

DRIVERS OF FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICTS IN BENUE AND NASARAWA STATES, NIGERIA

Ahmed Usman (PhD)

Department of Political Science
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
Email:uthmaan01@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study examines the major causes of the Fulani-Agatu conflict in Benue and Nasarawa states. The study utilized Environmental Scarcity Theory as the framework of analysis. A survey research design was adopted where 390 questionnaires were administered across ten (10) council wards in three Local Governments Areas of Benue and Nasarawa States respectively: Agatu (Benue); Nasarawa (Nasarawa); and Doma (Nasarawa). Fifteen (15) key informant interviews and three (3) focus group discussion sessions in Obagaji, Loko and Udeni-Magaji. Quantitative data were analyzed through frequency counts and simple percentages; while qualitative data were content analyzed. Findings of the study identified disappearance of demarcated cattle stock routes; farm encroachment; population increase; and proliferation of sophisticated modern weapons as major drivers of farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Benue and Nasarawa States. Consequently, the study recommends that, the federal Government in collaboration with state governments needs to revive the erstwhile grazing reserves system with improvements for permanent settlements of the Fulani Pastoralists. Also, there is the need for the establishment of ranches by the respective state governments and stringent measures restraining illegal possession of arms by individual need to be urgently put in place by both the federal and state governments.

Keywords: Farmers, Herdsmen, Conflict, Grazing Reserves, National Security

Introduction

The phenomenon of Farmers-Herdsmen conflicts in Sub-Saharan African countries has indeed becomes an issue of major concern. The incidence has in recent times becomes so pervasive and indeed ubiquitous to the extent that, it is taking newer and of cause very dangerous dimensions tilted towards political and religious spheres. Thus, the conflict which majorly involves the two principal land resource users has historically been in existence for long, but its prevalence was not pronounced largely due to the low pressure on land resources. However, historical documentations have shown that, the two groups had hitherto co-habited and co-existed in all

manners of mutuality and complementarities. For instance, Fulanis and Beromes had lived side-by-side in Plateau State with symbiotic relationship for over 200 years. The cattle manure, meat, cheese, milk and other dairy products were provided by the pastoralists while the Beroms allow them to settle for a while on their farm lands. Also, the cattle were to be grazed only in permitted areas and never on farm crops. The relationship became so welcoming that the male children from Berome extraction were offered to the Fulanis to graze for them for a period after which they were paid in kind with a calf or two. Several Vom, Kuru and Fan farmers are now cattle owners and cattle rearers in their own right. One could say Fulanis and Beroms have actually become cousins (Pam, 2016).

More so, the nomadic pastoralists had equally lived side by side the farmers in Jada and Biu areas of the north-eastern Nigeria in the present day Adamawa and Borno States respectively where both of the groups interacted and benefited greatly from each other (NAK/MAHFR, 1958). Idowu (2017) states that historically, the relationship between these two groups of resource users was previously symbiotic in nature which usually promotes interdependence and reciprocity. This was demonstrated by Mboro Herders and Gbaya Farmers in the Adamawa province in which gifts and items were exchanged among members of the two groups for many years of coexistence. However, with the gradual increasing pressure on land resources occasioned by the increased population manifesting today in the increasing farming and grazing activities, the competition between the two groups ultimately becomes the order of the day. It is also important to mention that, besides the increased population, also changes in climatic conditions immensely contributed to the present face-off between the farmers and Fulani herdsmen particularly in the North-Central Nigeria. Thus, Evidence to this were the several studies such as Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017); Gambari et'al (2018); ASUU (2018); Bashir (2018) which revealed that environmental degradation in the Sahelian states of the northern Nigeria provided an impetus for the southward migration of the large chunk of Fulani herders to the North-Central Nigeria. Hence, this high influx of the nomadic fulanis in North-Central Nigeria is by and large attributed to the incessant deadly clashes between the farmers and herdsmen in the region.

