



Farmers/herders conflict and the challenges on national security, population growth and development: The Benue state experience

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Abstract

One of the most environmental issues confronting the Nigerian landscape is conflict between herdsmen and farmers. The competition between these two agricultural land user-groups, however, has often times turned into serious concealed and unconcealed manifestation of hostilities and social friction in many parts of Nigeria. The conflicts have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized, with reverberating repercussions nationwide. This paper describes the challenges of Fulani herdsmen and farmers in the incessant resource conflicts and how it affects livelihood, security of those involved, population growth and general development for the area. The paper adopts the qualitative research method and employs both primary and secondary sources. Primary source will be used to obtain data through the use of oral interviews, while secondary source relies on existing literature on the topic from books, journals, magazines and the internet. The historical method was used to trace the history of these conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Benue State. Descriptive methods were employed to describe the factors responsible for the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers and their effects in Benue State, while the analytic method is used to emphasize the complementary role of the Church in addressing insecurity. The study concluded that there is the need to identify the causes, repercussions and proffered resolution of the critical issues that are at the roots of these conflicts.

Keywords: conflicts, farmers, herdsmen

1. Introduction

In recent times, there are frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in most parts of Nigeria including Benue State which has resulted in the destruction of lives and farmlands and has become a major threat to security, food production, population expansion and general development. This constant clashes by farmers and herdsmen has adversely affected agricultural production which requires an enabling environment to reach its maximum potential. This is because of the fact that for any meaningful development to be made in agriculture, among other things, demands a peaceful co-habitation of producer communities. It is only through cooperation that local communities could implement sustainable common pool of resource conservation and management strategies. In addition, stable and harmonious communities are only the ones that are able to be resilient and creative to respond to environmental stresses and sustain their livelihoods rather than those, which are frustrated by the circumstances in their localities. However, an important but somewhat overlooked challenge facing agriculture and rural development in Nigeria is the problem associated with farmer-pastoralist conflicts for arable land. Increasing frustration and impoverishment of farmers occasioned by perennial and extensive farm plot destruction and the ensuing bitter conflicts are eroding the gains of agricultural and rural development interventions. This becomes a problem for extension because the ultimate objective of extension to enhance the living condition of rural households is being threatened (Adekunle et. al. 60). In Benue State, there are ongoing clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in most farming communities which

has made farming that was once considered their cultural heritage and identity, becoming no longer business as usual. According to Eme *et al.*, These conflicts have adversely affected farming activities and other related businesses. This has resulted in a drastic reduction in farm outputs, a development that has heightened the fear of hunger as already most farmers in the State have abandoned farms for fear of being attacked by the herdsmen (qtd. in Apenda 188). For the predominantly farming communities in Benue and other border communities of Nasarawa and Taraba states, farming is no longer business as usual as several farmers have been displaced and dispossessed of their farms by armed men believed to be Fulani herdsmen (188). The increase in farmer/herdsmen conflicts resulting from resource degradation and scarcity in recent times has become a source of concern to everyone. This is due to the negative socio-economic consequences of the conflicts. Although there is no clear consensus on which group experiences greater hardships, the plight of arable crop farmers, who constitute the bulk of Benue agricultural production population, continues to attract attention. The development of farmer/herdsmen conflicts have become persistent in Benue States. For instance, nine out of the 23 local governments in Benue state, namely Guma, Gwer-West, Agatu, Logo, Kwande, Ukum, Tarka and the Northern part of Makurdi are mostly affected by the rampaging herdsmen have tale of woes to tell. The effects of the sustained Fulani war in the affected localities have led to farmers' reluctance to go back to their farms even as the current farming season is far gone. For examples, the able bodied young men did not have interest in Agriculture but

prefer staying in the urban areas for petty businesses like Okada and so on, the women from the rural local governments have also preferred to stay away from farms for fear of being killed or raped by the marauders (Apenda 188).

Conceptual Framework

Farmers/Herdsmen

As described in this paper, a farmer is regarded as one who follows the occupation of farming. For the purpose of this paper, they are producers of arable crops both for their consumption and for commercial purposes. What this means is that they live on the land and find sustenance through its cultivation for food and income. They settled in communities and carried out farming and farming related activities. Today, farmers, have maintained the cultivation of stretches of land available for food and income covering a wide variety of crops.

