

**HERDERS – FARMERS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Herders – Farmers conflict has been a recurrent problem yearning for permanent solution in Nigeria. It's a conflict between Fulani herdsmen and the indigenous farmers that have not just persisted but also manifested into bloodletting confrontations in different parts of the country. This paper examines the nature and cause(s) of the conflict and as well the implications of Herders – Farmers conflict on Nigeria's national development, highlighting the socio-economic and political implications of the conflict on the country's national development. The paper revealed that the major cause of the conflict revolves around dispute over land; encroachment of farmlands by herders and cattle rustling often perpetuated by host communities. The paper also revealed that the Federal Government of Nigeria has not made enough effort to put an end to this conflict. In the light of the findings the paper thereby recommended among other things: the establishment of Herder-Farmer Conflict Resolution Committee made up of statesmen and women, religious leaders, traditional/community leaders and other stakeholders to advance a panacea for the ravaging conflict that have bedeviled the country. The arrest and prosecution of the murderers and adequate compensation of the victims as it will ensure justice in the society; strict border control by the Nigerian security forces to make sure that foreigners does not invade the country in the name of herdsmen, creation of ranches in states that voluntary wants it instead of imposing it on them and collecting taxes from cattle owners who make use of those ranches.

Keywords: Nigeria, herders, farmers, conflict, resolution, national development

Introduction

Herders and farmers have co-existed from time immemorial in a relative peaceful relationship until lately when we started witnessing a high spate of conflict between the two groups which has metamorphosed into recurring clashes, mass killings, displacement of individuals and destruction of lives and properties. A number of factors such as land ownership, encroachment of farmlands by herdsmen and obstruction of grazing routes have been listed as the major causes of the conflict.

Peace is one of the prerequisites for development to thrive in any country of the world as lack of the former will definitely undermine the later. However, for Aristotle, peace is not merely the absence of war or conflict but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short, of government.

The continued absence of peace coupled with the poor response of the Nigerian government in addressing the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria may soon degenerate into political instability, adversely undermine the economic growth of the country and could ultimately lead to a total breakdown of law and order. According to Mark (2010), Herder-Farmer conflicts does not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved, they also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production in West Africa. Beyond this, the negative impacts of this conflict on the socio-economic cum political well-being of the country are manifold and disastrous.

Hence, the increasing spate of killings, destruction of lives and properties calls for an urgent examination of the cause(s) of the conflict, the implication(s) for national development of Nigeria as a country and how the conflict can permanently be resolved, as negligence could make the conflict escalate into a full-blown warfare or total breakdown of law and order in the country.

In a bid to solve the problem, the Federal Government has suggested the establishment of Cattle Colonies in all the thirty six (36) states of the federation as a solution after the Grazing bill failed to scale through at the National Assembly. The proposed Cattle Colony has been widely criticized as many have interpreted this move by the federal government in different ways.

The study also x-rayed the complex nature of the Herder-Farmer conflict. The conflict has manifested in different dimensions with political, religious and ethnic coloration which further makes it difficult to find a lasting solution.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Herder(s): Cambridge dictionary conceptualized a herder as a man who takes care of a large group of animals of the same type. Moving further the concept of a herder refers to a person who takes care of herds of cattle or flocks of sheep especially in an open field. A herder therefore implies a breeder, or a custodian of cattle or flocks of sheep. Herders are more often than not people from the Fulani ethnic group of the Western Savanna. In this case the Fulani extracts are domiciled in Northern Nigeria as noted by Horton, 1972; Adeleye, 1971; Last, 1967 as cited in Okeke O. (2014), it was through the series of events called the Fulani jihads, the Fulani conquered a greater part of the area that later became Northern Nigeria between 1804 and 1810. They are not only located in the Northern part of Nigeria, they are also located in Mali, Chad, Senegal and Sudan. The Fulanis' also known as the Fula or Fulbe are predominantly herders, hence the name 'Fulani-herdsmen'.

Farmer(s): Farmers are people who engage in agricultural activities such as farming with the primary objective of producing food and other cash crops either for subsistence consumption or for public consumption. In Nigeria, they are located in the both the Southern Northern part of the country.

