

HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE.

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ABSTRACT.

The Fulani Herdsmen are nomadic people. In the past, the nomads have often come into conflicts with the local farmers. The conflicts have now continued to increase on a daily basis and the nature of the attacks has changed. Herdsmen now allegedly use firearms. Also in recent years, the herdsmen – farmers conflict is very common in many parts of Nigeria. Such conflicts have caused a lot of losses to Nigeria, the state, local communities and families. The Herdsmen – Farmers conflict has become a social problem for Nigeria and a source of national concern. The clash between herders and farmers has become a major cause of increasing violence and general insecurity in Nigeria. In most of these encounters, citizens are regularly killed, internally displaced and the destruction or loss of property leaves an already endangered populace even poorer. All the government responses so far have not yielded positive results to the problem. All these have implications for social work practice in Nigeria and hence the need for this work. Social work is a helping profession and thus, the need for exploration of areas for intervention.

Key words: Herdsmen, Farmers, Cattle, Conflict, Social Work, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Herdsman – farmer conflicts in Nigeria are getting worse almost on a daily basis. According to Mayhem (2018) an age old rivalry has now grown deadlier. Although a strife between Herdsmen and Farmers date back centuries, it has escalated sharply as climate change pushes herders. According to Ismail (1994), the Fulani Herdsmen are nomadic Herders whose history can be traced to the Futa Jalon Mountains of West Africa and whose primary occupation is raising live stocks. They are largely located in the Sahel and semi-arid parts of West Africa but due to changes in climate patterns, many herdsman have moved further south into the Savannah and Tropical Forest Belt of West Africa. Fulani Herdsmen are found in countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Cameroon etc.

The history of Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria dates back to the 13TH and 14th centuries when they started migrating into northern Nigeria from Senegambia Region. After the Uthman Dan Fodio Jihad, the Fulani integrated into the Hausa ethnic group of Northern Nigeria. During the dry season when tsefly population was reduced, Fulani Herdsmen began to drive their cattle to the middle belts zone dominated by non-Hausa groups, returning to the north at the onset of the rainy season. But while managing the herds and driving cattle, cattle grazing on farmlands sometimes leads to the destruction of crops, becoming a source of conflict between the herdsman and farmers in Nigeria.

In recent years, the Fulani Herdsmen and Farmer conflicts have become a disaster for Nigeria. Also recently, the nature of the attacks has changed. It is often contained in the news reports that herdsman now allegedly use firearms. According to Global Terrorism Index

(2018), Fulani militants are the fourth deadliest terrorist group since 2014, using machine guns and attacks on the villages to assault and intimidate farmers. According to Akinkuolie (2018) herdsman and farmers' conflicts are very common in many parts of Nigeria. Also according to Global Terrorism Index Report (2018) herdsman have killed six times more people than those killed by Boko Haram in 2018. The Report identified Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Kaduna and Taraba as the deadliest states in Nigeria for these clashes and with many cases of Internal Displacement. Thus, the need for this work on herdsman – farmers' conflict in Nigeria and the implication for social work practice cannot be over emphasized.

FULANI HERDSMEN ATTACKS IN NIGERIA.

The incessant herdsman attacks and killings by herdsman is a major source of national concern. According to Egbas (2018) from 1996 to 2006, about 121 people lost their lives in Bauchi and Gombe states as a result of conflict between herdsman and farmers. Many communities, particularly in the northern central and south eastern states have also recently faced severe attacks allegedly perpetrated by Fulani herdsman. Since January 2016, about 10 Agatu communities in Benue state suffered unprecedented hardship in the hands of men suspected to be Fulani Herdsman. About 500 Agatu villagers have reportedly lost their livestock to the herdsman. In Abia State, Communities of Uzuakoli in Bende Local Government Area, Ebem and Akanu in Ohafia and Umuchieze in Umunneochi, there have been cases of deadly clashes between rural farmers and the cattle breeders. The invasion of farmlands in Ebem and Akanu communities nearly resulted to blood baths but the wisdom of the leaders in the community who timely reported to the authorities saved bloody

clashes. Some of the cases were so serious that Abia State Government had to intervene, preventing the youths of the communities from retaliating. It set up a peace committee that quelled the then imminent doom.

