

Herdsmen/Farmers Conflicts: A Threat to Food Production and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Linus C. Nnamani

Department Of Political Science, Enugu State University of Science and Technology,
Enugu Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have remained one of the most prominent and persisting challenge that cause disruption of peace and unity in many parts of Nigeria. The ever existing needs to cultivate/provide food, animals and raw materials for industry both for local use and exports led to extensive use of land for those purposes. This multiple use of land by these agricultural land users cause conflicts that exacerbate insecurity and food crisis especially in rural areas with their reverberating repercussions and consequences. This study shows that the conflicts cause huge treat to peaceful co-habitation by different tubes in Nigeria, disruption of unity and cause food insecurity in the country. It therefore recommends that each host community should form a committee on herdsmen-host community relationship pending the government stand/decision on ranching.

INTRODUCTION

The Fulani constitute the major owners and breeders of cattle that provide the main source of animal proteins and meat in Nigeria. The Fulanis' own over 90% of the nation's livestock population [1]. Community security, safety and development are very essential in enhancement of governance and sustainability of development. Conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have existed since the beginning of life and human cultivation. However, the degree of its intensity and frequency depends on the economic situation and other environmental factors.

Increase in herds number, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compels the pastoralists to look for more pastures to feed the cattle. Also, improvements in human health due to better health services, increase human

population who depend on food crops for survival. These imply that both the farmers and the pastoralists engage in fierce struggles for access to available arable land for cultivation and grazing that lead to conflicts. The intensity and variations of the conflicts depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the herdsmen graze their cattle. Many times attempts by farmers to prevent them from causing havoc are met with stiff and violet resistance. Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured, killed while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking the opportunities to steal, raze houses, rape women and other innocent citizens are killed. The conflicts constitute serious threats to means of

livelihood, food production, lives, property and development.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria is a nation gifted with arable land and natural resources where many tribes compete and claim the resources for different economic uses and reasons.

It is a fundamental reality that no real and sustainable development can thrive in a war prone society or in a society characterized by frequent clashes and conflicts.

Cattle herding is dominated by mainly the Fulani tribe in Nigeria. That is why most writers refer to cattle heading in

Nigeria as Fulani Herdsmen. The pastoral nomads are characterized with the following:

- Dependence on domesticated animal husbandry
- Migration along established routes for feeding their animals.
- Mobility of herds, people with their temporal habitats.
- Economic dependence on the herds and their products.

METHODOLOGY

Relevant primary sources of data (observation, interview and questionnaire) were obtained using interpreters that usually buy cattle and goats from the herdsmen. Additional information were obtained from the members of the committees that relate with the leaders of the herdsmen. The

secondary data were sourced from existing literature documented in books, journals of social sciences, published articles, magazines, newspapers, government publications and internet materials. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed using test-retest method.

THE HERDING MOVEMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

The movement or migration of the herdsmen follows dry and rainy seasons which precipitate availability of grazing grasses and shrubs. Cattle belonging to the members of one family are usually herded together. Such family herders are headed by mature male members of the family.

Fulani men possessing less than twenty (20) cows are seen as poor, while women possessing six or more cows are

considered as a rich woman [2]. Women own most of the small ruminants. Herding is dominated by youths and young adults, while the decisions on the grazing routes and areas are mainly by the elderly family members. The Fulani herders maintain a balanced functional species, composed of beefers, milkers breeders, carriers in the ratio of 4 females to one male [3]. The Fulani herders make excellent use of sign

language, their canes and verbal command to drive the animals. During migration, the herders move in groups and batches consisting of many families along the grazing routes. This group movement serves for their security and protection of their animals.

By the time a group of batches pass a given spot or farm, all the crops/weeds along the route are completely destroyed. This leads to conflicts between the owners of the farm and the herdsmen.

The herding season begins with Southward movement of the herds along rivers and stream-valleys from October to November, marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season. The movement is as a result of the fact that Northern part of Nigeria is characterized by sparse shrubs, grasses and short trees such as Acacia. The nature of the seasonal grasses of the area is that they dry up during dry season due to the dry continental North-East trade wind which originated from the Sahara desert. This added dry continental North-East trade wind increase scarcity of arable land due to droughts, impending desertification of the Sahel-savanna, land degradation and cultural differences among ethnic groups that predominantly farm or graze. December to February is the Harmattan season that

requires more frequent visits to source of water, longer grazing hours for the livestock. During visits to sources of water, the rivers and or the streams which are also sources of drinking water to the host communities could be polluted which leads to conflict. This is because the Fulani herdsmen believe that the streams and rivers are natural and common resources that should be used by all and sundry.