Herdsman are described as people who look after a large crowd or flocks of animals. It also means any person that owns or tend animals. Herdsman as used in this paper refer to nomadic cattle reeler who wander about with their cattle in search of pastures and water. They are mostly Fulani cattle owners. The Herdsman, who are predominantly Muslims are a pastoralist group who are by occupation traditional cattle herders. The search for conditions conducive for raising herds, keeps them on the move from one place to another, and specifically to areas with pasture and water availability and no tsetse fly infestation (Iro, Qtd. in Apenda 192)

Conflict

Stagner defines conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not by both; each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal. He conceives conflict from the point of view of incompatibility of goals (56). Coser perceives it in terms of the struggle between parties over desirable values. According to him, conflict refers to: Struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals and communities. Although conflict may be conceived from different perspectives, one crucial defining element of it is the presence of two or more actors struggling to secure a thing of value or adjudged to be valuable of which the gain by any of the actors' amounts to a loss or deprivation to the other actor(s). The benefit that goes with access to or control of the 'valuable' and the deprivation or insecurity that follows denial of access underlie all conflicts (3).

According to Dougherty and Pfalzgarff, the term conflict refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings in a given environment (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religions, socioeconomic, political, among others) is engaged in conscious opposition to or more identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals (qtd. in Apenda 189).

Human Security

Bellamy view it as a relative freedom from war, coupled with a relatively high expectation that defeat will not be a consequence of any war that should occur ("Human Security"). He added that security might be considered as too militaristic but without security, it would be impossible to provide peace and develop human rights and economic welfare. Moreover, security to him is about the survival of humans and the prevention of wars, killings, massacres.

Security could be generally classified according to their levels of operational analysis. State-to-state level of analysis deals with security issues between states. This type of analysis is especially important for scholars who are close to Realist school of thought, since they believe that nation-states are the primary actors in international relations and they claim to be the ultimate authority in resolving conflicts between them (Bellamy "Human Security"). The state and transnational civil society (trans-state security) level of analysis is interested in relationships between state and non-state elements and that within non-state elements and more available for scholars close to Liberal school of thought(Bellamy "Human Security"). The third level of analysis is international security which focuses on the relations between international and supranational organizations such as NATO, Warsaw Treaty Organization, EU etc. and states. International security studies try to develop a macro level analysis.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme has distinguished seven dimensions of human security to include:

1. Economic security which assure every individual a minimum requisite income.
2. Food security that emphasizes guarantee of physical and economic access to basic foodstuffs.
3. Health security which is the guarantee of minimum protection from disease and unhealthy lifestyles.
4. Environmental security that protect people from the short- and long-term ravages of nature, man-made threats in nature, and deterioration of the natural environment.
5. Personal security, protecting people from physical violence.
6. Community security for the protection of people from loss of traditional relationships and values and from sectarian and ethnic violence.
7. Political security to ensure that people live in a society that honours their basic human rights (24–33). Consequently, human security as conceived by UNDP moves the focus away from states and towards individuals. It emphasizes human rights, safety from violence, and sustainable development.

Analysis of the Farmers-herdsmen's Conflict in Benue State between 2007 and 2017

The Fulani Herdsmen crisis remains a major issue in Benue State. So far, thousands have been killed and many more have been expelled from their homes, and the Nigerian government does not appear willing to initiate any forceful action against them. Rather, they are requesting for pieces of land from states in order to provide the rampaging herdsmen with permanent feeding ground (Adelula David "Fulani Herdsmen Crisis").

Before the 19th century, herdsmen have been known to wreak little havoc in certain communities in Nigeria, but now, the rate at which they commit these crimes has

increased exponentially. According to statistics provided by the *Institute for Economics and Peace*, 1,229 people were killed in 2014, up from 63 in 2013 and Benue State seems to be the hardest hit in recent times (Ukpong Charles “Nigeria Most Terrorised Country”). Barely five days to the end of Governor Gabriel Suswam’s administration in May 2015, over 100 farmers and their family members were reportedly massacred in villages and refugee camps located in the Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa local government areas of the state (Salami Comfort “Consequences of Herdsmen-Farmers Clash”).

On 22 April, 2016, in what is becoming a weekly sordid ritual, 61 persons were, over the weekend, killed in separate dastardly incidents in Benue State. The victims who were mostly women and children, lost their lives in six communities of Guma Local Government Area of Benue State in the hands of suspected herdsmen with another coordinated attacks on Tse-Abi, Tse-Ginde, Tse-Peviv, Tse-Ikyo, Agenke and Gbenke communities of Unzughul, Saghev Council Ward in Guma where 25 persons were killed; the killings were said to have commenced from late Friday to the early hours of Saturday. (Sunday Vanguard “Benue Blood Bath”).