According to the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017), out of the reported 389 incidents of herders and farmers conflict in Nigeria from 1997 to 2015, 371 had occurred in the north-central Nigeria. Corroborating the above assertion, the Human Rights Watch Report (2015), maintains that the recurring violence in the North-Central States of Nigeria since 2010 has resulted in the death of more than 4,000 people and the displacement of more than 120, 000 residents. It is imperative to mention here that Agatu community is strategically located with abundant land resources such as

grass land, fadama and waters. This therefore, has historically attracted the nomadic Fulani pastoralists who were forced out of their traditional ecological zones by the harsh weather conditions that bedeviled the sahelian belt of the northern Nigeria. Indeed, history has it that for many decades there had been peaceful co-existence between Fulani pastoralists and the indigenous Agatu who are predominantly farmers and Fishermen including other ethnic groups living in the areas. Godwin (2016) maintains that the Agatu and Fulani people had lived together in peace for years.

However, for some reasons, the two groups have in recent years engaged in fierce fighting and squabbles with the Agatu farmers mainly complaining of destruction of crops and plants, major source of water, pollution of drinking water, ponds and fishery resources by the Fulani herdsmen. The Fulani herdsmen on their part have grudged that the Agatu farmers were responsible for large scale killings of their cattle. In specific terms, according to Agatu version of the story, the conflict originated in 1986 following a claim of destruction of farm land belonging to an Agatu man by a Fulani herdsmen (NAN, 2016). It is therefore against this backdrop that, the study painstakingly reviews and examines the major drivers of the lingering conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and Agatu farming communities in Benue and Nasarawa states.

Pastoralism and Sedentary Agriculture in Northern Nigeria

The origins of pastoralism can be traced back to the Neolithic period in Southwest Asia and Anatolia, when the domestication of livestock transformed animal economies from those based on hunting to those on animal husbandry. This transformative process has long been a focus of archaeological attention, and recent research has resulted in an increasingly fine-grained picture of the development of the earliest economic systems exploiting sheep, goats, cattle and pigs (Noah, 2018). According to Abbas (2018) Pastoralism is a pattern and branch of subsistent agricultural economics and activity that deals with raising of domesticated livestock, especially by the Fulani nomadic pastoralists, as a way of life. That the emergence of nomadic pastoralism, as a continuous movements with animals that require pasture; in search of essential resources such as water and forage, may have been due to occasional or seasonal harshness of the dry grass plain of the savannah. However, in Nigeria, it is generally acceptable and widely believed that nomadic pastoralism is a feature that is commonly associated with Fulani ethnic group.

Nomadic pastoralism therefore is a form of pastoralism where livestock are herded in order to find fresh pastures on which to graze (Noah, 2018). The subject matter is often dominated almost entirely by the Fulani in Nigeria considering the numbers of herds of cattle owned by the Fulani

compare with others ethnic groups doing similar activities. This means that it is not only Fulani that engages in nomadic pastoralism but there are other groups as already mentioned earlier. Corroborating the dominance and domineering factor of Fulani in nomadic pastoralism in Nigeria, Blench (2004) states that:

Most of the livestock in Nigeria is kept by herders or pastoralists belonging to particular ethnic groups. The most well-known are the Fulani, but there are also Shuwa, Uled Suleiman and Koyam in the North-east. These are often referred to as nomads in Nigeria, but in fact many of them have permanent homes.

Still on the engagement of Fulani in pastoralism, the International Crisis Group (2017, p.6) stated that:

Over 90 per cent of pastoralists reportedly are Fulani, a large ethnic group straddling several West and Central African countries. Pastoralists own approximately 90 per cent of the national herd, estimated at 19.5 million cattle, about 975,000 donkeys, 28,000 camels, 72.5 million goats and 41.3 million sheep. Livestock represents between 20 and 30 per cent of total agricultural production and about 6 to 8 per cent of overall Gross Domestic Production (GDP).

According to Adisa (2012), herding or pastoralism is a daunting task, and contrary to widespread belief, it is not the delight of the Fulani- they herd not as a matter of choice but as a necessity. That about 75% of the sampled nomadic pastoralists maintained that cattle herding is not only toilsome, but also becoming increasingly strenuous.

The major form of nomadic pastoralism in northern Nigeria is generally referred to as transhumance. This therefore involves a seasonal movement of cattle, sheep, goats, rams, and donkeys within or between the eco-regions primarily in search of fodder and water. In a more elaborate and detailed fashion, Gefu (2018) maintains that:

Transhumance is a major feature of pastoral production. Over 90% of Nigeria's ruminant population is kept under this production system. This production strategy has been occasioned by the seasonal alteration in the availability of fodder and water as well as the avoidance of diseases including trypanosomosis in the high-risk areas where otherwise fodder and water abound. The system involves the grazing of animals over varying distances, depending on availability of water, fodder and security of lives and property. Transhumance may be between or within agro-ecological zones. Where dry season grazing is available short distance transhumance is practiced. Otherwise, pastoralists embark upon long distance transhumance. This may involve traversing several ecological zones and national boundaries in search of pasture and water.

