

The Dynamics of Farmers And Herdsmen Conflict and its Implication for Food Security in Nigeria

By

Justin-Ugo, Oluchi

Department of Public Administration

University of Benin

Benin City, Nigeria

Email:oluchi.okocha@uniben.edu

Email:Okochaoluchi89@yahoo.com

&

Unufe, Edono Joseph.

Department of Public Administration

University of Benin

Benin City, Nigeria

Email: joseph.unife@uniben.edu

Abstract

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen has clearly not only affected the North-east, but has metamorphosed to various part of the country . Government on its part has setup various strategies and policies like the Cattle colonies(CC), Rural Grazing Area, (RUGA) to find a possible solution to this conflict but it has been faced with resistance from either the part of the farmers or the herdsmen .The thrust of this paper is on the Effect of Farmers and Herdsmen conflicts and its Implication for Food security in Nigeria. Farmers and Herdsmen conflict in Nigeria has become a matter of urgent attention by Government and Private Sector due to its effect on Human and Capital production. The authors relied on secondary sources of data .The paper took a theoretical perspective from three

(3) theories which includes the frustration-aggression; eco-violence and conflict theories to give the author a scientific approach on why this conflict arises. The study recommends amongst others that Nigeria should learn from its neighbours on how this farmers and herdsmen menace was curbed and at the same time make budgetary provisions for ranch development. Moreover Community policing should be implemented and also, the issue of state policing which involves state control of their security apparatus should be passed into law.

Keywords: Herdsmen, Farmers, Conflicts, Food security

Introduction

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed a number of violent clashes arising from the activities of the herdsmen who move about with their cattle in search of food and water. These herdsmen indisputably represent a significant component of the Nigeria Agricultural economy, especially in Animal Agriculture and so, their contribution to the local food chain and national food security cannot be over emphasized. (Lamidi and Ogunkunle, 2015). As they constitute the major breeders of cattle, the most available and cheap source of animal protein consumed, the Fulani own about 90% of the nation's livestock population which amount to about one-third of agricultural GDP (Eniola, 2010).

Before now, the incidence of farmers and herdsmen clashes was most prevalent in the North-Central region of Nigeria however, the confrontations have spread to other regions of the country. In many areas, herdsmen have clashed with farmers and their host communities due to cattle destruction of crops, indiscriminate bush burning by herdsmen which usually leads to loss of crops and farmer's encroachment on grazing reserves. (Oli, Ibekwe and Nwankwo, 2018; Adeoye, 2017). The mystery

surrounding the real cause of the disputes has been roped in mixed perceptions, while some perceive the dispute as mere farming, water and grazing land dispute; others see it as reprisals in defence of livestock from banditry in farming communities (Eyekpimi, 2016). The conflicts between the herdsmen and farmers have taken a heavy toll on humanity as tens of thousands have been killed and tens of thousands displaced with a resultant food insecurity. Benue State which is one of the hardest hit states has a record of more than 1,878 people killed between 2014 and 2018. From January 2015 to February 2017, more than 62,000 people were displaced from Benue, Kaduna and Plateau States. (Internationsl Crises Group, 2017).

Farmers and herdsmen conflict is a major challenge to food security as the continuous attack on farmlands pose a serious threat to food security. Idowu, (2016) argues that food security is one of the core components of human security; and if one component is affected, it by extension affects the other components. With the increasing population, the time for expansion of agricultural production to feed the growing population is crucial. But the quest to increase food security is threatened by the continuous conflicts between farmers and herdsmen. Agricultural and development experts are in agreement in their predictions that the gains recorded in the agricultural sector especially in the area of food production may begin to reduce due to the effect of farmers and herdsmen conflicts. (Okoli F and Addo, H, 2018). The conflicts between these two sections have demonstrated high possibility of increasing the insecurity and food crisis in Nigeria, particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts occur.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's population has grown from 33 million in 1950 to about 192.3 million today (Olayinka, 2018). This phenomenal increase of the population has put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralists. One of the outcomes of this process has been the blockage of transhumance routes and loss of grazing land to agricultural expansion,

while the increased southward movement of pastoralists has led to increased conflict with local communities. The conflicts primarily involve Fulani pastoralists and local farming communities. As violence between herdsman and farmers has grown and developed into criminality and rural banditry, popular narratives in the form of hate speech have exacerbated the crisis. Herdsman and farmers conflict however reached a disturbing level in 2017 when about 1,000 people were killed in more than 50 clashes. (Olayinka, 2018). A 2017 Global Terrorism index report stated that there were about 67 clashes between farmers and Fulani Herdsman and about 716 clashes between 2012 and 2018 and these clashes have a resultant effect on the food security of the country due to the locality these conflicts occur.