According to reports, in July 2015, suspected herdsmen attacked Adeke, a community on the outskirts of the state capital, Makurdi. Last December, six persons were killed at Idele village in Oju Local Government Area. A reprisal attack by youths in the community saw three Fulani herdsmen killed and beheaded. Between December, 2015 and February 2016, as a result of a clash between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State, 40 more people were killed, about 2,000 displaced and not less than 100 were seriously injured (Adelula David “Fulani Herdsmen Crisis”).

Strong indications emerged towards the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018 as the people of the state who were just about rounding off their New Year celebrations, were on January 2nd, attacked by armed men who unleash violence and mayhem on some rural communities mostly from Guma and Logo local government areas. This single event left over 85 persons been killed including pregnant women and children. Properties and crops worth millions of naira were also destroyed (Adelula David “Fulani Herdsmen Crisis”).

This attacks on Logo and Guma at the beginning of the year has left a sober experience leaving the people in perpetual fear of the unknown particularly on which community or area that will be the next destination for attack as there were romours going round that that armed men were even planning of establishing a militia around these areas. Even though, it started as mere romours, however it was later confirmed as the Miyetti Allah Kauta Hore claimed responsibility for this dastardly act which according to this organization was the execution of their vision on the peace-loving people of Middle Belt in general and Benue State in particular.

Essentially, Benue’s economy is an agrarian one which houses a vast majority of the state’s population. What this means is that any threat or attack to the agricultural sector will definitely have serious ramifications on the life of the people who depend on it for their livelihood. The nation’s economy also relies partially on proceeds from agricultural sector which Benue State plays a prominent role as the food basket of the nation. While natural disasters such as flood and drought can also affect such an economy, which is perfectly understood because they are beyond human

control; avoidable ones like herdsmen onslaught on farmers’ lives and crops, and cattle destruction of crops have badly affected the peasant economy in Benue. Aside the burning of crops and brutal murdering of farmers by the herdsmen, farmers who survived the senseless killings have been detained in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps under horrific condition.

Economy

Whatever the causes of Fulani herdsmen/farmers conflicts are, it is evident that the conflicts have been of great negative implications. According to research conducted by Alhasan Usman Bello on “Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in North-Eastern Nigeria: Causes and Repercussions” listed some of these negative consequences as ranging from economic repercussions such as loss of income through resources due to poor yield (138). According to this research, material losses and resources were, however, more widespread among farmers with income loss having the highest relative incidence among farmers, followed by loss of yield, household resources and stored products. On the part of herdsmen, losses – whether material or not, were minimal. In point of fact, 13.6%, 26.7%, 4.1%, and 3.6% of herdsmen claimed to have suffered losses in respect of their, income, yield, stored products and household resources respectively (Bello 136).

From this research, it was observed that both farmers and herders incur losses owing to these conflicts, however, losses suffered by herdsmen were generally far less than those for farmers, meaning that farmers experienced more losses than the herdsmen. Findings confirm the positions of other researchers such as Ajayi and Allagenyi who agrees that effective and sustainable service delivery is normally affected by the quality of family life. They maintained that organizational factors in sustaining extension service delivery is enhanced through good family life devoid of instability and security (9-21).

The implication of this development is that both farmers and herdsmen suffered several negative socio-psychological consequences relating to their respective family lives. Consequently, it becomes evidently clear that whatever happens at work could affect what happens at home. This affirmed the position of Potter, B.A. that, it is hardly possible to find a frustrated person at work that is energized at home (44). These effects were, however, found to be more pronounced among the farmers than herdsmen, probably due to the fact that farmers suffered more losses than herdsmen.

Food Security

Food security can be described as the condition in which a person have access to good, quality and sufficient food to consume in other to live healthy and productive life. United States Agency for International Development. (USAID) Bureau for Africa, defined food security as a situation “When all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life” (12). Eme, et. al. adds that food security is dependent on agricultural production, food imports and donations, employment opportunities and income earnings, intra-household decision-making and resource allocation, health care utilization and caring practices (55).

In a research conducted by Apenda, I.T. on “An Assessment

of the Impact of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Food Security in Benue State observed that these conflicts possess a great threat to food security. Following the data collected and analysed on socio-economic variables, the study found that the conflicts have negative impact on agricultural production activities in Benue State. It has affected the farmer's output in the study area. The research showed the agricultural output of the sampled respondents before and during Fulani herdsmen attack on Tiv farmers in Benue state (197).