Conflict: Conflict is a form of strife that occurs between two or more persons or groups when as a result of disagreement. It is a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals (Emily and Thomas, 2007). Conflict could also be seen as struggle involving opposing ideas and/or limited resources (Wilson and Hana, 1979). As pointed out by Coser in (Musa S.D et al, 2014), conflict is a struggle between parties over desirable value. According to him, conflict refers to struggle over values or claim to status, and scarce resources, in which the aim of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired value, but also to

neutralized, injure or eliminate their rivals. According to him, One critical defining element is the presence of two or more actors struggling to secure a thing adjudged to be valuable of which gained by any actors, amount to a loss or deprivation to the other actors.

National Development: This refers to the ability of a country to increase the socio-economic and political welfare of its citizens.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the assumptions of Relative Deprivation theory:

This theory has its foundation strongly rooted in the work of Ted Gurr, '*Why Men Rebel*' published in 1970. Gurr tried to explain the reason why people engage in political violence/conflict or rather the cause of instability in a society.

He identified social psychology factor in the form of relative deprivation as the cause of political violence/conflict. He theorized that just as frustration causes aggression on the part of an individual, relative deprivation instigates collective violence by social groups. Relative deprivation according to Gurr (1970), is a term used to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the "ought" and the "is" of collective value satisfaction, and that disposes men to violence.

Relative deprivation therefore points towards the discrepancy between people's value expectations and their value capabilities. These include things that people desire and feel they deserve. Once this people feel deprived of these values (resources, opportunities, wealth etc.) which they hitherto feel they should obtain, they feel resentful and frustrated. In other words, relative deprivation is a creates a situation in which people are prompted to take action for social change so as to acquire that value possessed by others upon which they feel deprived. Gurr also noted that the greater the scope and intensity of deprivation, the greater the violence.

CAUSE(S) OF HERDER-FARMER CONFLICT

Land, crops, livestock, water resources and vegetal resources played a key role in the development, maintenance and projection of socio-economic strength of a society as acknowledged by Schama (1996) cited in Musa et al (2014). In the 1960s, Agriculture was the backbone of Nigeria's economy. The country heavily relied on Agriculture to finance its budgets and as a major means of income. This lasted no longer than the era of oil boom in the 70s, when all attention were directed towards crude oil which has come to be the major source of national income and the pillar of the nation's economy at the detriment of agriculture. For so long crude oil has been the country's major source of income until lately when the price of oil at the global market dropped drastically. Following the fall in the price of crude oil, the nation automatically went into recession and as a result began seeking for other alternatives (diversification), with greater emphasizes on return to agriculture.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from Agriculture in Nigeria increased to 5189365.99 NGN in the third quarter of 2017 from 3745091.59 NGN million in the second quarter of 2017. Again GDP from Agriculture in Nigeria averaged 3736080.83 NGN million from 2010 until 2017, reaching all time high of 5189365.99 NGN million in the third quarter of 2017.

(<https://tradingeconomics.com/Nigeria/gdp-fromagriculture>). This feat could also be attributed to the various policies put in place by the federal government of Nigeria to encourage rural farming such as the placement of an importation ban on rice. This highlights the importance of Agriculture which also precludes livestock like cattle to the nation's economy. Nigeria has an estimated population of over 15 million cattle domiciled in the country as noted by Ephraim (2014).

However, in a bid to heed the Federal government's call to return to Agriculture, Nigeria has witnessed a massive return to agricultural activities. The massive return to Agriculture has been heralded by the Herder – Farmer that we are now witnessing. Herder-Farmer conflict is one of the most crucial problems that have bedeviled Nigeria at the moment. This is a national issue that needs to be tackled with every sense of seriousness. The conflict between the two groups is not just restricted to any particular state or geo-political zone rather it's an issue that poses a serious threat to all parts of the country and its unity as well.

It is very apt to analyze the cause of the conflict before seeking for the solution. According to Tenuche and Ifatimehin (2009), a high percentage of conflicts arising from land disputes have to do with land matters and conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers over grazing land. As a result of population explosion and the invariably scarce nature of land we have continued to witness massive encroachment into farmlands by Fulani herdsmen in search of pastures for their cattle. This has more often than not resulted in bloodletting clashes between farmers and herders. In line with this Blench (2004), argued thus: Farmer-pastoralist conflicts have been associated with the conflict of land resource use exacerbated by dwindling resources.

