

Full Length Research Paper

Farmers/Herders Conflict, Cattle Rustling and Banditry: A Threat to Agricultural Productivity in North Western Nigeria: A Review

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This paper reviewed the sources of farmer's herder's conflict in Northwestern Nigeria. It unveiled the historical background of the cattle fulbe, the fulbe militia groups, recent changes in pastoral migration, areas of civil insecurity in Northwest, cattle rustling and banditry, security agencies responses to security issues in the north, pastoral organizations, social impacts of insecurity and ways of conflict management and resolution for sustained peaceful co-existence in Northwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: Farmers, Herders, Conflict, Cattle rustling, Banditry, Agricultural Productivity

INTRODUCTION

In Northwestern, conflicts between crop-farmers and herdsmen arise from disagreements over the use of land around farmland and/or grazing areas, and stock routes and access to water points for both animals and households. The movement of herdsmen from the far northern states of the country such as Kano, Katsina, Borno, Jigawa, Maiduguri, Bauchi, Kebbi and Zamfara and to the Benue valley is usually caused by the increasing demand for fresh grazing grounds especially during dry season periods; When the herdsmen move with their herds southwards because of the availability of pasture. In most cases, the herdsmen encountered problems with the local people, because farmers' crops are usually destroyed by their cattle (Pinga,

2018). Trouble sparked off when the Fulani herdsmen in search of grazing land destroyed people's crops like guinea corn, cassava, maize, millet and groundnut. These crops were the means of sustenance for the indigenes of the area. The Northern inhabitants were not happy with this development, they therefore retaliated by killing the herdsmen and cattle in their numbers. The herdsmen felt that their source of livelihood too is tampered with and unleashed mayhem on the indigene who were/are the original owners of the land. As a result, people fled from their homes, agricultural and other economic activities came to a halt in the rural areas where atrocities were perpetrated (Ibrahim, 2015). The researchers also observe that there was mass killing,

raping of women, burning of houses, displacement of people, business premises, burning of vehicles and other assets and outright looting and cheating.

Conflicts between crop-farmers and Fulani, herdsmen, cattle rustling and banditry in Northwestern Nigeria have negatively influenced agricultural productivity as the frequent destruction of crops resulted to low yield of agricultural output and sustained hunger and poverty. Awortu (2015) observes that these unending conflicts between crop farmers and herdsmen have drastically reduced government performance in the area of infrastructural development, employment generation and improved workers welfare. This is true as the concentration and current budgetary allocation to security and increased security votes of governments at all levels have affected the allocation to sectors of the economy. The huge capital that should have been channeled to other issues in the education, health, agriculture and other sectors to enhance development are being used to control the conflicts that erupt between crop farmers and herdsmen. Aro (2011) points out that security issues have drastically reduced government developmental projects to agricultural sector, investment and growth in a number of many agricultural farms.

Nigeria, just like other countries of the globe, consider safety of lives and properties of her citizenry most important than any other human need. This is simply because security is one of the necessary conditions for the growth and development of any nation. This is to say that, a secured environment provides a condition of feeling safe from harm, danger or peril and the defense, protection and preservation of core values as well as the absence of threat of any kind (Anyi, 2013).

In recent times however, this very important aspect of protection of lives and properties of the government, as enshrined in the constitution of most countries seem to be under a serious threat not only in African countries, but other countries of the globe due to incessant conflicts between crop-farmers and herdsmen. Generally, conflict is the act of coming into collision, clash or being in opposition with one another. It is also the tension that is experienced when a group of people feel that their needs or desires are likely to be denied or where their language and ethnic values set in (Oluwole 2017). Onsarigo (2007) defines conflict as a condition when one party feels that the other party has frustrated or is about to frustrate certain concerns of that one party. It therefore, implies that conflicts exist whenever an action by one person or a group of persons prevents, obstructs and interferes with the desires of a particular individual or a group of people.

In Nigeria today, there are lots of conflicts that seem to have the potentials of affecting the intended effective achievement of the Nigeria basic needs such as protection of human lives and properties as well as provision of education for all. Some of the conflicts or

security challenging issues that may weigh down the attainment of these basic human needs in a nation may be crop-farmers and herdsmen conflicts, religious crises, youth militancy, communal violence, political assassinations, kidnapping and human trafficking among others (Okosun, 2013). This study focuses on crop-farmers and herdsmen conflicts, which are mainly attributable to resource control and divergent value systems in the country.

