

Herdsmen/Farmers Conflict And Food Security In Nigeria: A Commentary

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Abstract: The discourse on herdsmen and farmers conflict in contemporary Nigeria has largely been done without giving adequate emphasis on its implication on food security. The major crisis that may escalate in the near future as a result of these conflicts is food production and the security of lives and property. This paper used the structural conflict theory to explain the herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria as it relates to food security. The paper argues that the role of corrupt traditional leaders and their dwindling influence on their subjects, increased desperation of herdsmen competing for local resources, political tension being created by different forces and grazing land as being responsible for the continuous conflict by these groups even at sophisticated level. This paper holds the strong view that. Creating ranching zone with adequate consultation with local communities and tackling desertification through deforestation and irrigation should be encouraged across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. A strong political will from governments at different level is fundamental to resolving the herdsmen/farmers conflicts across the country.

Keywords: Conflict, Herdsmen, Farmers, Food Security.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts between herdsmen and local farmers in different parts of Nigeria has existed for many decades and the rudiments of the causes and effects of these violence remained significantly different and varies from one community to another. Conflict is an inevitable characteristic in every human society. In fact, it is a natural character of mankind resulting from interactions between people, groups and even communities. Isard (1992) sees conflict as a phenomenon that is an important part of human existence, while (Weeks, 1992), posit it as a natural part of our daily lives. In the thinking and works of classical social theories such as Marx and Comte to Simmler and Sorrel, social conflict, whether on a small or large scale, whether resulting from interactions between social groups or caused by external factors, have been an issues of concern. It is always difficult to point out a single factor as being responsible for conflict to occur. For order to be maintained within a society, it is very difficult to point to a

single explanation as the causes of conflicts. In the case where a conflict has degenerated to the point of crisis, it is common that those involved will even find it difficult to remember what led to the initial disagreement (Best, 2006).

Herdsmen – historically are pastoralists or nomadic or semi-nomadic Fulani whose primary occupation is raising livestock for different purposes. The pure Fulani pastoralist engages in random migration of cattle while the semi-nomadic makes transhumance movement and return to their camps or homes. The herdsmen are predominantly found in the arid and Sahel part of West Africa, but due to changes in climate pattern and the limited amount of land for agriculture, many herdsmen moved further into the savannah and tropical rain forest belt of Nigeria and other part of Africa. The herdsmen are found in countries such as Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroun etc.

In Nigeria they inhabit the North east, North West, North central parts and due to the push factor, most of them are

spatially found in South-South, South-East, and South-West part of the country. The livestock supplied by the herdsmen provide a bulk of the beef consumption, as well as form part of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the country.

Farmers – engages in the cultivation of land for crop production and raising living organisms for food or raw materials. The term usually denotes people who do some combination of raising field crops, orchards, vineyard, poultry, and other livestock. Farmers in Nigeria are mostly peasant farmers whose pre-occupation is to cultivate small piece of land in order to provide food for their immediate families and little for sales. This occupation has been negatively affected by the activities of herdsmen in many part of the country.

Food insecurity – this exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the application of the family level, with individuals with households as the focus of concern (Clay, 2002).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural Conflict Theory was advanced to explain the herdsmen and farmers in a society. This theory has two main sub-orientations. The first is the radical structural theory represented by the Marxist dialectical school with exponents like Marx and Engels, V. I. Lenin, etc. The second is liberal structuralism represented by Ross (1993), Scarborough (1998) and the famous work of Jahan Galting (1990) on structural violence. In the same light, similar to transformative theory, which addresses the reactions of individual, groups, culture, institutions and societies to change. In relation that sees incompatible interests based on competition for resources, which in most cases are assumed to be scarce, as being responsible for social conflicts, (Cotlier, 2002). Marxists materialism presented conflicts as mostly tied to economic structures and social institutions. The main argument of the structural conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. Theory looks at social problems like political, economic, injustice, poverty, diseases, exploitation, inequity, inequality etc, as sources of conflict. Structuralist maintain that conflicts occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies, domination of one class by others, etc.