Nigeria is typically an agrarian society particularly the northern Nigeria considering its vast land resources. Of course, northern Nigeria is rich with fatal arable land for agricultural activities. However, arable farming is all about cultivation of crops either for subsistent consumption or commercial purpose. Crops grown in arable farming include cereals and plants that produce cloth or oils as well as food crops (Nathaniel, 2017). Arable farming is usually influenced by both physical and human factors for efficacy and sustainability.

According to Alhassan (2013), 75 % of today's food comes from 12 arable crops and five animal species, with just three arable crops (rice, maize and wheat) accounting for about 60% of the calories and proteins obtained from plants. It is pertinent to say that arable crops play a very prominent role in the socio-economic lives of both rural and urban people worldwide. Arable crops therefore, include a wide range of annual crops of primary importance such as maize, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava, cowpea, wheat, soya-beans, melon, groundnut, yam, vegetable etc. These crops however require a warm climate and fertile soil to flourish. In addition, they also require flat land that allows the use of combine harvesters and other machineries (Nathaniel, 2017). In Nigeria particularly northern Nigeria, production of arable crops is essentially the prominent feature of agricultural activities. Indeed almost all farmers in Nigeria cultivate one or more arable crops for food as well as commercial or income (Alhassan, 2013). Furthermore, according to Alhassan (2013), Nigerian agricultural production is dominated by rural-based small scale arable crop producers, who account for about 80% of total food requirement.

Causes of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen has in recent time been endemic, pervasive, and ubiquitous particularly in the sub-Saharan African countries. It has received wide range condemnation due to its devastating consequences on the national development. However, attempting to trace the remote or underlying causes of the conflict between farmers and herdsman indeed requires navigating the historical trajectory of pastoral development in Nigeria thus, according to Blench (2004, p. viii),

Herder/farmer conflict has existed since the beginnings of agriculture, but in Africa the prevalence of tsetse fly and low settlement densities kept the incidence of clashes at a low frequency until the twentieth century. In West Africa, the introduction of cheap trypanocides and other veterinary drugs increased herd sizes to the levels that compelled herders to seek pastures outside their traditional ecological range.

The scarcity of renewable resources such as cropland, fresh water and forest arising from three major sources perhaps, causes or aggravates conflicts.

Fundamentally, Homer-Dixon (1994) pointed out that decreased supply of the resources due to depletion and degradation, increased demand due to population growth or increased per capita resource consumption and unequal resource distribution were the primary sources of scarcity of renewable resources. Similarly, Williams (1996) maintains that within the complex web of causality, the increasing scarcity of renewable resources such as fresh water, forests and arable land portends to be the leading cause of conflict in the 21st century. This is to say that scarcity generates adverse social effects which, in turn, cause violent conflict. The main social effects are decreased economic productivity or lower agricultural production, migration or expulsion from zones of environmental scarcity and a weakening of the state.

According to Percival and Homer-Dixon (1998), there are three types of environmental scarcity namely; supply-induced scarcity caused by the degradation and depletion of an environmental resources such as the erosion of cropland, demand-induced scarcity results from population growth within a region or increased per capita consumption of a resource and structural scarcity arises from an unequal social distribution of a resources that concentrates it in the hands of relatively few people while the remaining population suffers from serious shortages.

In the analysis of resource capture and ecological marginalization, Homer-Dixon (1994) explains that decreased in quality and quantity of renewable resources or resource depletion and population growth causes unequal resource access and eventually leads to increased environmental scarcity. Hence, unequal resource access combined with population growth causes migrations to regions that are ecologically fragile, such as steep upland slopes, areas at risk of desertification, and tropical rain forests. Thus, Williams (1996) states that large-scale population movements may result from expulsion or migration. That expulsion is an involuntary action, resulting from a dominant group's ability to deny resource access to another group. Migration on the other hand, is a voluntary action, stemming from a deliberate decision to leave one place in search of better condition in another. Hence, both actions can create ethnic conflicts as migratory groups clash with indigenous population.

