

FULANI HERDSMEN CONFLICT, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Nigerian nation has constantly been in a fierce vortex and seemingly boiling cauldron attacks. Nigeria as a state has experienced consecutively series of unwarranted and thinkable bloodshed across many parts of our Nigerian territory as a result of these clashes. Thus, herdsmen attacks on various farming communities in Nigeria have threatened the corporate and health existence of the country, hence the gruesome killings, rape destruction of farm crops and burning of houses and other property etc. thereby leading to conflict. This study therefore analysis the causes, revolution dynamics and solutions to the conflicts emanated from the farmers-herdsmen clashes in Nigeria. The study recommends the effective community policing model, demarcation of livestock grazing reserves, formulation of national livestock development policy, recognition for traditional rulers, forest guilds across all the forests in our lands, and periodical conference meetings of the stakeholders involve (Adebayo & Okpara, 2023). The above will however serve as strategies for ensuring peace, health governance, development as well as social order in Nigeria.

Keywords are: Herdsmen, farmers, local communities, conflict, bloodshed, health and development.

1. Introduction:

The quest to feed livestock of herdsmen necessitates their exodus from their communities due to insufficient pastures to other communities which has led to the trespass of these pastoralists to the farmlands of local farmers and unwanted destruction of their crops, thereby leading to conflict (Nweze, 2023). Nigeria has experienced a series of unthinkable bloodshed in which its earth has claimed the bones of millions of innocent people who lost their lives to preventable clashes. The sun has dried the tears of many helpless and hopeless people who have lost their loved ones and the ground has also gulped the innocent blood of many who perished in various violent movements and wars which have characterized the State. These violence are such as the Niger Delta violence, the Odimassacre, the Zakibiam massacre, the modakeke-Ife war, the Biafran war and the maitatsine religious uprising. According to (Okello & Onuoha, 2022), the Fulani-Birom clashes in Jos, the Shiite group massacre in Zaria, the Bauchi religious

riots, the Boko Haram terrorist activities and the recent Fulani herdsmen terrorist activities are the groups which threatens every socio-economic and religious sectors of the country at large. These actions of violence they asserted, have greatly disrupted the state of peace, health and development in the country.

It is regrettable here that the physical health of some of the masses has been risked and put to danger as a result of the crises. These are caused by dangerous weapons being used at the scene i.e. poisonous arrow and bow, air-pollution as a result of gun shots, including maiming of innocent citizens (Agbiboa, 2023). One should not forget in haste the hypertensive effect and other sicknesses that these violence may result from, hence making things very difficult for those concerned. As a result, it is therefore imperative for the government of Nigeria to act swiftly to ameliorate the conflict to forestall the metastasis of the conflict to full blown terrorism.

2. The Origin of the Fulanis:

The Fulanis, according to (BBC, 2016; Adebani, 2023), are likened to be perhaps the largest semi-nomadic group in the world, possibly found across West Central Africa. In Nigeria particularly, they are in large numbers, some move into the cities while many are still living as semi-nomadic herders. Basically, the nomadic group spend almost all of their lives in the bush; and are known for their pastoralist lifestyle, herding cattle, sheep, and goats. According to Anter (2011), 'Fulanis is an ethnic group who spread over several West African countries, Central Africa and Sudan.' The Fulani people can be found in Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Burkina-Faso, Coted'ivoire, Central Africa Republic, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroun, Ghana, Guinea, Benin, Liberia, Niger and Sudan. The Fulani in Guinea represent the largest population and they are mainly pastoralist agriculturists, whose main occupation is nomadic farming, pastoralism, trading, herding of cattle, sheep and goats. This they do all over the vast hinterland of the place they term to be their domain and in some cases keep away from the local agricultural population (Anter, 2011:12). The socio-cultural, political and religious identity of the Fulani of West and Central Africa can be traced to the eighteenth and nineteenth century Jihad with conquered communities (Hiskett & Niane, 1984:9). In line with Blench, (1999), the Fulani metamorphosed from the Senegambia before spreading out into about 20 states which cut across West Africa and the Sahel as well as Western Sudan and African Republic.

We are aware however that the Fulani are the major providers of milk and meat in Nigeria. Their contribution in terms of dairy and meat industry is glare, and about 90% of the cattle in Nigeria are owned by them, and they offer about 3.2% to Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP). Okello & Onuoha, (2022:3), upholds that it was the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate; colonialism and the introduction of the cattle tax that were the major reasons for the initial dispersal of the Fulani to the Southern part of the country. Mainly, Nigeria has two major seasons: the rainy and the dry seasons. Whenever the rainy season sets, the pastures begin to surface and this is the time when the clashes between

the herdsmen and the people of local communities start to occur due to their trespass into arable lands ,Abass, 2012:8.