Nonetheless, because of increase in population growth coupled with limited amount of land for agricultural purposes and grazing routes, which results in competition and conflict among the herdsmen and farmers which now has serious consequences on food security in Nigeria.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HERDSMAN AND FARMERS IN NIGERIA

For so many years, as Okoli & Atelhe (2013) argues, the relationship between farmers and herdsmen was that of collaboration and one can imagine that the relationship between herdsmen and farmers have been cordially good. And

both have jointly contributed for food security in Nigeria. However, between 1980s and 2017, there has been an unprecedented frequently acceleration of conflicts incidents which can be attributed to some economic, political and socio-cultural and religion factors. These are enumerated as follows;

- ✓ Movement of herdsmen into new grazing area, where culture, language, belief, religion, land tenure system are not familiar.
- ✓ The increased desperation of herdsmen competing for an area stock of grazing land.
- ✓ Overthrowing of power in local government administration by native farming people who do not favour herdsmen interests.
- ✓ Political leaders who tend to benefit from security vote of areas associated with herdsmen and farmers conflicts.
- ✓ The continuous availability of guns and other weapons combined with a general breakdown of law and order trigger conflicts between herdsmen and farmer as its always reported in national news papers, but no proactive major has been taken by government to analyze and curbed the cause of these conflicts.
- ✓ Corrupt traditional leaders have been the cause of the conflict. Many a time they receive bribe from herdsmen and allow them to enter into their villages. We also found the same village leaders connive with farmers and police officers in arresting herdsmen who have trespassed in the farmers crops. This scenario worsen the condition of herdsmen. And later create enmity between farmers and herdsmen.
- ✓ The activities of cattle rustler always result to a reprisal attack on the local farmers. The combination of all these factors resulted into food insecurity in Nigeria.

IV. REVIEWING SOME CASES OF HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Contemporary studies and statistics have shown that the spread of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers is not restricted to a particular part of the country alone; rather it has become national issue that has affected every geopolitical zone in Nigeria. A touch on each zone will give a better understanding.

NORTH CENTRAL

The bulk of these incidents have been in the middle-belt. The reason being that most of the communities particularly in Nassarawa and Benue states survive on farming. However, all the states in this zone have experienced on form of attack or the other resulting to poor food production. For instance, the Agatu in Benue and Fulani herdsmen conflict have degenerated to mass movement of people from their original homes abandoning their farming activities. Similar circumstances is witnessed in Nasarawa state, Benue, Niger State and Plateau States where major incidences are abound as is the cases in Eggons, Tius, Alago, Riyon, Barkin Ladi, Mangu, Jos North, Jos South, Bassa, Guman, Logo and Gwar West communities. The implication of these conflicts in all these communities is that economic activities including the

production of food is often threatened resulting to wide spread hunger and malnutrition, Atelhe (2013)

NORTH EAST

Morgen (2016) have posited that conflict which is associated with limited access to local resources is not normally restricted to a certain area. This is because as the competition scares resources continue to grow, the tendency is that there will be mobility and migration. For instance again, in the North East, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers have grounded certain economic activities. In April, 2016, about 44 people were said to have been killed in Angeri, Dashole, Dori and Mesuma villages, Gashaka L.G.A of Taraba State. Similar attacks were observed in Fufore, Girei, Demsa, Numan, Lamurde, Yola South, Suyuk of Adamawa State.

NORTH WEST AND SOUTH EAST

More so, the North West are of the recent hit of the herdsmen attack, this incident occur in Southern Kaduna part of Kaduna State in January, 2017.

The blood these herdsmen have shed as well as the sorrow and tears they have brought to the rest communities are no longer news. In Abia State, three local government areas where mainly affected by their activities are Umunneochi, Beride, Obiafia and Abbi in Enugu State are cut up with herdsmen attack.

SOUTH WEST AND SOUTH – SOUTH

The menace of the herdsmen passes across Akoko, South West, North East, and North West of Ondo State. The tropical rainforest where not also left out of the herdsmen attacks. States such as Bayelsa, Cross River, Rivers and Akwa Ibom have been attacked by herdsmen in communities where people are predominantly farmers.

A summary of cases of herdsmen attack in Nigeria is shown below:

- ✓ January, 4th 2016 – between 12 and 38 dead in Udeni Ruaw, Nasarawa State.
- ✓ January, 10th 2016 – up to 45 dead in Agatu, Benue State.
- ✓ January, 17th 2016 – 3 herdsmen dead, killed cattle rustlers in Ganey village, Wakari LGA, Taraba State.
- ✓ January, 23rd 2016 – 30 to 60 people killed, including a police, DPO in Demsa, Wunamokoh, Dikajam and Toboungo, in Adamawa state.
- ✓ February 23rd 2016 – 7 dead in Agatu, Benue State.
- ✓ February 7th 2016 – 10 dead in Tom Anyim, Benue State.
- ✓ February 11th 2016 – 2 killed in Abbi, Enugu state.
- ✓ February 24th 2016 – between 300-500 killed in Agatu, Benue State.
- ✓ February 28th 2016 – 9 killed in Agatu, Benue State.
- ✓ March, 7th 2016 – 8 killed in Logo, Benue State.
- ✓ March, 17th 2016 – 12 killed in Mbaya, Tombo, Burutu, Benue State.
- ✓ March 17th 2016 – 15 killed in Tombo, Buruku L.G.A, Benue State.
- ✓ March, 29th, 2016 – between 7-16 killed in Ohali-Elu, Ogbo-Egbema – Ndomi L.G.A River State.

