

THE MENACE OF HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATION ON SUSTAINABLE SECURITY IN POST MILITARY ERA IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading nationwide, threatening the country's sustainable security. This research paper will examine the menace of herder-farmer conflict and its implication on sustainable security in Nigeria. The conflict has caused a lot of losses to Nigeria and to her security development. This study unveils the secrets behind such conflicts and gives ideas on the way to prevent and solve such in the future. Using qualitative research method and secondary data that are derived from journals, articles, newspaper and other important commentaries on contemporary herder-farmer conflict and sustainable security in Nigeria. The primary driver of the conflict can be lack of political will on the managers of Nigerian security to professionalize security (procedures, processes and qualification of movement, reposition, possession,



and use of heavy and light weapons. management of and response to intelligence report; procedures of reprimanding offenders to the maintenance of security of lives and properties etc.) the result of the primary driver is the secondary driver destruction of farmlands. The security effects of the conflicts result to food insecurity, loss of lives and properties and loss of products in the storage, and poor development. This work suggests that to prevent herders-farmers clash, the government must professionalize and decentralize security and as well enhance conflict resolution mechanisms.

Key words: Herder-Farmer, Conflict, Sustainable Security, Conflict Resolution, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Conflict between farmers and nomadic cattle herders is a common feature of economic livelihood in west Africa.¹ In the period before the beginning of 20th century; such problems were mainly restricted to the savanna belts of West Africa. Cattle rearing where mainly prevalent in these belts: Guinea, Sudan and Sahel Savanna where crop production was carried out according to short raining season and small scale. Meanwhile, the herdsmen have the opportunity to develop the opportunity to provide their cattle the foliage of grasses that will enrich their livestock feed, as a time went on, and with the introduction of irrigation practice in the Savanna belt of Nigeria, and during dry season when pasture grassland and unavailable to cattle herders, the herds men move down site raining season were rain is longer available and soil retain moisture for long, in search of pasture and water – a movement called transhumance.

Although Nigeria majorly known for its oil and gas production, agriculture employs about 70 per cent of its labour force.² Small farm-holders in the country's centre and south produce most of the country's tuber and vegetable crops while farmers in the north raise most of its grains and pastoralist



engaged in livestock rearing.³ Over 90 per cent of pastoralists reportedly are Fulani, a large ethnic group straddling several West and Central African countries. Pastoralists own approximately 90 per cent of the national herd, estimated at 19.5 million cattle, about 975,000 donkeys, 28,000 camels, 72.5 million goats and 41.3 million sheep.⁴ Livestock represents between 20 and 30 per cent of total agricultural production and about 6 to 8 per cent of overall Gross Domestic Production (GDP).⁵ About 30 per cent of Nigeria's live animals slaughtered in Nigeria are brought in by pastoralists from other countries.⁶

Between 2010 and 2015, Nigeria lost 6,500 citizens and 62,000 others were displaced from their homelands in 850 recorded violent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the Middle Belt region of the country, and these deaths were more than what was reported.⁷ The farmer-herder conflict has arguably become one of the greatest threat to Nigeria's peace and security. It is exacting an ever-deadlier toll and, with the issue of violent that occur in some part of the country during the 2019 election, could destabilize the country if the government and other actors fail to contain it. Without measures ranging from immediate dialogue between affected communities to long-term livestock sector reform, the conflict risks escalating. President Buhari and the federal government must redouble efforts to check the violence, the drift of many young men toward ethnic militancy, the proliferation of assault weapons and the entrenchment of impunity.⁸ It is clear how central the cattle economy is to a Fulani herder and to what extent he can go to protect his livelihood. According to Alhaji Muhammadu Kirowathe chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association noted that:

For a Fulani man, for you to seize his cows he prefers to engaged in battle and does not have any documents to tender to federal or state government in protecting his cattle. While does not have any document to tender to state or local government for employment, making him to ensure his cows are his livelihood. He prefers to



die and noting that he rather die than his cow to be taken away.

To put things in perspective, in the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 Nigerians have died in violence involving herders and farmers. The farmer-herder conflict has become one of Nigeria's gravest security challenges, now claiming far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency.⁷ It has displaced hundreds of thousands and sharpened ethnic, regional and religious divides. It threatens and undermines national unity, stability and development. Several factors have contributed to this decades-long conflict and some of these are deforestation or environmental degradation in the far north, encroachment the Sahel region of the north by foreign militia, poor response on the part of the government to distress calls and failure to punish past perpetrators; and new state laws banning open grazing in Benue and Taraba States.