Aside dwindling government allocation to agricultural sector, activities of herdsmen in this area may have discourage many investors from investing in the development of agriculture for fear of their money being wasted if attacks are repeated. In the same vein,

The cumulative effects of crop farmers and herdsmen conflicts, cattle rustling, banditry and other security challenges have led to a situation in which expenditure on agriculture has increasingly dwindled over the years. This is occasioned by the pressing need to allocate more funds to security to the detriment of other sectors of the economy.

The narrative of resource conflict is conveniently simple, and has been emerging from both sides.

Typically, it is associated with a religious characterization, Christianity versus Islam. The

Characteristic response has been a corresponding growth in reconciliation and peace meetings, where available figures on both sides of the divide agree to resolve their differences. These processes have been manifestly unsuccessful, and violent incidents continue unabated. The explanation may lie in the fact that quite different conflicts are being played out within the context of the farmer/pastoralist conflicts. The potential wealth of Nigeria is such that both politicians and gangsters are willing to undertake extremely ruthless strategies against their opponents. These can be very effectively disguised by appealing to conventional stereotypes. There is strong evidence that both bandits and the dispossessed of diverse ethnic groups have been manipulated by politicians to serve narrow local interests.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CATTLE FULBE

The Fulbe or Fulani are the main pastoral people in Nigeria, along with the Shuwa Arabs and the Koyam in the northeast. They probably entered what is now Nigeria in the fifteenth century and travelled along the Sahel Belt as far as Lake Chad. During the eighteenth century some groups settled in the towns and effectively became urban residents, perhaps owning cattle but not herding them. They were converted to a more zealous form of Islam, and in 1804, Usman dan Fodio initiated a jihad, which eventually created a series of Islamic

Emirates across North-Central Nigeria and adjacent Cameroun. This was driven by extensive slave-raiding for sale in the markets of North Africa, and much of the Middle Belt became a wasteland at this period. The pastoral Fulbe were not directly involved in the trade, but

CONFLICT ISSUES BETWEEN FARMERS AND CATTLE REARERS

Oral history suggests that the first pastoralists began to cross the Benue around the time of the First World War, i.e. a century ago. Minor clashes have occurred, but the farmers and the pastoralists have as in the Northwest, various groups have been formed by farmers to defend themselves. However, there are also youth organizations which are largely uncontrolled, and which have access to modern weapons in some areas. Among the Hausa people of the North.

These attacks are problematic to interpret. According to the farmers, the Fulbe herders, having lived peaceably beside them for a century, suddenly decided to attack their neighbors in many villages, 'for no reason' leading to the death of many. The destruction of buildings on quite a large scale argues that these attacks were organized and took place over time, which hardly seems characteristic of mobile herders. Similarly, the herders have never returned, suggesting they are as fearful as the farmers.

A much higher percentage of the population is Muslim and Hausa is widely spoken, hence a greater potential to Communicate directly with Fulbe leaders. Moreover, the population is highly ethnically diverse, so the sort of coalition which has been formed against pastoralists in Northwest has never developed there. The human population is also much lower, which creates greater opportunities for the two populations to avoid one another. In addition, the system of Grazing Reserves and cattle tracks still survives in residual form. The main conflict has been between the two farmers and pastoralists.

MEANING OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a relationship involving two or more parties who have, or perceive themselves to have, incompatible interests or goals. It has also been defined as purposeful struggles between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents and to gain status, power, resources, and other scarce values. The purpose of conflict is to gain or retain desired values that are usually believed to be in scarce supply because others own or control them. The values in conflict may be tangible (e.g. territory or resources), or intangible (e.g. power, status, or ultimate truth). An essential

element in social conflict is the belief of one collective actor that another is the obstacle to its having the values that it desires. In order to gain or maintain these desired values, the obstructing group must be removed or neutralized.