The months of March and April are the most difficult period for the herdsmen and their cattle as the months are the hottest period in the grazing calendar. They herd their animals mainly in the evenings and nights during the two months. May and June mark the beginning of rainy season and vegetation begins to appear. This period marks the commencement of northward movement of herdsmen and their livestock. Some herders have remained in the Southern part of Nigeria, and moved from one state to the other. The moist South-West monsoon wind from the Atlantic Ocean adds to the rainy season that spans from May to mid October. The cattle breeding and more milk production occur in the raining season. Cattle herding in this period coincide with the crop production. Grazing on the crops causes conflicts between the herders and the farmers.

CAUSES OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN HERDSMEN AND HOST COMMUNITIES

Many issues have been identified to cause communal conflicts in communities and local areas. Those

issues that cause communal conflicts include:

- Struggle to acquire land for farming or grazing (economic reason).
- Religious beliefs and interpretations
- The indigeneship question and the attached benefits.
- Inordinate desire and fear of conquest

DROUGHT AND DESERTIFICATION

The two major environmental problems that contribute significantly to the southward movement of the Fulani pastoralists are drought and desertification. [4] Observed that:

“Drought and Desertification are twin global environmental problems. Nigeria is faced with rapid desert encroachment affecting fifteen northernmost states from moderate to severe rate. Out of the 909,890Km² of the country’s land area, about 580,841Km² of the country’s land area accounting for 63.83% of total land is impinged on by desertification. Climatic variability and anthropogenic activities such as deforestation, extensive cultivation, overgrazing, cultivation of marginal land, bush burning, fuel wood extraction, faulty irrigation system and urbanization are major causes of desertification. Drought and desertification impact directly or indirectly on all aspects of human life and all the environment including the ecological, health, geo-chemical, hydrological and socio-economic facets.

The deaths of animals during drought, due to thirst, hunger and exhaustion force the herdsmen to seek pastures elsewhere; hence the continuous southward movement by the Fulani

herdsmen in Nigeria in search of pasture for their animals.”

[5] While commenting on climate change and pastoral conflicts in the Middle Belt and South-East Nigeria, wrote as follows:

“Naturally Fulani by their nature are migrants who leave their traditional abode in search of greener pasture for their flocks. The migration is caused by the absence of good and veritable land for their flock to feed on. For instance, the rate of desertification and deforestation in the Sahara

desert is at an alarming rate and Nigeria is part of the countries of the Sahel region that experiences drought, desertification and deforestation. These triadic challenges mentioned above forced the Fulanis who occupy the area to migrate down south for greener pasture for their cattle to graze. In the course of entering the shores of the southern and middle-belt regions of the country, their cattle cause great damage to farm land, resulting to conflicts and confrontation with the indigenes.”

Attacks by Fulani Herdsmen

Date	Location	Damage Caused
7 th July, 2012	Maseh village in Riyon Local Government Area of Plateau State	About 64 people killed many others wounded including a serving Senator, member of state House of Assembly and millions of farm products destroyed
14 th October, 2012	At Yogbo village near Makurdi in Benue State sixteen (16) villages in Gwer local government near Makurdi were invaded by Fulani herdsmen	Many people killed and others wounded
November 2012	Tiv in Guma local government and Yogbo village in Makurdi. Afijio local government of Oyo state invaded with guns and machetes	About 30 persons were killed
July 2012	Ishi Ozalla in Enugu State was attacked by Fulani herdsmen destroying crops. Women and youths from Imo State barricaded the busy Owerri-Port Harcourt Federal Highway protesting the invasion of their farms in Ohaji/Egbema local government	No death was recorded
May 2012	Yewa North local government area of Ogun State was attacked	Destroyed farm crops and maiming people
April 2016	Nimbo Community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State	About 15 people killed, many lost their limbs while hundreds of people displaced and devastated
4/1/2016	Udeni Ruwa, Nasarawa State	12 - 38 killed
10/1/2016	Agatu, Benue State	45 killed
17/1/2016	Gareji Village, Wukari, Taraba State	3 killed
23/1/2016	Demsare, Wunamokoh, Dikajam and Tabuongo, Adamawa State	30 - 60 (including a Divisional Police Officer)
2/2/2016	Agatu, Benue State	7 killed
7/2/2016	Tom Anyiin, Benue State	10 killed
11/2/2016	Abbi, Uzo-Uwani, Enugu State	2 killed
24-28/2/2016	Agatu, Benue State	300 - 500 maimed or killed
7/3/2016	Logo, Benue State	8 killed
8-17/3/2016	Mbaya-Tombo, Benue State	31 killed
29/3/2016	Ohali-Elu, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, Rivers State	7 - 16 killed
3-4/4/2016	Tarka, Benue State	1 killed
9/4/2016	Ilado, Ondo State	1 killed
10/4/2016	Angai, Dashole, Dori, Mesuma in Gashaka, Taraba State	15 - 44 killed
13/4/2016	Ilara-Mokin, Ifedore, Ondo State	1 killed
18/4/2016	Moor, Kwande, Benue State	18 killed
25/4/2016	Ukpabi Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani, Enugu State	40 - 50 killed
26/4/2016	Obiaruku, Ndokwa, Delta State	8 (declared missing)

Source: 2016 Report on spreading Pastoralists Violence in Nigeria

To ascertain how the herdsmen feel and value their cattle, a Fulani headman

was asked how he feels when he kills a human being in defence of his cattle.