3. The Fulani Herdsmen and their Terrorist Activities:

There have been incessant and blood clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and communities for couples of years. These clashes according to Punch, 2016; Vanguard, 2023, have claimed thousands of lives within a period of twenty years. It further observed that in 2014, over 1,200 lives were lost which made this group of people the world's fourth deadliest militant group. Recently, in July, 2025, there was an attack on farmers in Benue State where 300 people according to (BBC), (2016) were reported killed. In April, 2016, another attack in Southern Enugu State claimed about 40 lives and destroyed properties worth millions of naira, leaving thousands fleeing their homes and rendered children orphaned. On the side of farmers seeking defense, some angry youths, local hunters and farmers in some communities in the country have however procured weapons against unprovoked attacks by Fulani herdsmen. These communities have also vowed to stamp out what they have termed to be mindless killings and destruction of their farmlands by rampaging Fulani herdsmen (Nnoli, 2022:4). Recently, hundreds in various States of the federation including Plateau, Adamawa, Benue, Enugu and a lot of other States were reported killed. The more worrisome aspect is that no prosecution has been carried out despite promises by security agencies in the country. It is not out of place to note that these herders are involved in criminal activities as they were found to have invaded some places in Lagelu Local Government of Oyo State and carted away with goods and cash worth N500, 000. The group is said to have grown very destructive such that they obstructed the convoy of the Governor of Imo State, Rochas Okorocha at the State Capital as the Governor was on inspection of state projects (Vanguard, 2023).

Cattle- grazing related violence has been on the increase in Nigeria. According to Olayoku (2020:7), about 615 violent deaths have been confirmed and recorded by the database of Nigerian Watch and there have also been about 61,314 fatalities that can be measured as violent. According to the researchers, in 2008, there were reported cases of 31 cattle conflicts while in 2009, the incident rose to 83 all occurring most primarily in the northern states of the country. In 2010,” it was observed that the prevalence of cattle grazing violence dropped to 39 fatalities with most of the cases taking in the north but sad enough, in the subsequent year, the occurrence hiked to 116 fatalities with the highest occurrence in Plateau State and the most sustained, lasting five days happening in Benue State”, (Olayoku, 2020:5).

The major causes of this conflict has been noted to include the invasion of farmlands by the herders and destruction of farmlands of people of the communities. In the year 2012, Nigeria recorded the highest number of 128 conflicts. According to Joseph (2020:2), about 500 cows were reportedly lost by the Fulani herdsmen. It was reported in Delta State that the armed herdsmen were dressed in uniforms, and when they were

attacked by the local communities led to the display of raping of women and headless bodies. When the military tried to restore peace and order resulted in the killing of another two persons. Meanwhile, the militants who were involved in the conflict used the opportunity to engage in robbery activities.

The Governor of Ekiti State, Ayodele Fayose was reported to have armed local hunters and ordered them to be defensive in any situation where there was an attack from the herdsmen (Sahara Reporters, 2016). In the same vein, a related case happened in Delta State when Hon Evancelvwurie, a Lawmaker from Ethiope Constituency of Delta State led security agents into the forest in the outskirts of Abraka Kingdom which later became a hideout for the herdsmen. It is interesting to know that herdsmen dug a tunnel in order to gain access to attack the community.

There were also conflicting cases in 2013 which about 115 casualties were reported and this has been a continuum. Several communities have become hostile to the pastoralists who have been dubbed a semblance of Boko-Haram insurgents due to their terrorizing nature. In Oke Ako in Ikole Local Government Area of Ekiti State, some suspected herdsmen attacked the town and killed one of the inhabitants (Olakitan, 2016:6). In Uzaar in Tombo, Anyii in Logo and Vase in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State, the herdsmen also attacked killing 8 women and 12 men respectively (Duru, 2020:2). This scenario led to the displacement of about 1,000 people from the localities rendering the homeless. Against this backdrop, it is therefore pertinent that the government of Nigeria should do something to arrest the persistent conflict of communities by the Fulani herdsmen to forestall peace, health and development in these communities and to also boost the friendliness of the Fulani with local residents, as well as ease their pastoral business.

Further Impacts on Health and Safety: Violent encounters between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have resulted in fatalities, injuries, and displacements across various States of Nigeria (Adebayo, 2023). Such conflicts can worsen health outcomes in affected areas. For example, a situation in Oyo State involved suspected Fulani herdsmen in a clash that injured students and teachers (Adebayo, 2023).

Effects on Development and Food Security: Clashes between these groups negatively affect agricultural output and food security. When farmers are displaced or unable to work due to conflicts, food production decreases, thereby affecting livelihoods and community stability (Blench, 2010; Udoh & Akpan, 2019).

4. Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework used to explain this study is The Structural Functionalism Theory. According to Parsons (1957), this theory was the earliest theory of Malinowski (1884-1942) and Redcliffe Brown (1881-1955). The theory posits that the society is an organism with structure and functions. Thus, the society or organism functions based

on derived needs or network of relationships, in order to exist for the good and wellbeing of man (*Sui generis*). So in line to this fact, Malinowski who lived among the natives of Trobriand Island during World War 1 and joined in their cultural activities found that all cultures satisfy the same basic needs or derived needs of their members in order to function well. Some of the basic needs are usually derived needs; for instance, the basic need of food (balanced food diet) is gotten from the production of food. In order to maintain this need, therefore, the society needs a political organization or party that has members at heart with political will to sustain it in terms of health, good governance, social order and development using effective social control mechanisms. For Redcliffe Brown, the structural functionalism theory does not only depend on basic needs or derived needs of the society rather it depends on the network of its relationships to maintain the “body social”. For this to be achieved, the society must have rules to manage the negative social implications or tensions in its institutions such as health institutions, community and security wise. To this effect, the theory implies that, with effective social networks in any society or institution, tension or conflict among people will give way for love, order, unity, health and progress.

Furthermore, Malinowski sees the need for health and development as a major concern in any society. Hence it is the bedrock for better health care for the people. In view of this, his theory explains that when the basic needs work hand in hand with derived needs, for instance, if needs of nutritional food diet work together with the needs of safety and better environment e.g. (herdsmen/communities clashes), there will be ultimate satisfaction of development and health needs in the society like Nigeria. This is more so when the powers that be at rank and file have rules that will help improve the basic/derived needs among members of the society (Nigeria) illness will be reduced, conflict will disappear giving way for peace to reign; development, good governance and social order will generally be accomplished.

5. Strategies to fight against the persistent Fulani Herdsmen & Local Community Conflicts in Nigeria.

The herdsmen – community clashes is something Nigeria cannot afford at the moment. Addressing these conflicts, finding a balance between the needs of pastoralists and farmers is key to mitigating conflicts. Implementing sustainable land use practices and effective conflict resolution strategies could help improve health, development, and food security outcomes in Nigeria.

The country has already lost not less than thousands of lives and property to the Boko-Haram insurgency, while more than a million people have been displaced. Hospitals/facilities have been destroyed including health dangers that this mayhem have caused as its consequence. These adversely affect the human and physical development of the country and invariably make the society sick. So, it is important for Nigeria as a nation to look critically into the conflict before it goes out of hand. According to (Okello et al., 2022; Mohammed, 2022),” to achieve this goal therefore,

Nigeria must ensure that there is the promulgation of the National Livestock Development Policy which will provide guild lines/procedures for livestock resources management”.

The government should also ensure that there is the development of institutional and technological changes which are necessary for the exploitation of the potentials which lie in the livestock sub-sector. This approach will engender research and development of disease control, livestock breed and ways of solving the ecological problems in Nigeria among others. The government should ensure that it consults with the major stakeholders in the livestock sector such as the Maiyatta Allah and other relevant groups. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Federal Ministry of Health are to ensure that it initiates a consultative interaction with these groups.

The government should implement community policing group and forest guild at the grass root that can help to forestall peace and tranquility in the rural areas, since we have shortage in officers and men of the Nigerian Police Force which could be tagged as one of the reasons herdsmen gain access into the communities to attack occupants, (Nigeria Police Force, 2004; Agbiboa, 2023:3). This pragmatic approach was first introduced and launched in 2004 by the Nigerian Police Force, hence it should be consolidated. Furthermore, the government should ensure that there is a demarcation of the grazing reserves to avoid desertification (Abass, 2012:4). The need for the implementation of the demarcation of the grazing reserves will ensure that there is enough grazing land for the herdsmen and will encourage peace and sanity.

There should be a need for a national stakeholders' conference of the herdsmen and community leaders, where adequate peculiarities of the job and measures to eliminate clashes could be discussed (Adebayo, 2023). It should be an avenue where those involved could discuss their grievances and way out. This will allow for mutual understanding among conflicting parties. Again, the traditional institutions in the country should be given recognition and appreciation, this will afford them the opportunity to exercise their authority as grassroots leaders and custodians of culture and value. The recognition will also help them to have a focus on solving issues of their community interest and also paves way for the existence of their community development. Once this is achieved community leaders will know how to manage their community conflicts especially between herdsmen/community occupants.

6. Conclusion:

This study examines the Fulani herdsmen conflict, health and development in Nigeria cum clashes that occur which negate development, health, tranquility, and social order in Nigeria (Nweze, 2023). These conflicts have been on the increase in recent times since in 2016 where several people were killed in Enugu and Benue States with several attacks in the South West and prominently in Ekiti State. The study therefore pointed

out that adequate strategies, policies and programs were not put in place to quench the lingering conflicts between farmers and herdsmen within the country. It was therefore recommended that the government should try as much as possible to implement grazing reserves, law enforcement and socio-cultural dynamics as possible means to curb the violence.

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