The case is not different in Enugu State. Of the 482 communities in the state, one cannot point to one community that has not had its fair share of Fulani Herdsmen's barbaric activities which leaves in their wakes, perennial tears of sorrow as incidents of killing, robbery, rape, maiming and kidnapping by cattle herdsman have inflicted pains on most farmers, leaving them in fear. In March 2014, suspected Fulani Herdsmen allegedly killed Tamgbo Ogueji, a member of the traditional ruler's cabinet at Eke community in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State. The deceased, aged 85, was shot in his house in the early hours over an undisclosed issue with the herdsman. The town of Nkpologu community in Uzo Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State was in January 2015, thrown into mourning following news of the death of a young woman on New Year's Eve during a Fulani herdsman's robbery attack on a commuter bus. In April 2016, suspected Fulani Herdsmen invaded Ukpabi Nimbo Community in Uzo Uwani L.G.A of Enugu State, killing scores. The herdsman, numbering more than 100, reportedly stormed the sleeping community in the early hours of a Monday morning, carrying guns, bows, arrows, machetes and swords to execute their mission. The attacks of Fulani Herdsmen have not only been witnessed in North-Central and South-East alone, farmers in Lagun, Iyana Offia, Offia, Atagba, Lapata and their surrounding communities in Lagelu L.G.A of Ibadan, Oyo State alleged that a group of Fulani armed men attacked their communities, carting away valuables.

According to Global Terrorism Index Report (2018), herdsman killed nearly 1,700 people between January and September 2018. Since the fourth Nigerian Republic's founding in 1999, Farmers and Herdsman Conflicts have killed thousands of people and displaced

tens of thousands more. The majority of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflicts have occurred between Muslim and Fulani Herdsmen Peasants, exacerbating ethno-religious hostilities. Most deaths occurred in the Nigerian Middle Belt, in particular in the states of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba with recorded 847 deaths. The state of Zamfara in the Northern Belt recorded 229 deaths. In June 2018, over 200 people have died and 50 houses were burnt in clashes between farmers and herdsmen in Plateau State. In October 2018, herdsmen killed at least 19 people in Bassa. By 2018, over 2000 people were killed in those conflicts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work made use of conflict theory and structural functionalism as theoretical framework.

Conflict Theory: The conflict theory was derived from the ideas of Karl Marx (1818-1883) who believed that society is a dynamic entity constantly undergoing change driven by conflict. Conflict theorists view society as made up of individuals competing for scarce resource which is at the heart of all social relationships. Competition rather than consensus is characteristics of human relationships. Broader social structures and organizations reflect the competition for resources and the inherent inequality competition entails some people and organizations have more resources (power and influence) use those resources to maintain their positions of power in the society. Thus, conflict theory is relevant in proving the fact that competition for access to natural resources between farmers and herdsmen give rise to conflicts. It sets the background for the origin of the conflict in terms of access to the means of production.

The Structural Functionalism evolves from the idea of Durkheim (1858-1917). It was concerned with how societies maintain internal stability and survives over time. It sought to explain social cohesion and stability through the concept of solidarity. All social

and cultural phenomena are therefore seen as being functional in the sense of working together to achieve the state of equilibrium and are perfectly deemed to have a life of their own. Thus, structural functionalist emphasizes the conditions necessary for interdependence of both the cattle herders and crop farmers on the use of common resources as well as specialized areas. There is clear demarcation between different types of conflicts in farmer-herdsmen relations. Farmers increasingly compete with herdsmen for farmland, pastures, water, trees and the use of range land in general (Akpaki; 2002).

METHODOLOGY.

This study was conducted in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive research design with in-dept review of literatures. The study also made use of secondary data which include news-papers and journal publications.

CAUSES OF HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA.

The term, conflict according to Ofuoku and Isife (2010) suggests differences and disagreement. Conflict is the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulse or motives. This was further described by Wilson and Hanna (1979) as struggle involving opposing ideas and| or limited resources. The conflicts between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria are caused by so many factors. According to Musa -(2014) most of these factors include destruction of crops | farmlands, the roles of traditional rulers, cattle theft by the host communities.

According to Abbas (2009) a study of major sources of conflicts between herdsmen and farmers shows that land related issues, especially on grazing fields, account for the highest percentage of the conflicts. Also Okello (2014) emphasized that the conflicts between

herdsmen and farmers have intensified in recent years with dwindling natural resources and land availability greatly contributing to the on-going, escalating conflict in the country.