More so, high population densities in those areas, which combined with a lack of knowledge and capital to protect local resources causes severe environmental damage and chronic poverty. This process is often called "ecological marginalization" (Homer-Dixon, 1994). Deducing from this therefore, environmental changes is considered a serious potential security threat to land resource users. Homer-Dixon (1994) identified six types of environmental changes as plausible causes of violent intergroup conflict. These include greenhouse-induced climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, degradation and loss of good agricultural land, degradation and

removal of forest, depletion and pollution of fresh water supplies and depletion of fisheries. Hence, Homer-Dixon (1994), asserted that decreasing supply of these physically controllable environmental resources such as clean water and good agricultural land would perhaps provoke resource conflict, also, large population movements caused by the environmental stress would induce group identity conflicts such as ethnic clashes and more so, severe environmental scarcity would simultaneously increase economic deprivation and disrupt key social institutions which in turn would cause deprivation conflicts such as civil strife and insurgency.

Consequently, Shetima and Tar (2008) maintain that environmental scarcity generating conflict between multiple resource users is an inevitable outcome of the competition for scarce natural resources to achieve security of livelihood. It is obvious that conflict between Herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria and somewhere else is typically a case of competition over land resources such as grass-land and waters in particular. A large collection of literature has linked the conflict to environmental factors such as climate change leading to severe degradation and desertification in Sahel region. These environmental challenges often said, perhaps necessitated a southward movement of great number of Fulani herders from the affected areas to the wetland and riverine areas. To buttress this further, the Ag Director of Veterinary services of northern region of Nigeria (NAK, 1952), states that the nomads are live herd who must “eat to live, and move to eat”.

Thus, “environmental scarcity” has been viewed as a major cause of the migration of large number of the Fulani herdsman to the north-central Nigeria. To support this, however, Blench (2018), states that migration of herders is a rational response to uneven rainfall and not a cultural pattern so to say. Thus, one of the effects of migration is the indigene-settler dichotomy and this has glaringly manifested in the conflict between the Fulani herdsman and the so-called indigenous farming population or the autochthonous or aborigines of the north-central Nigeria. This therefore, proved the assumption of Homer-Dixon (1994) that large population movements caused by the environmental stress would induce group identity conflicts. According to Idowu (2017) scarcity of land, water and foliage which stems from unfavorable weather and climatic condition that reduces the availability of these resources is what changes the patterns of grazing by herders. This changing pattern of pastoral migrations has by and large increased the prevalence of conflict between herdsman and farmers. Similarly, According to Abbas (2018, p.10),

The contest for survival between Fulani pastoralists and farmers is a vivid case of environmentally induced conflict. Since the occasional droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, nomadic pastoralists have continued to increase pressures on farmers by penetrating the semi-arid and humid regions with their herds. This penetration has been much deeper, longer and with much

greater intensity and numbers unprecedented in pastoralist nomadism in Nigeria. All these have subsequently transformed new dimensions of rivalries between herdsman and farmers. However, over three decades or so, the Lake Chad Basin has continued to recede causing further desperations for the pastoralists and livestock to increasingly move out for survival. Hence, environmental scarcity or constraint like water, land vegetation, forests etc may be regarded as causes or catalysts for the escalation of conflict between pastoralists and farmers.

Changes in climatic conditions particularly in the Sahel regions of the northern Nigeria have indeed caused a lot of defects to environment leading to acute drought, environmental degradation, fresh water depletion, desertification, erosion, extreme heat and loss of wetland (Blench, 2004). This therefore has contributed greatly to make land not just scarce but inhabitable and unproductive to both pastoralists and arable farmers in the region. It is on this ground that the pastoralists had no option, than to migrate to the areas of availability of the land resources in the north-central and southern Nigeria.

Furthermore, another major source of environmental scarcity identified by Homer-Dixon (1994) was population growth. Thus, no doubt increased population has effect on the land use considering the fact that population has always been increasing while land resources remains fixed. This shows that, as the population increases, also correspondingly, demand on land resources increases too and such would ultimately lead to shortage, scarcity and competition. This is exactly the case of Fulani herdsman and the farming communities in the north-central Nigeria. The farming communities in the north-central Nigeria and Fulani herdsman compete over limited land for both farming and grazing activities respectively which eventually results in to the violent clashes and confrontations between the two warring groups.