For Tonah (2006) as cited by Ofuoku and Isife (2009), the factors responsible for the increasing herder-farmer conflict include the southward movement of pastoral herds into the humid and sub-humid zones promoted by the successful control of the menace posed by disease, the widespread availability of veterinary medicine and the expansion of farming activities into areas that hitherto served as pastureland. Similarly, Akpaki (2002) in his view opined that, every farming system such as nomadic cattle heading has a boundary which separates it from the larger system, which make up the environment. The boundary represents the limit in the larger system. Farmers increasingly compete with nomadic herders for farm land, pasture, water, trees and use of range land in general. This is further elucidated in the words Musa S.D et al (2014), according to them, Conflict between herdsmen and farmers in the area are caused by so many factors. Most of these factors include: destruction of crops/farmland, the role of traditional rulers, cattle theft by host communities.

According to Tenuche M. and Ifatimehin O. (2009) in their work titled Resource Conflict among Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen: Implications for Resource Sustainability:

the State has played a key role in the conflicts over land from three critical levels, viz:

- (i) The State inability to address the indigene and settler phenomenon in the Nigerian Constitution;*
- (ii) The unresolved issues on grazing land and water spots that are central to the economic survival of both the herds men and the farming communities;*
- (iii) The Nigerian land tenure system which has had serious implications for land acquisition by the peasants and the lower class.*

AN OVERVIEW OF HERDERS – FARMERS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

As noted by Aliyu (2004), conflicts in Nigeria manifests in different dimensions and have been on the increase since after the Nigerian civil war of 1967 -1970. However, he also observed that resource control and divergent value systems in the country are responsible for these frequent conflicts.

The population of Nigeria as of 1960s was estimated to be around 48million with arable lands more than enough to accommodate both farmers and herders. The population increase to 194,502,490 in 2018 based on the United Nations estimates. It's apt to note that as the landmass remained the same over the years, the population keeps increasing and as a result there were increase in the demand for land, water, forest products and grazing land within territories inhabited by Fulanis and farmers (Murtala, 2013). Empty spaces were either earmarked for building of houses or for farming activities and the struggle for resources became more intense. The expansion and struggle for resource control brought about the clashes between the herders and the farmers. Access to a variety of limited resources which include chieftaincy position, power and status, grasslands, markets, water spots for animals, rival claims to land, government policies, leadership of political parties etc. by individuals differentiated by different categories in defined socio-physical environments give rise to conflicts as remarked by (Otite and Albert, 1999).

It is against this backdrop that the scarce resource theorists have argued that:

“population growth, environmental degradation, inequitable access to resources and rapid resource depletion cumulatively worsen the severity and scope of poverty within and across communities and countries, especially in the developing world. These tend to deepen socio-economic deprivation in society. These deprivations easily grow and develop into grievances, social bitterness, increasing rebellion and social unrest, thereby culminating in temporal or sustained violence and conflicts” Kahl, cited in (John., et al 2016).

However, the Herder-Farmer conflict in Nigeria has taken a multifaceted dimension. It has grown from an ordinary conflict or misunderstanding between the herders and the farmers to an

ethno-political, social and religious conflict threatening the country's unity and security as the spread of this conflict into the Southern States has further strained the fragile nature of relations across the different ethnic, religious and regional groups in the country. The specification on "ethno-political" implies a focus on conflict where the core incompatibility is one between different so-called ethnic groups and their political organizations (Emily and Thomas, 2007). What defines ethnic conflict as ethnic according to Ted Gurr as cited in (Emily and Thomas, 2007), is the tendency for opposing groups to describe themselves using criteria such as cultural elements, territorial claim, the myth common ancestry, racial ties and using this identity to claim equal status within a state or autonomy from it. However, Tonah (2006) remarked that Farmers-herders differences are not only seen as resources conflict but are also sometimes represented as ethnic conflict between the two groups. Since farmers and herders groups have different values, custom, physical and cultural characteristic, dispute between them are frequently characterized as ethnic conflict. The conflict has posed a serious national problem for Nigeria's unity as the conflict has claimed an estimated death of 168 in January 2018 alone according to Amnesty report published on 30 January 2018. In 2017, an estimated death of 549 was recorded across 14 states of the federation as thousands of people were either displaced or maimed while over 2,500 lives were lost in 2016.