The Nigerian state has a relatively weak rural presence and has neglected the agrarian sector since the 1970s, when oil revenues began to dominate the economy. There have been few improvements in agricultural productivity and livestock production as a result of the dependence on oil revenues, which have not been reinvested in productive economic activities. State response in the context of the lingering conflicts between farmers and pastoralists has been both ad hoc and reactive, with no concrete and sustainable strategies for conflict management and peace building beyond the deployment of security or establishment of commissions of inquiries.

As violence between herdsman and farmers has grown and developed into criminality and rural banditry, popular narratives, creating meaning, context and (mis) understandings have been emerging. The narratives emerging on rural banditry in the media and in popular discourse are becoming part of the drivers for expanding conflicts in the country. The protagonists in this saga are often presented as being nomadic Fulani cattle herders, who are mostly Muslims, and sedentary farmer communities of several other ethnic extractions, who are often, but not always non-

Muslims. These two distinct groups are usually depicted as perpetrators and victims, respectively. Perspectives of the social, religious and ethnic characteristics of these rural communities are framed into expansive essentialist discourses that actively breed and sustain suspicion and distrust.

These clashes threaten the peace of the country and, regardless of the tremendous amount of resources budgeted to maintain security by the government of Nigeria, it appears that the farmers and herdsman clashes have contributed to food shortage, damage to farmlands, crops and crop yields and have disrupted the peaceful co-existence between tribes. The effects of these clashes between farmers and herdsman have led to farmer's reluctance to go back to farming on their farms. Nigeria urgently needs to find pathways to get out of the crisis and one approach may be the development of grazing reserves for pastoralists. It is on these problems and how to find a solution that this research is predicated.

Conceptual Discourse

Food Security

Food is one of the basic needs of man, man is incomplete without food. Balogun (2017) states that food has a number of values which further prove its importance to man and they include: biological, social, economic and political values of food to man. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Bureau for Africa (1986), defined food security as a situation when everyone at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient food to meet his or her needs for a productive and healthy life. Food security is of course highly dependent on agricultural production, food imports and donations, resource allocation and so on. (Eme, Onyinshi, Uche and Uche, 2014).

According to World Bank (2001), food security is of three folds, which include food availability, food accessibility and food affordability. Food security also means physical and economic access to adequate food. Food

security as a concept is broad and cuts across many dimensions. NEPAD (2005) states that food security requires an available and reliable food supply at all times, food can however be affected by climate, disasters, conflict of which the farmers and herdsman clashes fall into population growth and so on. The opposite of food security is food insecurity and it can be defined as a situation when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe food for normal growth and development which can be caused by the unavailability of food, inadequate purchasing power and so on. (Idowu, 2016).

In the words of Balogun (2017), food insecurity is a condition when people lack sustainable physical or economic access to enough safe and socially acceptable food for a healthy, productive life; food security often times can be chronic, seasonal or transitory and usually the root causes of food insecurity include war, civil conflict and corruption.

Farmers

Farmers usually are people who cultivate the land and breed livestock for food and so there are several types of farmers; it is important to note that both farmers and herdsman practice farming and there is a link between farming and herding as they are both branches in agriculture. (Idowu, 2016)

Herdsman

Herdsman are nomadic or semi-nomadic group of people who specialize in raising domestic livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats, rams and so on. They engage in migration, usually in search of abundant grass and water for their cattle. The herdsman are usually Fulani found in the Sahel and semi-arid parts of West Africa but due to climate changes, they migrate further south to the savannah and tropical forest of West Africa. Herdsman are found in several countries of Africa such as Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Cameroon and Benin. In Nigeria, the cattle from these herdsman provide the bulk of the beef consumption (Iro, 1994).

Theoretical Orientation

The farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria since the time of independence has given birth to vacuum of insecurity and low crop cultivation and this vacuum has created food shortage in various part of the country where this conflict emanated. The attack by herdsmen has forced farmers to abandon their fertile farmlands, desert their communities there by allowing famers to take refuge in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps . This study has adopted frustration-aggression; eco-violence and conflict theories to give us a scientific approach on why this conflict arises more frequently in less develop countries like Nigeria.