Conflicts are a fact of life. They happen whether people want them or not. Conflicts occur when people pursue goals that clash or are incompatible. Conflict involves people's thoughts (ideas), emotions (feelings and perceptions) and actions (behavior). It is quite normal for some people to have different interests from others regarding how to use a resource. When these different interests seem incompatible, a conflict over interests occurs.

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF GRIEVANCES BETWEEN FARMERS AND HERDERS INCLUDE:

- (1) Endogenous population increase of both farmers and herders leading to intensification in resource exploitation and degradation.
- (2) An increase in commercial agriculture and extensive land use over limited land resources.
- (3) Changes in prices and productive potential of land
- (4) Confusion among the three sources of rules: customary rules, official law and land markets;
- (5) Disagreement over arbitration procedures and the legitimacy of the mediating organizations.

THE ARENAS OF CIVIL INSECURITY IN NORTHWEST

Nigeria has significant issues with security in four major arenas, Boko Haram, inter-ethnic conflict in the Central Zone, banditry and competition for territory in the market for drugs and other illegal but profitable resources. The Boko Haram insurgency has received far more attention both within Nigeria and externally than the others, but there is a strong argument that these less-well publicized issues negatively impact on ordinary citizens' lives to a far greater extent. Security issues in other parts of Nigeria can and do affect the situation in regions very remote from the problems. Pastoralists are by definition mobile and their herds are vulnerable, so they inevitably flee conflict areas. Although the Boko Haram insurgency is the major problem for the Nigerian government, trouble on the Jos Plateau has also affected pastoralists. A typical response to attacks on the herds and camps is to move the family unit to a place of safety and to send the herds with young men or hired herders. As a consequence, this reduces control over the herds, and they are more vulnerable to rustling. Alternatively, herders resident in northwest have been concentrating in a few areas for greater safety where the

security services are located and they can come to the aid of one of their number who is attacked. The forces that underlie the growth of conflict between herders and farmers in the North Western Zone have been allowed to develop unchecked due to a weak policy environment. NGOs and CBO scan use advocacy to try and change the situation, but where security issues are involved they have little influence. Nonetheless, they can engage in several key arenas, most notably in-depth regional conflict analysis, forward policy thinking and advocacy for pastoralist-friendly policies. Probably the most difficult conceptual problem is convincing the established farmer blocs that resolving these issues is in their own interest, especially in the new Nigeria that is developing. Non-formal institutions have the freedom to try new technological solutions which government will never implement.

CATTLE-RUSTLING AND BANDITRY

A more general breakdown of law and order has followed the insurgency in the Northwest and this has been manifested by the rise in banditry, cattle-rustling and kidnapping. Especially since 2010, there has been a major expansion of cattle rustling and associated kidnapping, reflecting a combination of youth unemployment, pastoralists who have lost their herds and a lax security environment in Northern states. Given the lack of herding skills among farmers, it is credible that the rustlers consist of gangs which include Fulbe who have lost their cattle in association with thieves, and connect to networks which can transport the stolen livestock the large markets in the south, where they rapidly disappear. Government response has so far been ineffectual, as the rustlers live in remote areas and are hard to catch by conventional means. Nonetheless, the stolen cattle must be fed into the marketing system and transported past checkpoints. If such cattle can move freely, this does not provide confidence that action is being taken. The unchecked growth of this practice, the suspicion that the powerful people behind it are being protected, all adds to the climate of distrust.

PASTORALISTS-FARMERS CONFLICT IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

A further rather remarkable development is the alliance of bandits with unemployed youths within the farming community. For example, Hausa youths will enter a market and pretend to warn the stallholders the Fulbe pastoralists are coming to kill them. The market traders flee and their goods and livestock is looted by this alliance of criminals. After the event, the exact responsibility is hard to determine, and very often this is

taken as further evidence of the maleficent intentions of the herders. The following aggravate conflict between farmers and herders:

Drug use

The use of drugs, both legal and illegal, was often mentioned as a factor in exacerbating conflict. Hard drugs, heroin and cocaine, are rare except in big cities, but marijuana is common, cheap and is locally grown. As a result, there are frequent 'turf wars' between local gangs and the NDLEA (Nigerian Drugs Law Enforcement Agency) in the area, but without intelligence-led policing, this is of limited value. Similarly, legal prescription drugs such as Tramadol, are in common use. Nigeria has no prescription system and once a drug seller has a licence, he or she may sell almost any commercial drug to customers quite legally. Both pastoralists and traditional leaders consider this is an important factor in further exacerbating aggrieved youth. Drug use clearly plays a role in tipping potential conflict situations into actual conflicts.