In Benue state, tension rose sharply after 1 November 2017, when a state government law against open grazing – thus prohibiting herders' longstanding practice of letting their livestock forage unrestrained – took effect. From 1 to 7 January, armed men widely believed to be herders angered by the law raided six farming villages across Logo and Guma local government areas, killing over 80 people.⁹ The attacks have continued with over 300 more killed in the state.¹⁰ Logo and Guma, largely populated by farmers of the Tiv ethnic group, suffered the highest death toll. As these areas abut Nasarawa and Taraba states, locals say attackers usually strike across the boundaries and retreat.¹¹ Nasarawa state has also suffered an increase in violence involving both herders and farmer militias. From January to June 2018, over 260 people were killed in several incidents, mostly in the southern zone covering Doma, Awe, Obi and Keana local government areas.¹² Most of these killings followed the influx of herders driven there by the Benue state anti-grazing law as reported from national dailies.¹³ North-eastern Adamawa state has seen recurrent clashes between Fulani herders and farmers from the Bachama ethnic group.¹⁴ Tensions rose sharply after 20 November 2017, when



Bachama youth militias attacked three Fulani herders' settlements – Shaforon, Kikem and Kodemti – in Numan local government area, killing at least 55 people, including 48 children.¹⁵ That incident sparked Fulani reprisals in five Bachama villages in nearby Demsa local government area in the first week of December.¹⁶ This can be accredited to the Bachama leaders allegedly that over 100 people were killed, some allegedly by two Nigerian Air Force aircraft – an Alpha Jet and an EC135 attack helicopter – deployed to disperse Fulani fighters who were advancing upon Numan town. The air force rejected the allegation, insisting its mission was to fire “warning shots” at the “hideouts of miscreants”. It insisted its intervention caused no casualties and stopped the Fulani attackers from destroying Numan town.¹⁷ Vigorous police and military interventions in Adamawa stopped further major attacks, but killings continued on a smaller scale.¹⁸ This research paper will examine the causes of the herders-farmers conflict and its implications on sustainable security in Post Military Era in Nigeria. It is based on critical interrogation on contemporary issues why there are still upsurge of violence between herders-farmers relations.

CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

Herders-Farmers Conflict and Sustainable Security

The movement of herdsmen and subsequent clashes with farmers and host communities in recent times has heightened insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central region and by extension in other parts of the country. The driving force of the clashes is the competition for available resources, especially grazing land. Based on observation, that the government has abandoned the grazing reserve system created by the Northern region government in 1965, then, the government created over 417 grazing reserves in the north.¹⁹ Under the grazing reserve system, government provided space, water and vaccinations for the livestock while the herdsmen paid taxes to the government in return. However, the discovery of oil and subsequent exploration and export made



Nigeria an oil economy, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, the grazing reserve system was abandoned due to the neglect of the agricultural sector as the mainstay of the country's economy.

Consequently, grazing reserves which were under a neglected agricultural sector could not be sustained. It received little or no attention from subsequent administrations. As a fall-back, herdsmen to their traditional and seasonal grazing routes which had been interrupted or interfered with by industrialization, urbanisation, demographic and natural factors. This led to clashes and conflict with herders, farmers and host communities. These conflicts have been on the increase in recent times and constitute one of the major threats to Nigeria's national security.

To address these challenges, the Federal government in June 2015 constituted a Strategic Action Committee to look into the issue and make recommendations that would help government address the problem. A major stakeholder in this effort, the umbrella body cattle breeders, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), agreed that the effect of climate change and desertification was a major causal factor leading to trans-human movement from North to the South annually. Since climate change and other associated factors are beyond what farmers or herders could address, there is need for concerted efforts by the government, private sector, regional bodies and the international community at large to come together to address these challenges.

Incompatibility breeds conflict because it is a psychological state in which people cannot get along with one another in a community. Incompatibility of the herdsmen and farmers in the North-Central and North East states cut across economic, cultural and linguistic divides – these are some of the critical indicators of the persistent communal conflicts between these two distinct nationalities. In Benue State where the communal conflict is increasingly recurring, vast majority of the farmers are Tiv, Idoma, Agatu and Igede people who speak languages totally different from Fulfulde, this implies that there is little or no socio-cultural and linguistic relations between the two opposing parties. This is why



every encounter between the herdsmen and farmers subsequently leads to bloodshed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Conflict Theory

The theory sees social life as a competition and focuses on the distribution of resources and power which are not evenly endowed by nature. Proponents of the theory view society as a gathering of people of diverse needs and interests with limited resources to meet their needs. This creates inequality that generates social conflict and social change. Karl Marx is considered the foremost proponent of this theory. He advanced that purports that due to society's never-ending competition for finite resources, it will always be in a state of conflict. The implication of this theory is that those in possession of wealth and resources will protect and hoard those resources, while those without will do whatever they can to obtain them.

