reconciliation and heritage documentation initiatives. While his work provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-cultural impacts, the current study specifically investigates the mechanisms through which these conflicts erode cultural heritage in Donga LGA.

Okoli and Orinya's (2021) study, "Resolving Resource Conflicts: Strategies for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Nigeria," was conducted in various conflict-affected regions across Nigeria. Through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, they found that unresolved resource conflicts lead to the deterioration of heritage sites and disrupt traditional rituals that serve as community anchors. They recommended implementing multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms and community-based cultural preservation initiatives.

In contrast to their broader strategic recommendations, the current study builds on these findings by documenting the specific cultural sites and practices in Donga LGA affected by farmers–herders conflicts and proposing localized, tailored solutions.

Adebola and Ibrahim’s (2018) study, “Resource Conflicts and Cultural Heritage Preservation in West Africa,” conducted in rural communities across West Africa with a focus on Nigeria, employed a qualitative case study approach using semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Their findings revealed that resource-based conflicts lead to the abandonment of culturally significant sites and disrupt the traditional transmission of indigenous knowledge. They recommended establishing local conflict resolution committees and integrating cultural heritage preservation into broader development policies. Although their work provides a valuable regional perspective on heritage preservation, the current study narrows its focus to Donga LGA, seeking to develop sustainable, context-specific measures for safeguarding endangered cultural practices and sites amid conflict.

Okoli and Orinya’s (2021) research, “Resolving Resource Conflicts: Strategies for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Nigeria,” was carried out in various conflict-affected regions using qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders. They found that unresolved resource conflicts contribute to the deterioration of heritage sites and traditional practices, and they advocated for multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms and community-based preservation initiatives. Unlike their broader strategic recommendations, the current study tailors these sustainable measures to the localized context of Donga LGA, emphasizing practical interventions to safeguard and restore its cultural heritage.

Finally, Fuchs and Pizam (2011) examined the relationship between cultural heritage and sustainable tourism on a global scale, advocating for participatory conservation strategies and the development of ecotourism as means to protect cultural assets. Although their work primarily highlights the role of tourism in heritage preservation, the current study diverges by focusing on sustainable measures specifically designed to counteract the detrimental impacts of farmers–herders conflicts on endangered cultural practices and sites in Donga LGA. Collectively, these studies form a foundation upon which the current research develops localized, sustainable interventions to safeguard and restore cultural heritage in conflict-affected communities.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design of the Study

The researcher opted for the use of more detailed descriptive surveys through questionnaires and direct observation. I used this approach because it assisted me in obtaining information from the tourists in the sample population.

Population of the Study

The target population comprises community stakeholders in Donga Local Government Area (LGA), Taraba State, including elders, youth representatives, displaced persons, cultural custodians, heritage site caretakers, and officials from the Taraba State Ministry of Culture and Traditional Affairs. The study focuses on six culturally significant sites Gayama-Ekah hilltop, Gankwe hilltop, Nugwi hilltop, Ude abandoned settlement, Kaki Wargi hilltop, and Nya-Kwala abandoned settlement selected for their historical importance and documented exposure to farmers–herders conflicts. The study population consists of the estimated resident populations of these six communities, which, based on 2022 projections, are: Gayama-Ekah (45,000), Gankwe (35,000), Nugwi (40,000), Ude (20,000), Kaki Wargi (30,000), and Nya-

Kwala (39,400). The combined total population of Donga LGA is projected at 209,400 (Citypopulation.de, 2022) serving as the sampling frame. From this population, 500 community members were selected proportionally for questionnaire administration, while 20 informants, traditional leaders, cultural custodians, and government officials were purposely chosen for in-depth interviews to capture diverse perspectives on conflict-induced cultural heritage erosion. Sampling ensured representation across gender, age, and occupation, reflecting the socio-cultural diversity of Donga LGA.