Frustration-Aggression Theory

This theory was originally adopted by Dollard and Miller (1939) but later expanciated by Berkowitz in 1969. The theory asserts that aggression is an outcome or result of obstructing or frustrating a person's efforts towards a certain goal (Dollard, 1939; as cited in Myers, 2007). The theory further denotes that frustration caused by interference in goal-directed activity produces a 'readiness' for aggression which if 'triggered' can result in aggressive response.

Rationis in (2014) asserts that the triggering element that propels aggression is most times insignificant and this includes; indecent behaviour or action, provocation as a result of behaviour or criticism which can sometimes be overlooked. Though Rationis tried to identify these gestures but neglected the human behaviour as a result of prolonged triggering elements as stipulated .But to the frustrated individual who is already waiting for an opportunity to show his frustration it may provoke aggressive response or reprisal. In application to this study, the goal or aim of every farmer during planting season is to have bountiful harvest, sell the farm produce and make profits. On the other hand, the herdsmen would always want to have well fed and healthy cattle and be able to make profits as well.

When any of these expectations was not realizable, either by the herd (cattle) eating up and destroying the farmers' crops or that the farmer

encroached on grazing reserves or use water reserved for cattle to irrigate their farms, aggression would be triggered. Furthermore, a clear readiness for aggression could be likened to the Fulanis' justification on why they attacked ten Agatu communities of Benue State on February 10, 2016 and massacred hundreds of persons. According to the leader of the Gan Allah Fulanis Association, the conflict was a reprisal attack against the killing of their prominent son by the people of Agatu who stole his cattle in April 2013 (Mayah, Tukur & Adebayo, 2016). This case shows that the act of frustration as suggested by Adebayo denotes that destruction of crops by herdsmen and killing of cattle's by farmers predated the aggression from both parties.

Eco-Violence Theory

The world Eco is derived from the world 'Environment' which simply denotes atmospheric changes which can be caused by season or climate. The theory examines the inter-linkage between environmental changes and possible conflict situation. The eco-violence theory derives its epistemological foundation from the political ecology perspective (Okoli and Atelhe 2014). The basic assumption of the theory according to Homer-Dixon (1999:26) is that:

Decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resource, population growth, and resource access acts singly or in various combinations to increase in scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests, and fish. This can reduce economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts.

The relevance of the theory therefore lies with the fact that the manifestation of militant posture of the Fulani pastoralists should be understood with

reference to their individual and collective world views vis-à-vis group subsistence and survival; that has a lot to do with pastoral farming. In effect, any threat to his herd probably due to decrease in renewable resources amounts to a threat, not only to his survival but also to his common destiny. This is in consonance with the following citation. In the words of Abbas, (2009).

Social and economic factors continue to provoke violent conflicts among the Fulani pastoralists and farmers. The intensity and variations of the conflicts largely depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the herdsmen graze

The implication of the preceding citation is that a typical Fulani-Pastoralist would care less to life if the survival and sustenance of his herd come under serious threats. This explains the magnitude of aggression and vindictive violence that the Fulani pastoralists often manifest in their disputes with settled farming communities.

Conflict Theory

The concept Conflict simply explains an argument or struggle between two elements. The lead proponent of this theory is Karl Marx (1818-1883). He was a victim of marginalization due to his revolutionary ideas and the misery of his alienation was seen through his two radical most famous works: *The Capital and Communist Manifesto* (Charles, 2005). Marx's conflict ideology is "an analysis of inequality under capitalism and how to change it through confrontation" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014:43). They argued that in capitalism, there is an inherent conflict of interests between two opposing classes. Rex in Kirby, Kidd, Koubel, Barter, Hope, Kirton, Madry, Manning and Triggs (1997:32) submits that "the most basic cause of the conflict between two groups is usually over access to material resources". However, the basic tenet of the theory is that two opposing groups in the society always struggle for limited or scarce resources. Each

group strives to protect their interest in resource allocation due to its scarce nature and this has over time resulted in conflict (Idowu, 2017).