Ingawa et al (1999) stressed that the key underlying causes of herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Nigeria are: (a) changing resources access rights, whereby traditional access rights to communal grazing and water resources are being obstructed by the individual tenureship of arable farmers. This is particularly severe on the traditional trek routes, which become favorite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas. Within the fadama areas, this is exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the crops plots, which makes prevention on animals straying in the crop plots difficult

(b) Inadequate of grazing resources as increasing crop cultivation (and increasing commercialization of the crop residues) and poor management of grazing reserves have resulted in a significant reduction in available livestock feed resources, in particular in the Northern States. Moreover, the high value crops introduced by National Fadama Development Programme (NFDP) like tomatoes and onions produce almost no crop residues for livestock feeding.

(c) Decline in internal discipline and social cohesion as the adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods and the authority of the traditional rulers is broken down. (2012) pointed out that another contributing factor is the fact that grazing resources including pasture and water are found in different places at different time of the year, hence the need for constant mobility among cattle herders for opportunistic resource use. This brings them into contact with the landed settled farmers and cause competition and conflicts. Tonah

(2006) opined that the causes of farmers|herders' conflicts 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 and availability of veterinary medicine and the expansion of farming activities into areas that hitherto served as pasture land. As a result, the herdsmen destroy crops of the farmers on their farmland.

Also Adisa (2012) stressed that land tenure system ownership of land was regarded as a cause of the conflicts. In most areas in Nigeria, farmers are regarded as those that own the land, and therefore determine how it is used, while the herdsmen are regarded as the landless group who do not own land to use and settle on.

Government policies according to Hoffman et al (2008) can also be seen as a cause of herdsmenfarmers conflicts. For instance, conflict do occur as the size of the existing reserve shrinks due to encroachment and government approved expansion of farmlands. This leads to the conversion of water points and stock routes into farmlands. Bello (2013) enumerated the major causes of herdsmen – farmers conflicts to be: (1) destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructure) by the herdsmen themselves are the main direct cause for conflicts cited by the farmers. (2) burning of range lands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herdsmen. (3) increasing rate ofcattle theft which is often accompanied by violence. (4) antagonistic perception and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources.

According to Tukur (2013) the cause of herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Nigeria include destruction of crops, contamination of streams by cattle, zero grazing of land, disregard for local traditional authorities, female harassment, harassment of nomads by host communities' youths, indiscriminate bush burning, defecation of cattle on roads, cattle theft and straying of cattle.

EFFECTS OF HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA.

The conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria have been the major cause of increasing violence and general insecurity in Nigeria. Herdsmen have killed so many people in different parts of Nigeria, razing homes and farmlands and sending thousands fleeing to nowhere. According to Ofuoku and Isife (2010) the socio- economic effects of herdsmen and farmers' conflicts include:

- (a) reduction in output and income of crop farmers as a result of destruction of crops by cattle and discriminate bush burning. A lot 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 saving, 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.
- (a) 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 stop going to the distant farms for fear of 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

(c) Land degradation (Erosion) as a result of zero grazing: The soil was made naked and susceptible to wind erosion and eventually as the rain comes, erosion continues. This is accelerated by the topographic nature of some of the areas, being hilly there have arisen the problems of loss of nutrients and difficulty of cultivation.

(d) loss of lives: A lot of killings by the herdsmen took place as a result of the conflicts and this led to the reprisal killings of herdsmen by the host communities, the herds of cattle belonging to the nomads were also killed. Also some of the victims 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. Also in the process there were reported cases of proliferation of small arms and ammunitions. Ajibefun (2018) has similar view on social and economic effects of herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Nigeria. According to him, the social effects of the conflicts are loss of lives, sexual harassment of human life, acquiring of weapons | arms, reduction of quality of social relationship| social support and high cases of rape while the economic effects of the conflicts are reduction in output and income of farmers and nomads, loss of produce in storage, displacement of farmers, scarcity of agricultural products, loss of houses and property and infrastructural damages.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES AND SOLUTIONS TO HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA.