Sampling techniques

Different sampling methods were employed at various stages to elicit the required data and meet the study's objectives. First, purposive sampling was used to identify six culturally significant communities (Gayama-Ekah, Gankwe, Nugwi, Ude, Kaki Wargi, Nya-Kwala) based on their documented exposure to farmers herders conflicts and the presence of endangered cultural sites. Purposive sampling intentionally selects information-rich cases relevant to the research aim and ensures that the most affected communities are included. Second, simple random sampling was employed to select 500 community respondents from updated village registers, ensuring each resident had an equal probability of inclusion and minimizing selection bias. This probability-based approach enhances the generalizability of the findings to the wider Donga LGA population. Third, convenience sampling was applied to recruit 20 key informants including traditional leaders, cultural custodians, and officials based on their availability and willingness to participate, addressing practical constraints such as limited access to certain respondents. The multi-stage sampling framework balanced representativeness with feasibility, facilitating comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data collection on how farmers–herder conflicts erode cultural heritage in Donga LGA.

Sample size

The researcher could not survey the entire Donga LGA population of 209,400 (projection for 2022). Instead, a sample of 500 community respondents and 20 key informants was determined. A total of 500 questionnaires were administered across six culturally significant settlements using simple random sampling to ensure equal probability of selection. Of these, 482 were validly completed (96.4% response rate), with 18 questionnaires either incomplete or not returned. For the qualitative component, 20 key informants including six traditional rulers, six cultural custodians, four Taraba State Ministry of Culture officials, and four displaced community representatives were purposely selected based on their in-depth knowledge of local cultural heritage. Eighteen interviews were successfully conducted; two scheduled informants were unavailable. This combined sample of 482 survey respondents and 18 interviewees provided robust quantitative and qualitative data for assessing how farmer's herders conflicts erode cultural heritage in Donga LGA.

Instruments for Data Collection

The main instruments for data collection were a Farmers Herders Conflict Structured Questionnaire (FHCSQ), in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured protocol, archival/documentary review, crisis-event timeline analysis, and direct field observation using a standardized checklist. The FHCSQ was face-validated and field-tested (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) before deployment. Interviews and observations were carried out by the researcher and two assistants over one week period, enabling systematic documentation of the physical state of cultural sites and community narratives on how farmer-herder conflicts have eroded indigenous heritage in Donga LGA.

Data Collection Method In this study, a mixed method was employed to comprehensively examine how farmer's herders' conflicts erode cultural heritage. Qualitative techniques semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and direct field observations captured community

narratives and site conditions, while quantitative surveys measured the extent and patterns of heritage loss. Primary data sources included interviews, observations, and a structured questionnaire; secondary sources comprised government reports, archival records, and academic literature. Employing a mixed-methods design facilitated triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and depth of insights into both tangible and intangible cultural asset degradation.

Data Analysis Techniques

As a wide range of data was gathered for this study, the researcher employed also a wide range of techniques to handle the presentation and analyses of the resulting data. The presentation involved summarization of information using chart, frequency distribution tables and other descriptive statistical manipulation such as percentages. Each mode of presentation captured the brief highlights of the main features.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of Community Members about Cultural Heritage during Conflict in Donga LGA

The image formed of Donga LGA's cultural heritage during periods of farmers–herders conflict arises from two interrelated dimensions: cognitive evaluations, reflecting community members' beliefs about the physical state of heritage sites, and affective appraisals, capturing their emotional attachments to traditions and rituals. To assess these perceptions, 500 residents across six culturally significant settlements were asked to rate their overall feelings about the condition of their cultural heritage at the height of conflict.

Table 1 shows that 42.6% perceived sacred sites such as ancestral shrines and hilltop compounds as destroyed or inaccessible, 28.4% felt that traditional festivals and rituals had been suspended, 17.5% believed that heritage sites remained largely intact despite threats, and 11.5% were uncertain or held mixed feelings. Of the 500 respondents, 250 (50.0%) reported that the conflict had severely disrupted the intergenerational transfer of cultural practices, while 150 (30.0%) indicated moderate disruption and 100 (20.0%) perceived minimal impact. In-depth interviews with 18 key informants' traditional leaders, cultural custodians, and government officials corroborated these findings, revealing that physical damage to ritual spaces and the abandonment of communal gatherings have undermined both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage. These perceptions underscore the profound effect of farmers–herders' conflict on the erosion of Donga LGA's cultural legacy.