Social conflict theory basically looks at struggles for power and control in society as a major causal factor of conflict. Conflict occurs when two or more actors oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social powers in an effort to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them. The quest for dominance and power becomes the currency rather than consensus. Based on this premise, governments at local, state and federal levels have not been able to address the contending issues between herdsmen and farmers or assist them in reaching some consensus. Although, the establishment of the Alamajiri school by Jonathan administration was a good development to Cush the issue of conflict in the country.

Drivers of Herder-Farmer Conflict in Post-Military Era in Nigeria

Climate Change: Climate is a critical factor in the activities of herdsmen and farmers. The changing climatic condition, generally referred to as global warming, is no doubt taking a toll on the



survival of herdsmen and farmers business. The desert encroachment from the Sahara towards the Sahel region and other associated climatic conditions have continued to affect the livelihood of herdsmen as they push further south in search of available space, pitching them against farmers and host communities. This global phenomenon is currently affecting many parts of the world with attendant consequences – including the herdsmen-farmer conflict.

Destruction of Farming/ Lack of Farming Space: Constant urbanisation and demographic shifts in the present day world has increased the tendency and likelihood of farmers to move further afield for farming activities. At independence in 1960, the Nigerian population stood at about 35 million people.²⁰ However, 58 years later, it has leaped to over 180 million people and the growth is expected to persist in the near future.²¹ Population increase of this magnitude also means a geometric increase in the demand for food products as a basic human need. This also implies an increase in the quest for farming space for farmers. Conversely, industrialisation and urbanisation have continued to claim all available land, leaving little or nothing for farmers' survival. The continued movement of herdsmen southwards in search of pasture for their animals has pitched them against farmers, eventually leading to conflict and destruction. For example, farming along the Benue River accounts for over 20 000 tons of grain annually.²² This same area is also fertile ground for herdsmen to feed their cattle. Thus, farmlands within the river bank areas are the most affected by the movement of the herdsmen – resulting in a number of clashes.

Lack of Political Will: The government at all levels has demonstrated near absence of needed political will to proffer lasting solutions to the conflicting claims of different actors in the ongoing conflict between the herdsmen and farmers. Political leaders need to enhance the law and invoke appropriate legislations to be backed by action that would define rules and limits for parties involved in the conflict. At the regional level, the



Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a Protocol on Trans-human Movement, though the framework is yet to be fully implemented at national levels. Insufficient political will remains a hindering factor among member state and it is important for political will to implement this protocol and other frameworks remains an enabler to the conflict. The Federal government, in the past, has made efforts to regulate and control pastoral activities, but it appears that adequate political will is needed to enforce laws. This perception is likely due to the fact that the President is Fulani, the same ethnic group that dominates the cattle business. Citizens, especially from the most affected states expected the federal government to deal with the herdsman-farmer conflicts in all parts of the state with the same vigour and determination it showed in similar internal security issues in other parts of the country.²³

Political and ethno-religious conflagrations: These have severally drawn the country to the brink of collapsing. It has engendered huge human death, internal displacements and refugee crisis, loss of investments, strained inter-communal relations, threatened internal security and societal balance. There is the high level of inter-ethnic and inter-religious vendetta in the country, to the point that it seems that Nigeria is now exhibiting the symptom of a collapsing state, whose members are perpetually at war with one another.²⁴ Several efforts such as deployment of huge security operatives, peaceful dialogue amongst groups and setting up of probe panels have been made to manage the recurring communal conflict have been embarked upon by the Nigeria government to solve the Herders-Farmers conflict in the country. Also, as a long-term solution, the government has unveiled a National Livestock Transformation Plan (2018-2027) with a view to creating cattle colonies or ranches for the herdsman. This signals greater commitment on the part of the government, but they are yet to be implemented and the violence still continues.²⁵



However, the roots of the conflict lie in climate-induced degradation of pasture and increasing violence in the country's far north, which have forced herders to migrate towards south; the expansion of farms and settlements have also swallowed up grazing reserves and blocked traditional migration routes; and the damage to farmers' crops wrought by herders' indiscriminate grazing. But three immediate factors explain the 2018- 2019 escalation.