The indigenes-settlers issue is a factor that have contributed to herders-farmers conflict as witnessed in Jos, Plateau state Nigeria. This conflict however revolves mainly around resource control such as land ownership. It is basically between the Berom who happened to be one of the largest tribes and the Hausa migrants. This conflict has transcended into religious conflict where the Berom Christian dominated indigenes are in continuous antagonism with their Muslim Hausa settlers, hence the battle for dominance. The Berom people are predominantly farmers while the Hausa Fulani settlers are predominantly pastoralists. The fear of being displaced in their indigenous land by the Muslim Hausa settlers made lead to the discrimination and resentments against the Hausa settlers. This overtime resulted into pockets of conflicts and ultimately escalated into conflict marked by killings and reprisal killings on regular basis. The massacre of Agatu indigenes in Benue state by the Fulani herdsmen is not bereft of ethnic and religious undertones.

Beyond the clashes between the Berom Christian indigenes and the Hausa Muslim settlers, and Tiv community versus the Fulani Herdsmen in Benue, the advancement of the Fulani herdsmen down to the South has been perceived by the Southern Christians as a deliberate attempt to Islamize the Southern part of the country. In the first half of the 1960s, Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Northern Nigeria, embarked on several campaigns in central Nigeria that were meant to convert —pagans to Islam (Crampton, 1979, pp. 80-84 & Paden, 1986, pp.566-578), cited in (Okeke 2014). He further explained that the gradual southwards expansion of the Hausa-Fulani is responsible for on-going ethno-religious conflicts in the central states of Nigeria, but to a greater extent in Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue States.

It is good to note that stakeholders' interest is a factor that has influenced the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Natural resources serve the interest of various actors hence the concept of stakeholders is applied in their management. Stakeholders comprise various actors, some of which are gaining while others are losing in their interaction with the ecosystem (John et al, 2016). They further opined that stakeholders such as herdsmen and peasant farmers directly impact on resources in the ecosystem. For them, each stakeholder has an interest which can be positive or negative and possess various degrees of power over the management systems of the natural resources and that the interest influences the kind of actions they take and the power shows the kind of control a stakeholder can exercise over the resource.

In line with the above assertions, it is argued that the herdsmen are mere servants of the real cattle owners. In line with this school of thought Afrrev (2014) stated that “the Fulani elite own large proportions of the cattle bred reared by Fulani herders. The real cattle owners belong to the upper class citizens from the Northern extracts and have the financial muscles to arm these herdsmen against any perceived obstacle against their interest. This explains why some herdsmen are seen with AK 47 and other sophisticated weapons which ordinarily they cannot afford to purchase. This was acknowledged by Ephraim (2014) in his assertion, “the herdsmen often own sophisticated weapons”. The rationale behind this is to protect their interest by clearing everything poses a threat to them. This also explains why there are often high casualties especially on the part of farmers each time this conflict occurs.

States that have been affected by the Herder – Farmer Conflict include:

- Kaduna State, Kebbi State, Sokoto State, Zamfara State, Katsina State(North West)
- Yobe State, Adamawa State, Taraba State (North East)
- Nasarawa State, Kogi State, Benue State, Kwara State, Plateau State (North Central)
- Ekiti State, Oyo State, Ogun State (South West)
- Enugu State, Imo State, Abia State (South East)
- Delta State, Cross River State, Edo State (South South)

As already noted before, Herders-Farmers conflict often revolves around land disputes between farmers and herders, cattle rustling and crop destructions by herders. Having said this, It must be clearly stated that cattle rearing is an occupation that is predominant in the Northern part of the country, Ephraim (2014) noted that over 90% of livestock holding is found in the Northern part of Nigeria. but as a resulted of desertification and degradation herders are forced to seek pastures for their herds across the South who are predominantly farmers. Coupled with population explosion and the return of people to Agricultural activities in the country, there became a problem of land disputes. The farmers accused herders of destroying their farmlands and crops while the herders accused farmers of obstruction of traditional migration routes and cattle rustling. In many instances, the Nigerian government have said that the killings are perpetuated by foreign herdsmen from Chad, Niger and Benin. This further gives the conflict a political coloration as it is the duty of the federal government to ensure strict boarder control. The conflict is ready to hamper and strain Nigeria's unity and its national development if not appropriately handled by the federal government of Nigeria. It has created ethnic tensions between the various ethnic groups in the country and added salt to the sour of regional cum political relations within the country.

