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HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CLASHES IN NIGERIA: CASE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a raging battle between Fulani herdsmen and farmers of Nigeria's middle states of Benue, Jos and Taraba. This conflict has mutated drastically so that tourists are discouraged from visiting the different amazing destinations situated in this region. The persistence of farmer-herdsmen conflicts portends grave socioeconomic consequences. Although there is no clear consensus on which group experiences greater hardships, the plight of arable crop farmers, who constitute the bulk of Nigeria's agricultural production population, continues to attract research attention. The paper recommends regular review of stock routes and educational campaigns to increase their awareness and compliance rates among conflict actors. Farmer-herdsmen conflict resolution initiatives should also incorporate a careful consideration of all conflict factors from the perspectives of the actors. The necessity to provide food for crops and animals, as well as raw materials for industries and for export use to meet demand has led to extreme need and use of land by farmers and herdsmen. This leads to a high competition which often times turn into concealed hostilities between these two agricultural land users. The conflict has transcended into insecurity of lives and property and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localised and gradually encroaching on urban areas. This has reverberating repercussions on the country.

Key words: Insurgence, Conflict, Herdsmen, Farmers, Repercussions, Resolutions.

Fulani Herdsmen

They represent a significant component of the Nigerian economy Fulani herdsmen are popular for being cattle rearers which makes it essential for them to navigate their prized cows, from one location to another in search for food and water. This regular search may lead to the invasion of other people's farms. They constitute the major breeders of cattle which supplies the country with a cheap source of animal proteins. 90% of the nation's livestock population are attributed to them. Eniola (2007) has it that: the traditional and unique Fulani encampment (ruga) consisting of temporary structures made of stalks closely knit family members and livestock is the natural habitat of the orthodox fulbe settlement.

The Fulani tribe in Nigeria entirely dominates cattle rearing. Iro (1994) documents vividly the herding system which is a daunting task and contrary to widespread belief is not a delight to the Fulani. This task is not chosen my choice rather a necessity. According to Iro (1994), 75% of nomads sampled, maintained that cattle herding is tiresome and strenuous. The optimum herd size lies between 80 and 100. Cattle belonging to individual family members are usually herded together, with male family members assuming automatic rights to all cattle, making it difficult to determine cattle ownership by female members. It is seen as poverty if a Fulani man boasts of less than twenty cows, while six cows owned by a woman is regarded as an affluence. Herding is mostly dominated by youths, while decisions about grazing are mainly made by the elderly family members. The Fulani herdsmen make excellent use of sign language, the cane and verbal command to drive the animals, with faster animals occupying the front rows. These fast and agile animals may be the ones to cause destruction on the farms they graze. During migration, a typical herd consisting of several family units move in a column of up to five metres wide and about two kilometres long. By the time this group passes any given point, "everything that stands

at that point remains destroyed" (Fricke, 1979). According to Iro (1994), the herding seasons starts with southward movement of the herd and along rivers and stream valleys from October to December -marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season. January to February is the harmattan season that is characterised by longer grazing hours, herd splitting and more frequent visits to stable water sources. Cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production. Herdsmen -farmer conflict therefore becomes prevalent during the period.

The Farmers

The vital role of agriculture in the development of the economies of Third World nations, including Nigeria, is undeniable (Eastwood et al. 2007). Nigeria, with a population of about 200 million people, occupying a land area of 923,773 square kilometres continues to benefit immensely from agricultural production activities. With about 82 million hectares of arable land, out of which only 42% is so far cultivated, agriculture (crop and animal production) contributed between 31.2% and 39.2% of total GDP between 1986 and 1995, and over 40% 1999 and 2006 (National Economic Intelligence Unit 2006). Dwindling economic fortunes, the need to reverse high food importation bills and the ever-increasing demands for food and raw materials continue to exert more pressures on the arable lands which, incidentally, are required by both farmers and cattle herdsmen for their production activities.

Losses from these conflicts are of far-reaching dimensions and implications on both sides. It was reported in a study carried out in Nigeria's Guinea savannah, within which is Kwara State, Fiki and Lee (2004) that out of about 150 households interviewed, 22 reported loss of a whole farm of standing crops, 41 reported losses of livestock, while eight households from both sides reported loss of human lives. In other studies, indications are that stores, barns, residences and household items were destroyed in many of the violent clashes. Serious health hazards are also introduced when cattle are reared to water bodies that serve rural communities. The implications of all these may put question marks on the achievability of the 10 percent growth rate in the agricultural sector being proposed by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Benue State is regarded as the food basket of the nation. It is an agrarian state because of the fertile soil and this makes agriculture very important for their livelihood and survival, and has inevitably attracted Fulani herdsmen to Benue and other Middle belt states. So, the farmers rue the wanton ravaging of their lands as it destroys of their source of livelihood. At the end, it becomes a battle for survival.