In a bid to stop herdsman and Fulani conflicts in Nigeria, the Federal Government has responded in many ways. The implementation of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) in 2019 was the latest plan by the President Muhammadu Buhari led administration to put an end to a recurring conflict between nomadic herders and farmers. RUGA promotes ranching as the way forward for cattle rearing in Nigeria. RUGA involves provision of settlements which will house nomadic herdsman who breed animals in different states. The Federal Government wants to put the nomads in a place that has been developed as settlement where water and pasture will be provided for the animals, schools for their children, security, agro-rangers, cattle markets which will mark the end of herdsman having to transport their herds mostly by foot and avoid conflict with local farming communities etc. The pilot states for the RUGA include: Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba, Kastina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara, and Niger. The overall benefit of the RUGA to the nation includes a drastic reduction in conflict between herders and farmers, a boost in animal protection complete with a value chain that will increase the quality and hygiene of livestock in terms of beef and milk production, increased quality of feeding and access to animal care and private sector participation in commercial pasture production by way of investments. The RUGA plan is not part of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP).

Also a bill, sponsored by Senator Zaina Kure was proposed. According to Egbas (2018) the bill titled “National Grazing Reserve (establishment) Bill 2016” was to provide for the establishment of the National Grazing Reserve Commission which would have power to, among other things, establish at least one Cattle Reserve in each state of the Federation. But many have kicked against the proposed bill to create grazing zone across the country, arguing that the decision is ill advised, against the land use act and over-riding public interest. Furthermore, Federal Government wants to put a permanent end to herders and farmers conflicts in Nigeria by the introduction

of National live-stock Transformation Plan. Open Grazing was roundly condemned and blamed as the reason why cattle herders clashed with local farming communities over the control of land all over the country. In June 2018, the Federal Government presented the National Livestock Transformation Plan, a ₦179 billion, 10year initiative targeted at putting an end to the age long herders and farmers conflicts and to massively improve the livestock industry. The initiative stipulates that ranching is the way forward for cattle rearing in the country. Under the Federal Government's plan, cattle herders are expected to be registered and recognized with cooperatives for the purpose of the ranching scheme. These cooperatives will then be able to get rental agreements for land from state governments and also benefit from ranch resources on several terms including loans, grants, and subsidies. The funding of the plan from the Federal Government and State Governments is expected to last for the first three years in the pilot phase for a total of ₦70 billion while private sector interests and investment between the third and tenth year is expected to be in excess of ₦100 billion. The proposed ranch size models, according to the plan, is a cluster of 30, 60, 150, and 300 cows ranched in a location within the donated reserves. Adamawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara were selected as the pilot states to launch the plan with 94 ranches to be established and operational clusters of 4 ranches in 24 locations in those states. Of the 10 states designated as pilot states, and Ebonyi State have publicly denied agreeing to provide land for the Federal Government's initiatives.

According to Yusuf and Safina (2018) also introduction of cattle colonies by the Federal Government came following the recent harvest of deaths in rural communities across Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States blamed on suspected herdsmen. Colonies and ranches are the same thing in many ways except that a colony is a biological expression for any species of animals whether by nature or by human design that are found in a large community sharing the same terrain, such as bee colonies in certain areas. In colony, 20,30

ranchers can share the same colony, a ranch is usually owned by an individual or company with few numbers of cows. In a cattle colony, you could find 100, 200,300 cows owned by different individuals. The reason for designing colony was to prepare on a large scale, a place where many owners of cattle can co-exist there, they feed well because their feeds can be made from agro-waste, provide water, cow can be grown on a large scale, harvest and feed the cow, give them veterinary services and protect the cows against rustlers. While cattle ranching is more of an individual venture for the herdsman and those wishing to invest in the livestock sector, cattle colonies are large projects where up to 40 ranchers can share same facility that will be provided by the government at a reduced rate. Ranching is more of individual venture for those who want to invest but cattle colony is bigger in scope and size. The idea of cattle colony was a measure to tackle the herdsman and farmers conflicts and a platform for government to make more commitments to the development of the livestock subsector.

However, since declaration of the cattle colony policy, there have been outrage and overt opposition by some sections of Nigeria that government has hidden agenda to forcefully amass communal land nationwide for prowling herdsman. There was speculation that government was conspiring to grant supremacy over communal land to Fulani herdsman. But the general idea by government was different. The colony is going to be done in partnerships with state governments that would like to volunteer land for it. Federal Government will fund the project and those wishing to benefit from it will pay some fees.