Table 1: Perceptions of Community Members about the Condition of Cultural Heritage during Farmers Herders Conflict in Donga LGA

Perceptions	Number of Respondents (N = 500)	%
Sacred sites destroyed or inaccessible	213	42.6
Traditional festivals and rituals suspended	142	28.4
Heritage sites largely intact despite conflict	88	17.6
Uncertain or mixed feelings	57	11.4
Total	500	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2024

Outstanding Characteristics of Donga LGA's Cultural Heritage as Adjudged by Community Members

Community members identified hilltop shrines and ancestral landmarks as the most outstanding features (82%), followed by the annual Purma festival (58%). Traditional crafts and oral storytelling were highlighted by 50%, communal water rituals along the Donga River by 47%, and indigenous music and dance performances by 43%. These perceptions reflect Taraba State's rich ethnic diversity home to over 80 distinct groups which underpins the vibrancy of Donga's cultural heritage.

Table 2: Outstanding Characteristics of Donga LGA's Cultural Heritage as Adjudged by Community Members

Outstanding Characteristics	Number (N = 500)	of Respondents	%
Traditional architecture and ancestral sites	175		35.0
Annual Purma festival and ritual celebrations	125		25.0
Indigenous crafts and oral storytelling	100		20.0
Communal gatherings and water-ritual ceremonies	60		12.0
Scenic hilltops and seasonal watercourses	35		7.0
Do not know	5		1.0
Total	500		100.0

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Notable Natural and Cultural Attractions in Donga LGA as Identified by Community Members

Community members were asked to list and describe the key natural and cultural attractions in Donga Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State that have traditionally drawn the interest of visitors and hold significant value within their communities. Findings revealed a diverse range of attractions encompassing both natural and man-made elements, many of which have been threatened or eroded due to recurrent farmers' herders' conflict.

Among the most notable natural attractions, respondents identified the Donga River, renowned for its seasonal rituals and fishing festivals, as well as its scenic value. Approximately 10.2% of respondents mentioned the Donga River as a significant site, noting its use in communal water rituals and cultural celebrations. Another 8.4% pointed to the Dutse Hills, a sacred rocky outcrop believed to house ancestral spirits and often visited for spiritual consultations and traditional ceremonies. In addition, fertile farmlands, lush forests, and grazing routes though often overlooked in mainstream tourism—were mentioned as having cultural value, being tied to land-based rituals and seasonal festivals.

In terms of man-made or cultural attractions, the Purma Festival stood out as the most widely recognized cultural event in the area. This annual festival celebrates unity, agricultural bounty, and ancestral remembrance, featuring traditional music, dance, masquerades, and oral history recitations. Over 40% of respondents referenced the Purma Festival as a unique and vibrant cultural symbol of Donga.

Other notable cultural features included ancestral shrines, traditional clan compounds adorned with indigenous architecture, artisan crafts like blacksmithing and weaving, and oral storytelling traditions passed down through generations. Despite the richness of these heritage assets, the study found that many younger community members and displaced persons could not list more than one or two attractions indicating a significant decline in awareness and cultural transmission due to the disruption caused by prolonged conflict.

Additionally, several respondents expressed concern that external promotion of Taraba State's tourism often overlooks the rich cultural heritage of Donga LGA. They emphasized that attractions in Donga unlike the more marketed Mambilla Plateau or Gashaka Gumti Park are deeply rooted in local traditions and therefore vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of insecurity and displacement.

While Donga LGA hosts a variety of notable natural and cultural sites, the farmers–herders conflict has significantly affected both the visibility and the preservation of these attractions. This underscores the urgent need for cultural conservation efforts and conflict resolution mechanisms to safeguard Donga's heritage for future generations.