Causes of farmer-herdsmen conflict

The causes of farmer-herdsmen conflicts are often not far-fetched. However, there appears to be no consensus among both groups as to the causes of their mutual conflict. According to de Haan (2002).

1. Destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation equipment and infrastructure) by the herdsmen themselves, are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers.
2. The herdsmen cite burning of arable lands and fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment as important direct reasons.

3. The cattle use their hooves to destroy the tender plants which invariably causes stunted growth.
4. The cattle dung damages the crops as the dung is acidic and corrosive when hot.
5. Ingawa, Ega, and Erhabor (1999) reported that the key underlying causes of farmer-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria are: Changing resource 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 favourite 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 crop plots, which makes prevention of animals straying in the crop plots difficult; Inadequacy of grazing resources, as increasing crop cultivation (and increasing commercialization of the crop-residues) and poor management of the existing 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 NFDP (tomatoes and onions) produce almost no crop-residues for livestock feeding. Finally, the regulation that twenty percent of the fadama would need to be set aside for grazing (National Agricultural Policy, 1988) has not been adhered to; and 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 breaking down. This is exacerbated by increased rent seeking of the formal and traditional authorities in managing resource access. De Haan (2002) also noted that antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources.

Another cause of farmer-herdsmen conflicts is increasing rate of cattle theft which, according to de Haan (2002), is often accompanied by violence. Other perceived causes of farmer-herdsmen conflicts include inequitable access to land, diminishing land resources, antagonistic values among user groups, policy contradictions, and non-recognition of rights of indigenous people (Adisa, 2011). Whatever the causes of farmer-herdsmen conflicts are, it is evident that the conflicts have been of great negative effects. These range from economic effects (such as loss of income/resources/yield) to physical (such as home/farm destruction, bodily injury or death of family member) and socio-psychological effects such as emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction (Adisa, 2011a).

The causes and effects of farmer-herdsmen conflict have attracted considerable theoretical and empirical analyses, but conflict actors and victims' coping mechanisms have not received sufficient attention in the literature (Adisa, 2011b). The main thrust of this chapter is to analyse conflict actors' coping strategies and the implications for rural development in Nigeria.

Resolutions

Tackle Desertification

According to research findings a sandy desert occupies about 35 to 40 percent of the land mass of frontline Nigerian States of Borno, Yobe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto and

Kebbi. Over the years, the desert has consumed different parts of the region due to deforestation and pastoralism. This has encouraged many Fulani herdsmen to move from their base in these states, southwards. The middle belt and other parts of Nigeria are bearing the brunt. To forestall this continued migration, the government needs to encourage reforestation and irrigational farming.

Bridge the Indigenes – Settler differences

When the Fulani find themselves in the farmer's territory despite spending decades in the middle belt region, they are still regarded as settlers by the indigenes. This differences should be bridged through regular meetings, social gatherings, festivals and sporting events. This opens window for interdependence among groups in the use of resources available to them

Ranching Zone

This is a key factor the government, herdsmen and farmers have to agree on. A large expanse of land set aside solely for grazing should be declared as ranching zone. This should be established across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It will go a long way in reducing the tension between the farmers and the herdsmen. The government must make herdsmen to keep to agreed routes and farmers avoid farming across them with stern and stringent policies.

Educational intervention

There is need for educational intervention in farmer-herdsmen conflict. This could be achieved by a. creating better awareness of land use regulations among farmers and herdsmen.

b. availing extension personnel with conflict coping mechanisms through attendance of related seminar and conferences. By so doing, extension personnel would be able to teach farmers and herdsmen on conflict coping mechanisms,

c. educating both parties on the need for peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding,

d. the work of extension is not limited to teaching of new techniques, it is also instructive to know the obstacles that could stand in the way of the techniques to be adopted by farmers. It is therefore worthwhile for extension agencies to have units responsible for farmer-herdsmen relations, Education among the two parties should be realistically encouraged. This would not only lead to better perception but also create better opportunity for awareness of realistic coping strategies,

NGOs on farmer-herdsmen conflict

There is need for viable NGOs on farmer-herdsmen conflict management, especially in the areas of awareness, education, prevention, and amelioration. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations should support livestock-centred livelihoods including cattle herding, not only in conflict mitigation but also in the support of grassroots innovations and in influencing favourable national policies.

Conflict management framework

A multi-stage conflict management framework is required to curb the danger posed by farmer-herdsmen conflict. The proposed framework should be statutory committees at community, local, state, and federal government levels. It should also include the relevant occupational unions.

Intervention of Traditional Leaders

Traditional and local leaders should be well involved in finding solutions to farmer herdsman conflict. The committees proposed above must have representatives of the local leadership.

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