Ethnic militias bearing illegally acquired weapons, such as those of the Bachama and Fulani clans in Adamawa State. Second is the failure of the federal government to deploy effective preventive action and foster friendly social relations between herders and farmers communities in the country. Third is the introduction in November 2017 of anti-grazing laws vehemently opposed by herders in Benue and Taraba States, and the resultant exodus of herders and cattle, largely into neighbouring Nasarawa and Adamawa States, thereby sparking clashes with farmers in those states?

Impact of Herders-Farmer Conflict on Sustainable Security in Post-Military Era in Nigeria

Conflict is an integral part of human existence and social relations because it is inevitable in any social gathering, community, society and state at large.²⁶The inevitability of this phenomenon, however, necessitated its interpretation and definition by different scholars. These definitions describe conflict as an opposition, Hellriegel and Slocum posited that conflict is an opposition arising from disagreement about goals, thoughts, or emotions with or among individuals, teams, departments, or organizations.²⁷ Conflict arises when the behaviour by a person or group is intended to hinder the attainment of goals by another person or group.²⁸ The following are the impacts of herders-farmer conflict in Nigeria:

Loss of lives and destruction of Properties: A lot of killings by the nomads took place as a result of the conflicts and this led to the reprisal killings of nomads by the host communities, the herds



of cattle belonging to the nomads were also killed. Also some of the victims (young and old) were badly injured and others were maimed. This has reduced some women farmers to the status of widows. All these have drastically reduced agricultural labour force in the area. In the process there were reported cases of proliferation of small arms and ammunitions. This was due to the fact that host farming communities and headsmen saw other as archenemies and this inimical to the spirit of integration of Nigerian tribes or ethnic groups and peaceful co-existence.

Displacement of farmers: There were reports of displaced farmers and herdsmen alike. In the host communities, Nomadic herdsmen relocate as a result of conflict. Host farmers especially women farmers who remain behind stopped farming in their distant for attack by the nomads in the bush. Such displaced farmers have become a source of liability to other farmers they have to beg for food for themselves and their families. This has trickled down to the vicious cycle of poverty in such communities. The effects of the violence extended to non-farming activities as the hostile environment made it difficult for farmers to conduct business transactions. For example, small business owners reported losing both their capital and investment to the conflict.

Food Insecurity: Reduction in output and income of crop farmers as a result of destruction of crops by cattle and indiscriminate bush burning. A good number of farmers lost part or the whole of their crops. This spelt reduced yield which translated into low income on the part of the farmers who take farming as major occupation. This tends to negatively affect their savings, credit repayment ability, food security and economic welfare of urban dwellers that depend on these farmers for food supply. This is very discouraging to the farmers and rural/agricultural development.²⁹



CONCLUSION

The herder-farmer conflict has become more significant in and thorns on sustainable security in Nigeria. Although the government had in the past taken some measures to address this phenomenon, the increasing causes ranging from desertification and the effects of climate change have further increased the drive for the herdsmen to move further south in search of grazing land and pasture for their livestock. These southward migrations always set them against farmers and the host community whose crops are regularly invaded and destroyed by the cattle during this seasonal migration. The result of this is increased conflict, death, displacement and the total destruction of properties. However, because the phenomenon is a national security issue, there is a need for a concerted effort at state, national, regional and international levels to address the challenges, especially since there is no specific legislation that is dedicated to addressing the peculiar needs of herders and farmers in the country.

RECOMMENDATION

The Federal government of Nigeria should deploy a Joint Task Force comprising military, police, paramilitary and civil institutions to all the affected states as an immediate response to the conflict. This will help restore law and order and build confidence of the general populace in the ability of the government to respond to threats.

There is need to encourage state and community policing leveraging on the already existing vigilante system in most states. State and Community policing will help in intelligence gathering about the conflict while civil police would respond to such threats. This will help address the challenges of waiting for the federal government to deploy security to states when there is conflict.

The Federal government should revisit the 1965 Northern Region Government's Grazing Reserve System and remodel it to deal with contemporary threats. The grazing reserves and livestock routes have also been encroached by farmers and the



activities of urban developers. Also Federal government should vigorously pursue a holistic campaign that will seek the support of all actors, including herdsmen, farmers, state and local governments, to accept the idea of modern ranching as an alternative to traditional migration of herders which causes friction and other associated threats.

Interventions to deal with the conflict must target alternative livelihood sources and deal with the factors that caused the conflict; a victim compensation fund may also be created to attend to the needs of victims. To avoid food insecurity, government must depoliticize the response to the conflict and provide adequate and timely intervention to prevent more violence.



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