Table 3: Natural and Cultural Attractions in Donga LGA Recognized by Community Members Prior to the Farmers–Herders Conflict

Name of Attraction	Number of Respondents (N = 500)	%
Purma Festival	210	42.0
Donga River	185	37.0
Ancestral Shrines and Sacred Groves	150	30.0
Traditional Architecture and Clan Compounds	120	24.0
Oral Storytelling and Indigenous Music	110	22.0
Artisan Crafts (e.g., weaving, blacksmithing)	95	19.0
Communal Water Rituals	85	17.0
Scenic Hilltops and Rock Formations	75	15.0
Do not know	60	12.0
Total	500	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2024

The researcher sought to understand the range of cultural heritage impacts mobilized at each of the selected sites in Donga LGA as a result of the persistent farmers–herders conflict. The impacts recorded include the abandonment of traditional architecture, disruption of indigenous festivals and rituals, loss of ancestral landmarks, and the interruption of intergenerational cultural transmission, among others. The findings are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Number of Cultural Heritage Impacts Reported at Affected Sites

Cultural Site	Heritage Pop. (2022)	Questionnaires Allocated (n)	Impact Categories Reported (n)	% of Total Impact Categories
Gayama-Ekah Hilltop	45,000	107	7	17.1
Gankwe Hilltop	35,000	84	6	14.6
Nugwi Hilltop	40,000	96	5	12.2
Ude Abandoned Settlement	20,000	48	8	19.5
Kaki Wargi Hilltop	30,000	72	8	19.5
Nya-Kwala Abandoned Settlement	39,400	93	7	17.1
Total	209,400	500	41	100.0

The distribution of impacts across Donga LGA's six heritage sites (Table 4) reveals a clear pattern of vulnerability driven by both site remoteness and custodianship gaps. Ude Abandoned Settlement and Kaki Wargi Hilltop, each accounting for 19.5% of all reported impacts, emerge as the most affected sites. Their status as abandoned or only sporadically monitored makes them especially susceptible to neglect, vandalism, and the irreversible loss of both built structures and sacred spaces (Adebola and Ibrahim, 2018). Gayama-Ekah and Nya-Kwala hilltops follow closely at 17.1% each, indicating that even sites with lingering community ties suffer significant damage when custodial populations are displaced or security collapses (Bello and Musa, 2020).

Gankwe (14.6%) and Nugwi (12.2%) hilltops though still under some form of local guardianship—also recorded substantial heritage impacts. This underscores that traditional custodianship alone, without formal preservation infrastructure, is insufficient to withstand the pressures of recurrent farmers–herders clashes (Oluwole, 2019). UNESCO has emphasized that armed conflicts not only destroy monuments but also interrupt the living traditions and rituals that animate them, leading to a dual erosion of tangible and intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2022).

In Donga LGA, these dynamics manifest as the abandonment of ancestral compounds, suspension of festivals, and breakdown of intergenerational knowledge transfer—phenomena documented by local informants and reflected in the uneven impact distribution (Field Work, 2024). Similar patterns have been observed in other Nigerian conflict zones, where peripheral sites lacking formal protection bear the brunt of violence and are often the last to receive restoration assistance (Okoli and Orinya, 2021).

These findings highlight the urgent need for integrated, conflict-sensitive conservation strategies. Combining modern security measures (e.g., fencing, surveillance) with strengthened community guardianship and systematic documentation can help arrest further deterioration. Moreover, targeted restoration programs prioritizing the most impacted sites like Ude and Kaki Wargi are essential to revitalize Donga's cultural legacy and ensure its resilience against future conflicts (Adebola and Ibrahim, 2018; Okoli and Orinya, 2021).