Scarcity of resources in farmers/herdsmen clashes can be associated with; farm lands, crops, grass/pasture, fresh water which is geographically situated in various part of Nigeria and this is the determinant of survival by both parties. Conflict, however, would not only occur between herders and farmers as both strive in the pursuit of these resources either by intruding, exploiting or destroying a secured region for the purpose of survival. Moreover, herders migration in search of good pastures to feed their cattle's leaving their families behind can sometimes engage in various unethical activities which includes rape, robbery and invasion into secured farm settlement and they are most times faced with confrontation by other peaceful settlers in migrated areas and this can lead to conflict .Also from the perspective of farmers, most of them cultivate crops in reserved areas which can also lead to conflict.

The Dynamics of Farmers and Herdsmen Clashes

There is no gain saying that there have been violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen in several states in Nigeria. The clashes are occasioned by the destruction of farmlands by the cattle of the herdsmen. The clashes arise as cattle graze on the farms of farmers and farmers in retaliation attack the cows of the herdsmen, of course the herdsmen go on a reprisal attack on the farmers and this attack and reprisal attacks by farmers and herdsmen lead to great destruction of lives and properties (Ajibo, Onuoha, Obi-Keguna and Okafor&Olawale, 2018).

According to Ofem and Bassey (2014), the clashes between these two groups have led to great destruction of crops, contamination of streams by the cattle, indiscriminate bush burning and over grazing of fallow land hence all of these effects generally benefit no one.

Naturally, herdsmen are migrants who leave their homes in search of greener pastures for their cattle which in most cases is caused by the

absence of good land for their cattle to feed on. (Imo, 2017). These herdsmen used to embark on migrations seasonally from the north to the south but this movement has now become an all season's affair, a situation that has not been appreciated by farmers.

Gbaradi (2018) recorded that herdsmen killed about 3,780 Nigerians in various clashes across the country, this number excluding the injured, displaced, in the reprisal attacks, while farmers have killed scores of cattle for the destruction of their farms and farm produce by those cattle, Gbaradi (2018) further gave an example with the case of Benue state where herdsmen invaded 2 villages in Agatu Local Government Area and killed 8 villagers allegedly in retaliation for killing 112 cows.

Causes of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflicts in Nigeria

The seasonal movements of herdsmen have become more worrisome with the new pattern of carrying sophisticated weapons that are used to terrorize farmers. However, the following reasons can be adduced from Imo (2017) for the continued conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria.

1. Variation in Atmospheric Condition:

The desertification of the Traditional abode of the herdsmen can be seen as one of the factors for the continued conflicts as herdsmen migrate southwards where there is availability of grassland for the cows to feast on; they often intrude into farmlands that have been cultivated by settled farmers. (Olietal, 2018). Climate change and desertification in the North has made southern region more of grazing areas.

2. Trespassing on private properties by herdsmen:

The intentional grazing on crops is one of the most dominant causes of conflict between farmers and herdsmen. This deliberate destruction of crops has become a threat to national food security. The farmers have become increasingly apprehensive over the attitude of the herdsmen who unleash their cattle to destroy their crops. (Imo, 2017). The destruction of

reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructures by herdsmen also propels clashes between farmers and herdsmen.

3. Shortage of Water:

This is a resource issue facing the world today that has been under discussed. As a result of climate change, water scarcity has increased; as water is essential for agriculture, access to water has become more competitive and has led to a number of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen (Oli, Ibekwe and Nwankwo, 2018).

4 .Bad Government:

The issue of government has been a problem in the quest for eradicating these conflicts encountered by Farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria .The crises have not been given adequate attention and most time politicized. The approach of government in eradicating this menace has been stamped there by causing distrust by citizens of the country to take laws into their own hands. Moreorless, the security of the country lies in the hands of the government and the government has failed to safeguard the lives and properties of her citizens.

5. Poor Security and Justice System.

Our Nigeria justice system has been a mirage in administering justice ,where adequate measure initiated by government to punish suspects of Fulani herdsmen involved in crime are infiltrated by political actors. This has been changing but more work needs to be done in this areas. If these people are severely punished, it will serve as a deterrent to killers or will be killers to know that they will be brought to justice (Nwosu, 2017).

Other Causes of Conflicts

1. Burning of rangelands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herdsmen.

2. Increasing rate of cattle theft, which is often accompanied by violence.

3. Antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict

Situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources.