- ✓ April 23rd and 4th, 2016 – An Ape Chieftaincy killed in Tarka Benue State leading to mass protest.
- ✓ April, 9th 2016 – Former SGF, Olu Falae Farm attacked, security guard killed, Ilado Ondo State.
- ✓ April 10th 2016 – between 15 and 44 killed in Angai, Dashole, Dori and Mesuma Villages, Gashaka L.G.A, Taraba State.
- ✓ April 13th 2016 – Herdsmen killed in reprisal attack in Illeremokin, Ifedore LGA, Ondo state.
- ✓ April 18th 2016 – 18 killed in Moor, Kwande LGA, Benue State.
- ✓ April, 25th 2016 – at least 20 killed in Ukpabi Nimbo, U30 Uwani LGA, Enugu State.
- ✓ April, 26th 2016 – 8 people missing in Obiaruku, Ndokwa, Delta State.
- ✓ January, 3rd 2017 – herdsmen attack in Southern Kaduna, Kaduna State.
- ✓ April, 2016 – herdsmen attack in Odukpani LGA, Cross River State, Morgen (2016) & compiled by the authors)

The herdsmen and farmers have a negative implication on food security in Nigeria. The killings and destruction of farm land, crops, animal etc has drastically affected food supply within and outside Nigeria. Nigerians minister of Agriculture lamented the high level of food importation into Nigeria which he attributed to the conflict in agrarian communities, THISDAY NEWSPAPER (2016). It is important to state that the mutual and cordial relationship between the two parties in the conflict has greatly impacted on food security in the past especially food for immediate consumption. But such contributions have been jeopardized because of series of conflict between the herdsmen and the farmers. These have led to recent food insecurity and massive importation of consumable products in the country.

V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONFLICT ON SOCIETY

The herdsmen and farmers conflict are generally considered as a negative phenomenon which often led to loss of many lives and properties which invariably impact negatively on the Nigeria political system.

In addition to that, probable link to reduction in production was inadequate food for the family. According to Goodhead (2001), one of the most devastating effects of war or conflicts is scarcity of food item which often led to poverty and disease. These were also attributed to the cause of the recent economic recession in Nigeria.

Furthermore, transportation is crucial in aspect of food production, processing and marketing of agricultural products and therefore, whatever affects it would have a shortfall on the general outcome of production process (Collier, 1999). Thus, the increase in its price must have contributed to the lower income of the farmers in conflicts areas.

More so, herdsmen and farmers conflict have the resultant effect on education. Many children dropped out of school, because of the aftermath of lost breadwinner and reduction of income of the farmer farming business during the study. The drop out in school incidence would invariably bring back education statuses backward and later increase social crime in the communities.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the various issue of herdsmen and farmers conflict with particular focus on its implications on food security in Nigeria.

The increasing statistics of violence association with herdsmen and famers conflict in Nigeria is attributed to the increased desperation of herdsmen and farmers competing for both farming and grazing, and practices of corrupt political and traditional leaders who tend to benefit more from the conflict.

The continuous availability of guns and other weapons combined with a general breakdown of law and order trigger conflicts between herdsmen and farmers in some quarters. The activities of cattle rustlers always lead to reprisal attacks on farmers of such an area.

Be that at it may, one of the most fundamental objective of policy makers is to ensure the establishment of ranching zone. A large expanse of land set aside primarily for grazing should be declared as ranching zone. This should be made available across the size geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It will go a long way in resolving the herdsmen and farmers conflicts in the country.

Furthermore, tackling desertification through reforestation and irrigation farming should be encouraged. Over the years the desert has consumed many states such as Borno, Yobe, Kebbi, Bauchi, Sokoto, Adamawa, Zamfara, Jigawa and Taraba due to deforestation and pastoratism. This has encouraged many herdsmen to move upwards to the middle-belt and southern parts of Nigeria. To Forestall this continued movement, the stake holders at different levels needs to encourage reforestation and irrigation farming in the desert-prone states.

Also, there is need for bridging the dichotomy between indigene and settlers by the indigenous farmers.

This differences should be bridged through regular meetings, festivals, social gatherings and sporting events among the herdsmen and the local farmers.

In addition to that, there should be strengthening of governmental institutions for combating the proliferation of light and small arms through effective border management and internal policing.

Lastly, the fight against corruption should also be applied both political and traditional leaders who tend to benefit from the security vote has to be checkmated.

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