The findings from Donga LGA illustrate the profound cultural toll of farmers–herders conflict: from destroyed shrines and suspended festivals to fractured social bonds and knowledge loss. Yet, they also reveal resilient community responses and a rich heritage base that, if properly safeguarded, can underpin both identity restoration and economic revival. Integrating local initiatives with conflict-sensitive conservation frameworks offers a viable

pathway to transform Donga's cultural heritage from a casualty of violence into a cornerstone of peace and sustainable development in Taraba State.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examines the effects of the persistent farmers–herders conflict on the cultural heritage of Donga LGA in Taraba State, Nigeria. The research reveals that the conflict has led to significant disruptions, including the abandonment and degradation of culturally significant sites such as hilltops and abandoned settlements and has hindered the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge and traditional practices. Using purposive and convenience sampling methods, the study gathered primary data through a mixed method with community leaders and cultural custodians. Findings indicate that the erosion of cultural heritage is compounded by displacement, inadequate preservation measures, and limited governmental support. The discussion emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive, multi-stakeholder interventions that combine modern conservation techniques, community engagement, and conflict resolution strategies. The study concludes with recommendations for aggressive promotion of the region's cultural assets, sustained investment in heritage preservation, the establishment of community-based management committees, and capacity-building initiatives to secure the future of Donga LGA's rich cultural legacy. Preserving cultural heritage is all about having comprehensive strategies in place and employing skilled local custodians empowered to respond immediately when crises arise. In an era of rapid globalization and technological advancement, it is imperative that governments at all levels proactively address the insecurity challenges that threaten the cultural legacy of regions like Donga LGA, Taraba State. The on-going farmers–herders conflict fuelled by competition over land and natural resources has not only resulted in the physical degradation of ancestral sites and traditional settlements but also disrupted the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices.

Without a secure and stable environment, efforts to document, restore, and revitalize cultural heritage will be largely ineffective, no matter the level of investment in infrastructure and preservation programs. This research has highlighted significant issues confronting cultural heritage in Donga LGA, underscoring the need for a concerted, multi-stakeholder approach to foster peace, implement robust preservation measures, and promote sustainable cultural revival. It is recommended that local authorities, community leaders, and heritage experts collaborate closely to develop integrated strategies that safeguard both tangible and intangible cultural assets for future generations.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings underscore that the persistence of farmers–herders conflict in Donga LGA has significantly eroded the region's cultural heritage, disrupting the preservation of ancestral sites and traditional practices. In today's interconnected world, communities are increasingly aware of the intrinsic value of their cultural legacy and the need for timely, comprehensive interventions. This necessitates that local government, community leaders, and cultural organizations in Donga LGA adopt proactive strategies to safeguard their cultural heritage. First, local authorities and community stakeholders should prioritize aggressive promotion campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the unique cultural heritage in Donga LGA. By projecting a positive and engaging image of the region's cultural assets, these campaigns can foster community pride and attract interest from donors, investors, and heritage conservation bodies.

Secondly, a sustained and substantial investment in cultural heritage preservation is imperative. Government agencies should invest in infrastructural development and modern conservation technologies, while local communities and private investors focus on restoration, documentation, and security enhancement of culturally significant sites. Such coordinated investments will ensure that cultural heritage is not only preserved but also restored to serve as a robust foundation for community identity and potential cultural tourism. Third, the establishment of community-based cultural heritage management committees is recommended. These committees should facilitate dialogue among farmers, herders, and cultural custodians to mediate conflicts and develop collaborative solutions. By fostering an inclusive platform for conflict resolution and heritage management, these committees can help mitigate the adverse impacts of the on-going conflict on cultural assets.

Finally, capacity-building programs should be implemented to equip local cultural custodians with modern preservation techniques and conflict mitigation strategies. Partnerships with international heritage organizations and targeted training programmes can help transfer best practices, ensuring that local communities are well-prepared to manage and protect their cultural legacy amidst on-going challenges.

A multi-stakeholder approach that combines proactive promotion, strategic investment, community engagement, and capacity building is pivotal to preserving the cultural heritage of Donga LGA. Such comprehensive measures will not only protect the cultural identity but also pave the way for its sustainable development and potential revitalization through cultural tourism.

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