Impact of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict on Food Security

Aside the loss of lives and properties, farmers and herdsmen conflict has over the years affected the peaceful co-existence of citizens within the Nigeria territories. In the same vain the agricultural land mass has also been threatened hereby making a vast expanse of arable lands are left uncultivated due to the insecurity of the farmers. In the developing country of Nigeria, the Agricultural sector plays strategic role in economic development; making significant contributions to economic prosperity and providing basic raw materials for industries and household consumption. The sector employs approximately two-third of the total labour force and contributes over 40% of the GDP. It is also estimated that:

About 7.1 million Nigerian Citizens are married with poverty as half of those populations barely eat three (3) meals in a day. And this has resulted to the level of insecurity in Nigeria due to frequent crisis by farmers and herdsmen. When Nigerian farmers cannot plant and harvest crops peacefully, the price of commodities in the markets will greatly increase and encourage importation to supply the shortages which will weaken the agricultural sector (Bakare, 2015).

The recurring issue of clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in some parts of Nigeria remains one of the major threats to food security in the country. The recent abduction of former Minister of Finance, Chief Olu Falae, purportedly by Fulani herdsmen with whom he was reported to have been having squabbles over farm issue, has once again brought to the fore concerns over constant hostility between Fulani herdsmen and farmers

across the country. Sadly, this perennial feud could have serious implication for food security in the country. Just recently, an alarm was raised on how the encroachment of farmlands by herds of cattle will, in no small measure, affect the output of crops coming from the north; the region relied mainly upon for the provision of foodstuffs and fruits in the country. In Jigawa State alone, more than 70 cases of conflicts have been recorded since the beginning of the 2015 farming season. These cases bordered on encroachment into farms by cattle and farmers' misuse of cattle routes. The situation is not different in Nasarawa and Benue States, the food baskets of the nation as Fulani herdsmen persistently engage farmers in feuds that often result in serious casualties on both sides. While farmers accuse the herdsmen of farm land encroachment, the latter blame the farmers and members of their communities for rustling of their cattle (Bakare, 2015). Having in mind how security can be a challenge in Nigeria, it will be an error not including environmental degradation in form of soil erosion and overgrazing amongst other factors that have necessitated nomadic migration to greener lands, lastly erosion to change in climate can cause a farmer moving to other areas already occupied by pastoral farmers which can lead to conflict and this has affected harvest there by making Nigeria lose \$14 billion dollars from agricultural export annually (Iro, 1994).

Conclusion

The conflict and clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have so far claimed thousands of lives in Nigeria from 2012 to 2019 (Gbaradi, 2018). The continual effect of this conflict is problematic as it has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of properties and displacement of members of various communities hereby making farmers avoid their farm lands or harvest and in the long run cause shortage of food in Nigeria; it has also affected the Nigerian economy adversely. The destruction of farm produce and killing of cows have not fared well with the Nigerian economy, psychological wellbeing of victims' relatives and survived victims of the attacks have been

distorted adversely (International Crises Group, 2017, Gambari, et al, 2018, Adisa and Adekunle, 2012 & Bello, 2013).

To guarantee security of life and property (of both herdsmen and farmers) for a sustained peace and development, the people are being mobilized to be security conscious to provide intelligence report to the police to forestall attacks by herdsmen and their mercenaries for our peaceful development and a united Nigeria.

Recommendations

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria asserts that a citizen of a particular country has every right to own his property, to ensure development of his or her regions, thereby promoting national peace and development in the unification of its territories. On this note the following recommendations are made.

- (i) The issue of Gazing by Nomadic Farmers on private properties should be backed with compensation to avoid disputes or conflicts between land owners and nomadic farmers.
- (ii) Government on its path should ensure proper policies guiding both farmers and herdsmen are implemented to avoid giving land owners a feeling of oppression, such as —Cattle colonies, Rural Grazing Area, (*RUGA*), anti open grazing in policies and laws.
- (iii) Nigeria should learn from its neighbours on how this menace was curbed and at the same time making budgetary provisions for ranch development.
- (iv) The issue of hate speech which can lead to frustration by both herdsmen and farmers should be totally eradicated by punishing those accused of it to discourage aggression.

- (v) The approach of government in tackling violence should be total disarmament and not one sided, by not giving a set of the clashes more favour which may lead to distrust.
- (vi) Community policing should be implemented and also, the issue of state policing which involves state control of their security apparatus should be passed into law.
- (vii) Finally, government should educate farmers and herdsman on the negative effect of crises.

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