Increasing access to sophisticated weapons

Weapons are becoming increasingly common on all sides and they are more and more sophisticated. Unlicensed guns are theoretically illegal but are smuggled with impunity from a variety of directions. They are imported into the creeks of the Niger Delta for local use but also sold on to create an income stream. Similarly they can be bought and sold by insurgents in the Northeast, taking advantage of the vacuum in authority created by Boko Haram. The important question is how these purchases are financed, since a semi-automatic weapon would normally be beyond the income of a farmer or herder. For the farmers, there may sometimes be community contributions for local defence, but most of the weapons are apparently supplied by politicians during elections in support of their faction. For example, in the run-up to the election of 2015, youths were supplied with guns as part of a strategy to intimidate opposition voters. Win or lose, the guns remain in the community, and usually in the hands of the same unemployed rootless young men who are around at polling time.

There have been a number of efforts to induce communities to hand in weapons. Government Amnesties have been declared but these are generally ineffective. Unless greater security can be developed, it is unlikely people will divest themselves of the means of defence.

Political manipulation leading to conflicts

The characterization of conflict in Northwestern Nigeria depends on the interest of those expounding the narrative. From the point of view of the elites, it is important to characterize this as a struggle for resource utilization by the farmers and pastoralists. But the evidence suggests that the situation is quite different from this surface appearance. As suggested above, there is little doubt that the attacks are partly funded by political and sectional interests who cloak them in quite different conflicts. Just as politicians in the North fund Islamic extremists in the quest for power.

IMPACTS OF INSECURITY IN NORTHWEST

The high population density of the Northwest and the shortage of land has the consequence that civil disturbances are common, even apart from the pastoral conflicts discussed in this report. Conflicts over land, drugs and politically motivated attacks are described above. Following the major outbreak of violence at different times in different years, many villagers moved to towns to stay with relatives. These can be considered 'hidden IDPS'. Their numbers are hard to gauge, since the state government will not allow the establishment of official IDP camps. However, studies conducted for UNHCR in some LGAs suggest the figure could be as high as half a million. For comparison, the permitted camps outside Maiduguri are thought to shelter some 1.5 million IDPs. Needless to say, the social outcomes are hardly positive. Food shortages and malnutrition are widespread and very often the IDPs depend on family, the churches and informal CSOs rather than the state. At the same time, social breakdown has the consequence of increasing prostitution, and alarmingly, child slavery. Children may be sold to suspect employers with the knowledge of the parents, who believe, or pretend to believe, their unrealistic promises. In other cases, children are simply lured away. Girls become house servants and child brides and boys are put to work on remote farms, with no access to mobile phones.

ROLES OF SECURITY AGENCIES TO SECURITY ISSUES IN NORTHWEST

Police

Given that these episodes involve loss of life and property, it might be thought that the Nigerian Government would have a role in keeping order and the prevention of further episodes. By and large, the police play little or no role in security incidents, and the army is called in directly. This can be a risky strategy, as the

army are not trained to deal with civilian incidents and their current concerns are events in the northeast.

Army

The Nigerian army has been much occupied in the northeast in recent years although it keeps a small presence throughout the country. In recent times, however, they have been called both to conflicts in the Middle Belt, North west and North east to resolve pre and post-conflict issues. There was a general consensus in interviews that the situation has much improved, at least in terms of response time, since the government of Present Buhari took over. However, it was also noted that the skills of local commanders were extremely variable, some being much more adapted than others at peace building.

Vigilantes

One of the responses to the increased insecurity has been the formation of vigilante groups. These are informal groups, often including hunters, armed with a variety of mostly antiquated weapons. Members are mostly voluntary and paid only by community contributions, and although in some places Local Government contributes to their costs. Increasingly, they are formalizing their status with offices and uniforms. In areas where armed robbers and criminals operate, vigilante checkpoints are extremely common. In the long run they are dangerous to peace, since they tend to be armed and consist of younger men.