According to Egbas (2018) there are 5 ways to stop killing by herdsman in Nigeria. To prevent and eradicate the conflicts, these are to be done:

(1) Identifying and punishing killers: These herdsmen who silt throats and leave blood in their trail must have faces, names and acquaintances. It is time to start arresting and dragging them before courts judgement in accordance with the laws of the land. These herdsmen must not be allowed to get away with murder in order to serve as a deterrent. The full force of the law is what is required.

(2) Anti- open grazing laws: For a farmer to watch cattle to trample on his| her yam shoots, level cassava ridges, upturn rice nurseries and devour vegetable with reckless abandon hurts the farmer and makes him | her to run crazy. Nigeria has to make laws that will make open grazing illegal. There is a point to be made here, that the typical Fulani Herdsman cherishes his nomadic, peripatetic lifestyle and would not trade that for any legislation. But times they are –a-changing. The Fulani Herdsman has to learn that restriction is part of the modern world and adjust accordingly. There are no open borders anywhere.

Invest in grazing ranches: Every state in Nigeria should dedicate parcel of land for green pasture for herdsmen. and their cattle. It should be compulsory for every state to have these ranches which should be religiously maintained and tended. Herdsmen would not need to traverse states and villages, destroying farmlands and provoking everyone in their wake. In civilized societies, herdsmen do not trek from one end of the earth to the other. Besides, cattle restricted to ranches turn out healthier.

(3) Educate Herdsmen: Herdsmen could actually behave better if they had a little more education a sensitization to go with their trade. What will it cost states to enrol herdsmen in informal learning centres and bring them up to speed with modern grazing

and livestock trade. What will it cost states to enroll herdsmen in informal learning centres and bring them up to speed with modern grazing and livestock techniques.

(4) Disarm Herdsmen: No herdsman should be carrying guns or been licensed to do so. Why do we let civilians to bear arms indiscriminately and helplessly watch them as they turn those arms on fellow civilians. Herdsmen should be declared as terrorists.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN NIGERIA.

Social work is a problem solving profession. According to Ekpe and Mamah (1997) social work is a socially sanctioned institution set up to intervene where necessary so as to enhance, conserve and augment the means by which persons individually and or collectively can resolve disequilibra and conflicts in their social existence. Conflict intervention is among the core competencies of social workers and social workers have contributed greatly in this area. According to Mayer (2013) social workers provide preventive, remedial and sustainable programmes to people or groups in conflict situations. Social work is known for its critical and holistic approach to understanding and intervening in social problems. Social workers are good at identifying and making decisions, especially in problem solving.

Social work in Nigeria is relatively new profession and has many roles to play in Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria. With increase in the incidences of herdsmen and farmers conflicts almost on a daily basis coupled with increase in internal displacement of people in Nigeria, there is need for increase recognition and intervention of social work in Nigeria. Herdsmen and

Farmers conflicts in Nigeria require social workers to study and continue professional development, to retain and develop more knowledge and skills for practice. Social workers must be more sensitive, objective and have engagement skills that will enable them intervene in herdsmen and farmers' conflicts. According to Ajibo and Oluwole (2018) social workers are trained in areas such as identifying and analyzing underlying interests of conflicting parties, developing resources and generating options. Social workers should develop mechanisms to protect the interest of both the herdsmen and farmers involve in the conflicts. Social workers can drive home to the herdsmen the benefits of grazing reserve to their cattle healthiness as against open grazing. Social workers in collaboration with the government agencies such as security apparatus and legislatures can enlighten the Herdsmen Association on the best practice of grazing reserve which will also end the incessant conflicts between Herdsmen and Farmers.

Also social workers should protect and assist everyone who has been affected by forced displacement as a result of herdsmen and Farmers conflicts in Nigeria. Social Workers should see the need to identify new solutions to the problems of Internally Displaced Persons in the camps and host communities. Social Workers should assist the Internally Displaced Persons by distributing food items and providing health and protection services and reinforcing access to water with the support of government. Social Workers should work with host communities and other humanitarian agencies to make sure that they reach everyone in need as a result of Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, complex causes trigger Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts providing significant challenge to social work profession. The involvement of professional social workers in social work intervention in solving social problems in Nigeria is almost non-existent and the result is that non-professional social workers are more in the field. Thus, there should be more training of professional social workers and involvement of professional social workers in solving the problem of herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Nigeria. There should be increase in roles that social workers should play in efforts to bring about solutions to herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Nigeria. Even though there is need for increase collaboration between professional social workers and other non-professionals, social workers should take the lead as members of the team.

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