The Fulani herdsman stated thus:

“If you kill three out of five children born by one man; the remaining two can marry and continue the generation of that man if they have cattle. On the other hand, if you kill all the cattle and leave the children, the children will eventually die because of joblessness, starvation and death. This is so because a Fulani herdsman has no car, no land, no money in the bank or any other material possession. So their whole life depends on their cattle” [6]

FINDINGS: EFFECTS OF HERDSMEN-FARMER CLASHES

Clashes/Violence

These clashes between herdsman and farmers force many farmers to flee their homes leading to lack of food security, and economic welfare of urban dwellers that depend on these farmers for food supply.

A global humanitarian organization funded by the British Department for International Development (RDID) called Mercy Crops stated in respect of causes and effects of perennial clashes between herdsman and farmers in Nigeria, thus: The incessant attacks have drastic effects on food security and caused a loss of US \$14 billion in three years (2013 - 2016). In addition, these conflicts thwart the country's economic development to an enormous extent; impede trade practices, destruction of private and public buildings [8].

These crises reinforce vicious circles of extreme poverty and hunger, destroy social status, food security and worsen the plight of the most marginalized groups including women and children. The money that would have been used

for other development activities will be used to manage the crises and feed, clothe and treat the displaced farmers. Issues Raised by the Farmers

The farmers stated that the main cause of herdsman -farmers conflicts include:

- Struggle on the use of arable land for either farming or grazing
- Destruction of farm crops by herdsman livestock.
- Pollution of drinkable water supply.
- Burning of their reserved farm lands in order to get fresh vegetation for their animals.
- Rapping of women by herders.
- Stealing of farmers property

Issues stated by Herdsmen

The herdsman informed the researcher that the main cause of conflict between them and the farmers include:

- Stealing of their cattle, sheep and goats.
- Host communities claim that natural resources like streams and rivers belong to them exclusively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) Tackle Desertification: Desertification that has been increased by deforestation and pastoralism should be restored by government through encouragement of reforestation and irrigational farming.
- (b) Ranching Zone: This has to be established especially in the sparsely populated zones in the North-East and North-West.
- (c) The Proposed Grazing Bill: The Proposed Grazing Bill which seeks to map out grazing routes and establish a National Grazing Reserves Establishment and Development Commission is being supported by mainly the Northerners. Most States in the Southern parts of Nigeria have kicked against the idea of the Grazing Bill. As the issue of Grazing Bill will further divide the country, the proposed bill should be discontinued.
- (d) Government should be sincere, firm and fair in its resolution and implementation of decisions.
- (e) The Committees on community herdsmen welfare must have representatives of the local leadership.

CONCLUSION

The grazing of animals on cattle trails should be greatly reduced in 21st century in order to enthrone an atmosphere of sustainable peace and development in the country. In many nations like India, China and USA with large populations depend on milk and dairy products to minimize hunger, unemployment, malnutrition and promote social harmony. India that produces ten percent (10%) of world milk, rear their cattle within the confines of village Communities and farmers cooperatives. The average milk production per cow in Europe kept under confined padlocks has been reported to be between 40-50 liters per day as compared to the paltry 1-2 litres obtained in Nigerian cow [9]. The India

and European models of rearing cattle within confined communities are suited to Nigeria situation [10].

The above adds to further works of [10] that

- International Modern ranching can be pursued as one of the possible models in areas with lower population densities in the North-East (Sambisa Game Reserve in Borno State) and North-West (Gidan Jaja Grazing Reserve in Zamfara State);
- In order to meet the feeding needs of herds, alternative low water and drought resistant grasses should be produced, in response to the impact of

desertification on fodder production.

- The programme for the country's transition to modern forms of animal husbandry must be accelerated and funded. The national stock would require rapid improvement and modernization to meet market demands for meat, milk, hides and other products from the industry.
- Commercial ranches should be established in some of the

sparingly populated zones in the North-East.

- Efforts should be made towards modeling best practices of pastoral-farmer relations as evident in countries such as Chad, Ethiopia and Niger, where the existence of institutionalized and functional mechanisms for pre-empting and resolving conflicts between farmers and pastoralists enable them to live in peace.

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