Informal sector

Nigeria has a relatively poorly developed civil society sector, and the various churches and Mosques thus play an important role. Much of the social justice and economic development is effectively the responsibility of external funders. Since the government system for assistance to IDPs is extremely weak, the churches and Mosques have played an important role in providing food and health-care. Individual projects have focused on mediation skills and workshops for reconciliation. However, they are based on assumptions which are not necessarily founded on an in-depth analysis.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

The following agencies have played and will continue to play significant roles in conflict management and resolution:

The role of the church and Mosque in Conflict resolution

The role of the church and the Mosque should presumably be to encourage peace and reconciliation and to diffuse a tolerant view of different belief systems in the interests of their congregations. This is not necessarily how the issue is seen in Nigeria. Indeed some churches and Mosques take a strong view that their role is the reverse, it is rather to defeat the 'enemy', who are characterized as terrorists adorning the church and the mosque in Zamfara State and adopted from the internet and certainly not in Nigeria suggests attitudes which are all too common. Worryingly, even bodies which do not propagate these views are not necessarily willing to condemn them. The church, and Mosque irrespective of denomination and sect is an influential voice in Zamfara State. If it is not seen to condemn this type of hate-speech, no resolution is possible. The Nigerian churches and Mosques are typically very hierarchical and the bishops, archbishops and Imams are at the top of the tree of authority in conflict resolution and management of communal farmers and herder's disputes. It is therefore essential to ensure that the hierarchy of the churches and Mosques be in broad agreement with the strategies proposed for total reconciliation of the conflicts.

Policy and advocacy for Regional solutions to conflict Issues

As this report emphasizes, the mobility of pastoralists is such that this is a regional issue. Fulbe Herders typically move between grazing areas, regardless of administrative boundaries, and the rise of instability has further accelerated this trend. Fulbe also split their herds and families, so that part of the herd may be in one state, while the young men are with the larger group of animals some whereelse. In recent times, the mobile phone has become an indispensable tool in coordinating these dispersed activities. Any effective solution to the issues outlined in this report will therefore depend on the development of a more regional perspective, not confined to the boundaries of diocese, province or state.

The widespread belief in 'ranches'

Politicians are not livestock producers, but this does not prevent them from pronouncing on strategies for animal management. Ranches have a long and entirely unsuccessful history in Nigeria and there is no reason to consider this will change. However, suddenly, perhaps as a result of glimpses of intensive farms in Europe or ranches in Uruguay, this has become the preferred solution. Numerous researches, discusses on

the social media platforms, economic and infrastructural requirements for any type of ranching to succeed, and concludes these conditions are not met in Nigeria. This suggests a rather costly failure is the likely outcome. The argument will not be repeated here, but a discussion of the legislative situation is appropriate. Individual states, playing to public opinion, have been discussing restrictive solutions to what they perceive as the 'herder problem'. These consist mainly of prohibiting open grazing and authorizing vigilantes and other barely-controlled groups to shoot or 'arrest' cattle they perceive to be roaming.

The importance of information and Communication in Conflict Resolution

Both farmers and pastoralists entertain wrong information about one another and tend to propose highly impractical solutions to current problems. Most typical are plaintive comments that we should return to the former period of collaboration, co-operation and peace. Such days will never return and only realism is a practical response for fixing the problems. In addition, rumours and false accusations have a tendency to circulate rapidly, exacerbating distrust between people of the State. There seems little doubt that insurgents and bandits play on this by using what must be quite exaggerated versions of Fulbe dress to give the impression the herders are the attackers. Government plays no role in correcting this unchecked propaganda. It is therefore of

Considerable importance to use whatever media is most effective in countering some of the more

Exaggerated claims. Nigeria is a quite connected society, where the internet and smartphones play a role in social interaction among urban populations. However, this technology is almost useless in rural areas, where the problems recur. Radio is the only way to reach such populations, and that broadcasts must be in the vernacular, and in a style that convinces hearers of the sympathy of the speaker. Peace building organizations have so far made little use of this cheap and effective method of countering false assertions.