Socio-economic and political implication of conflicts

As rightly pointed out by Schama (1996), livestock's, water resources and other vegetal resources played key roles in the development, maintenance and projection of socio-economic strength of a society. The conflict between the Herders and the Farmers has prompted a reduction in not just the farmers' outputs but also in the income of farmers owing to the destruction of crops by cattle. This is ironical to the Federal government's call to return to agriculture in order to boost the ailing economy. As a result of the conflict a lot of farmers have lost their farm produce to the conflict. This automatically affects earning capacity at the micro level and at the macro level affects the Gross Domestic product of the country (GDP) bringing about shortage in food security of the nation. This is a symbiotic scenario as herders are not also spared. They also count their loses as cattle are rustled, leading to a reduction of income and shortage of beef for the general public. The conflict in most instances does not only affect the productivities of farmers or that of herders but also disrupts every other business within the designated conflict areas and instead of attracting investors, it scares them away.

Loss of lives and Displacement of both farmers and herders: in this case farmers are the most affected because they have always been at the receiving end of the conflict. According to Amnesty International, clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, Ondo and Kaduna have resulted in 168 deaths in January 2018 alone and in 2017, 549 deaths and thousands displaced across Enugu, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Cross River, Adamawa, Katsina, Delta and Ekiti State. In most cases of the conflict both farmers and herdsmen relocate as a result of attacks and reprisal attacks. More often than not, farmers are afraid of going to their farms lands for fear of attack by herdsmen in areas where there is conflict. This again affects production and income of farmers. Moreover, as a result of the killings, a lot of children have been rendered fatherless and motherless and husbands and wives turned into widows and widowers.

Herder-Farmer conflict has lead to the destruction of material resources. It has also facilitated land degradation as conflicts often results to the destruct environmental, physical, human and

social capital, thereby altering available sustainable development opportunities that will enhance national development.

Overtly and covertly conflict impacts negatively on the general human well-being of the society either by maiming and wounding the inhabitants thereby rendering them handicapped, it reduces the quality of life and the capabilities of people to live the kind of life they desire. Such victims if not well rehabilitated becomes a burden to others in the society.

Aside from loss of lives, livelihoods and opportunities, such conflicts have a negative impact on human dignity and fundamental human rights as such rights stands to be abused during conflicts.

Politically, it's the duty of the federal government to protect the lives and properties of its citizens, protect the country from both external and internal aggression. In a situation where the federal government fails in managing the conflict effectively, it will have a negative effect on the country's image abroad.

Insecurity and uncertainty is one of the factors that discourage investors from investing in a particular country thereby undermining the economic and national development of the country.

Socially it has sowed the seed of discord between the Fulani race and their counterparts in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first step in solving this problem is to stop arms proliferation and disarm the Fulani herders. The conflict have been able to escalate to this extent, causing so much casualties as a result of arms proliferation. If the parties involved are not unarmed, the conflict is not likely to end any soon.

The establishment of Herder-Farmer Conflict Resolution Committee made up of statesmen and women, religious leaders, traditional/community leaders and other stakeholders to advance a panacea for the ravaging conflict that have bedeviled the country.

The arrest and prosecution of the murderers and adequate compensation for the victims as it will ensure justice in the society.

Strict border control by the Nigerian security forces to make sure that foreigners does not invade the country in the name of herdsmen. Again Nigeria should review its

The culture of primitive pastoralism should be changed to what is obtainable in modern societies. To this extent the practice of Ranching is advocated as opposed to primitive pastoralism. However, Ranches should be established in states that voluntary wants it instead of imposing it on them. In addition, taxes should be collected from cattle owners who make use of those ranches as it will also serve as a means of generating revenue for the country.

Ranches should be well equipped and up to standard; such that will withstand the climate change. Its features should include good sources of water supply like boreholes, dams and irrigation. Also, Forage-crop farming should be encouraged or sought for both within and outside the country in order to sustain these ranches.

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