It is evident from the study that majority (87.5%) of the respondents have agricultural output of less than or equal to N100 000 during the Fulani herdsmen attack on Tiv farmers while 12.5% of the respondents have agricultural output of between N100 001 and N200 000 but no percentage of the respondents that have agricultural output of neither between N200 001 and N300 000 nor above N300 000 during the Fulani attack. Before the Fulani attack, the agricultural output of the sampled respondents showed 51.6% of the sampled respondents agricultural output of above N300 000 as compared to the 0% when the respondents had been attacked by Fulani herdsmen. The percentage of those who have agricultural output of between N200 001 and N300 000 rose from 0% to 25% while the percentage of those with agricultural output of below N100,000 has increased during the Fulani herdsmen attack which indicate an increase in the agricultural output of the respondents during the times of no conflict (Apenda 198).

Population Displacement

The classical economic theory of population growth as postulated by Thomas Malthus stated that a rise in incomes, particularly among the poorer classes in any country, tends to increase fertility rates but decrease mortality rates (Qtd. in Eniang 1). Although rapid population growth does not seem to influence the supply of financial savings, it clearly affects the demand for savings. To maintain income, capital per person (including "human capital," that is, a person's education, health, and skills) must be maintained. And as populations grow, "capital widening" is needed to maintain capital per person. But slower population growth releases investable resources for "capital-deepening" that is, increasing capital per person.

Several scholars have argued that that Tiv nation have suffered displacement from the hands of other nationalities. According to Wilfred Uji, the experience started as far back as the colonial era, through the Ring Fence Policy" can be likened to a forced migration of the Tiv out of central Nigeria which lead to the displacement of large population of the Tiv people. The ring fence theory provided the impetus for the British colonial system to forcefully curb Tiv population migration into the districts of Wukari, Keana, Awe, Obi and Lafia Divisions, thus, laid the cornerstone for understanding the conflict between what is termed indigenous population and stranger-settlers (30). He added that between 1992 to the present, the Tiv population in the states of Taraba and Nassarawa have been victims of a systematic forced migration using the mobilization of guns, ammunitions and militia force by nomadic herdsmen or other ethnic militia forces such as the Alago and Jukuns. Using the historic background of the slave trade and black migration in Southern Africa, the Tiv of Central Nigeria has been subjected to a similar experience in recent contemporary Nigerian history (31).

Against this backdrop, between 1992 and 2014, the Tiv population of central Nigeria witnessed mass displacement due to a forced migration imposed by Fulani-nomadic expansion as well as the revival of the Kwararafa confederacy hate against the "Tiv Intruders". Statistics below shows the displacement of Tiv population as found in internally displaced camps as well as the loss of property by the Tiv population (Uji 37).

Recommendations

It is the position of this paper that, rather than create grazing routes and reserves for Fulani herdsmen outside their states of origin, the federal and, more importantly, the state governments of Fulani states should make livestock production a sedentary occupation. They should cite ranches in Fulani states and on lands owned or leased (not seized) by the Fulani and confine cattle breeding within the enclosed areas.

Other States of the Federation should borrow a leaf from Benue State House of Assembly through the enactments of Anti-Open Grazing and Prohibition law so as to curb the incessant grazing by herdsmen.

Also as pointed by Apenda, I.T., government should provide public enlightenment campaigns, seminars and symposia to sensitize the farmers and herdsmen on the divesting impacts of this conflict.

Conflict control strategies such as regular meetings and dialogue should be encourage among the farmers and herdsmen by the community leaders to avert conflict including the setting up of a joint peace and conflict resolution committee made up of the farm community and the herder's constituted by the Government to be reporting the activities of the groups to Government.

Conclusion

Benue State 'the giant of Nigeria' is in shambles as these developments may create hunger and poverty if not properly addressed, will create other attendance negative consequences as started been experienced such as kidnapping and wanton destruction of human lives, theft of cattle and goats. The social, economic and political tensions created as a result of numerous escalations of violent conflicts have raised fundamental national questions for the survival of the Nigerian State. The failure of the state to manage and resolve such conflicts has put a question mark on the suitability or relevance of the federal structure to the Nigerian reality. Insurgency, especially by herdsmen, has thrown a huge cloak of insecurity not just over the entire Benue Valley, but also the entire country, and thus, should be everyone's' task. Checking herdsmen activities should not be left only in the hands of security agencies, but rather, should be everyone's' duty. Absolute and total cooperation remain the call of this paper.

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