The potentials of radio as a tool for conflict management

One solution that has been so far little explored is the use of radio. Nigeria has a lively broadcasting scene, and recent trends have been to include more and more languages, both on Federal, State and private stations. In Ekiti State, the JDP has already begun broadcasting in Yoruba, although so far on non-controversial topics. Reaching rural populations is most effectively achieved through radio and television and the internet are still rare in many areas. The proposal to

make radio programmes in different state languages is widely acceptable.

The role of the mobile phone in conflict resolution

Mobile phones began to be widespread in Nigeria from 2005 onwards, and they remain relatively cheap and practical, with good national coverage. Smartphones are common in urban areas, and Nigerians are enthusiastic adherents of social media. However, in rural areas, perhaps surprisingly, a lack of literacy among both herders and farmers has meant that the importance of mobile phones is restricted to voice calls. Even so, access to a phone now plays an important role in herders' lives. The primary use of the phone is for information concerning grazing and water, something individuals previously would travel long distances to find out. Market prices are an important secondary use, since Fulbe economy depends on the sale of small stock for meat. The potential of the smartphone for circulating security information as well as correcting exaggerated claims in the media, as well as linking together pastoral leaders in widely dispersed places has yet to be realized.

Internet presence towards ameliorating conflict issues

Despite the importance of the internet in spreading ideas in Nigeria, the JDP system has no internet presence. This is indicative of the passive approach taken to the goals of the organization. It is recommended that each JDP has a website and training sufficient to update it with current activities. Ideally, each body would also have a Facebook page and would be able to promote actions and policies as well as responding to the queries of the public and outside organizations. At present the paradox is that organizations with a mission for advocacy and social change have precisely no tools to achieve these goals.

Analytic versus narrative reporting role in peace-building

Long-term solutions require effective analysis and this is often sorely lacking in Nigeria. There is a general assumption that conflict resolution and peace-building are desirable and they have accumulated considerable resources. But the continuing violence argues that they are only temporary solutions. Reporting in Nigeria is usually narrative; suitable for agriculture but of limited value in a humanitarian situation. Unless reports dig down to the drivers of conflict, proposed solutions are of no proven value. It is better to try and prevent future conflict than simply to keep on trying to patch up the situation after the event.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review, it was established that conflicts between crop-farmers and herdsman have significant effect on agricultural productivity in Zamfara State. The unending conflicts between crop-farmers and herdsman, cattle rustling and banditry in this part of the country have not only led to dislodging the affected communities, but have also discouraged International Agencies from contributing their quarter to the development of agriculture as well as investing in other sectors of the economy. Thus, if the situation is not arrested on time, can have the tenacity of tarnishing the image of Zamfara and Nigeria at the international community. These conflicts, cattle rustling and banditry issues undermined agricultural productivity and economic growth by destroying the productive segment of the society. The worst part is that many farmers in the affected villages in Zamfara State have failed to produce crops and animals during this calamity periods. These farmers-pastoralists clashes also forces rural inhabitants to relocate to places that are safer from the crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review, it is recommended that:

1. Government should beef up security in Northwest and off course the country at large in order to reduce the level of insecurity in the state and ensure safety of lives and properties to encourage internal and international investors in contributing their quarter in funding and investing in agriculture in Nigeria.
2. Religious leaders should organize and carry out sensitization campaigns to discourage farmers/herders crisis. This will assist in reducing these barbaric acts of destroying farmer's crops by herd's men and encourage farmers and cattle fulbe to see themselves as a family.
3. Community leaders should collaborate with the security agencies to flush out the invaders/bandits and also protect the investors and their investments in the area.
4. The Federal Government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency, use all security apparatus as to ensure the immediate implementation of the Open grazing prohibition law in Zamfara State and other parts of the country to stop the incessant killings and destruction of lives and property.
5. The Federal Government of Nigeria, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and indeed wealthy individuals should embark on reconstruction of buildings and other infrastructures destroyed in the affected villages of the state. This will encourage the people to produce more crops and rear more animals.
6. Empowerment of the internally displaced persons through such means as asset ownership and access to

credit facilities. This will assist them to be productive and create wealth through the multiplier effect. The gains from their agribusinesses can be used for improved standard of living.

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