Population Explosion in terms of increase in the herd sizes, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compelled the cattle herders to seek for more pastures beyond their limited ecological range (Aliyu, 2015). Thomas Malthus in his 1798 work on Eco-scarcity and population pressure, titled "An essay on the Principle of Population" proposed that population and resources are initially in equilibrium, but while populations grow exponentially, food production increases only linearly (Idowu, 2017). This is to say that the population of the people keeps increasing in geometric progression while the land related resources remain in constant progression. This growth in population has certainly expanded the scope of pasturing and farming activities most especially in the fadama areas which invariably led to the escalation of conflict between the Nomads and farmers particularly in the north-central Nigeria. Consequently, Gefu (2018, p. 7) maintains that:

As a result of population and market driven forces, available croplands are being more intensely cultivated to raise food crops. Virgin lands including marginal lands utilized by pastoralists are increasingly being opened to cope with the increased cropping needs occasioned by population growth. Traditional grazing resources often used during the wet season are fast disappearing. So also are dry season grazing resources provided by wetlands being increasingly utilized for dry season farming of vegetables for urban and petty-urban markets. The combined effects of shrinking grazing resources and the scourge of climate change on pastoral resources have precipitated serious conflict (often resulting in fatality) between crop and livestock producers.

This is to say that, over a period of time the human population has increased exponentially and the resultant effect is the increased demand on land thus creating more pressure, scarcity and fierce competition between the two major user groups. The effects of the population increase is further seen in the area of urbanization which has to do with expansive use of land for non-agricultural purposes such as buildings of residence, schools, hospitals, road construction and factories. Hence, this can be situated within the broader context of the political economy of land struggle, traceable to a burgeoning demography in which there is fierce competition for fixed space to meet the demands of the rising population (Olayoku, 2014). This phenomenal increase of the population has indeed put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralist (Gambari, Agwai, Ibrahim, Jega, Kwaja, Balla, Fesse, Muhammed-Oyebode & Ya'u, 2018).

Other factors such as unregulated transhumance as well as open grazing, largely as a result of government negligence and abandonment of the established national grazing reserves and cattle stock routes, land ownership system, ethno-religious intolerance and absence of effective institutional mechanism of conflict mediation among others have largely been attributed to conflict between the herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria (Idowu, 2017). Thus, according to the National Security Summit Report (2021), land disputes and competition over dwindling resources, ethnic differences, and settler-indigene tensions have contributed to clashes between herdsmen and farmers throughout the north-central part of Nigeria.

Hence, several studies such as Jiddere (2016), Williams et'al, (2007) have shown that farms encroachments and subsequent crop damages by the herdsmen, blockage of cattle stock routes (Burtali) by farmers, pollution of the stream waters by the cattle, cattle rustling, proliferation of modern dangerous weapons, mercenary elements and illicit drugs among others are considered to be the immediate factors responsible for the armed clashes between the farmers and the Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria. Corroborating this further, Mercy corps (2016, p.2) states that in Nigeria's ethnically and

religiously diverse setting, violent conflict between pastoralists and farmers arises from disputes over the use of resources such as farmland, grazing areas, stock routes and water points for both animals and household. Thus, in a more recent study, Blench (2018) states that among the factors that worsen the Herder-Farmer conflict in recent time in Nigeria are; fall in the value of Naira which has reduced food imports and increased the incentive for farmers to grow more food and Boko Haram insurgency in the North East that has caused many herders to flee the area leading to greater pressure on the North-Central Nigeria. Others include the use of prescription drugs and narcotic, access to modern sophisticated weapons, hate speech, framing the conflict as religious conflicts, anti-herder legislations and lack of communication between the farmers' leaders and the leaders of the pastoralists.

Environmental Scarcity Theory

The theory was proposed and developed by Homer-Dixon in 1994 and it attempted to link environmental scarcity and violent conflicts. The theory was a product of empirical researches conducted in some countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia. The main postulation of the theory is that scarcity of renewable resources such as cropland, fresh water and forest arising from three major sources perhaps, causes or aggravates conflicts. Fundamentally, Homer-Dixon (1994) pointed out that decreased supply of the resources due to depletion and degradation, increased demand due to population growth or increased per capita resource consumption and unequal resource distribution were the primary sources of scarcity of renewable resources.

While utilizing the theory in a similar study, Williams (1996) maintains that within the complex web of causality, the increasing scarcity of renewable resources such as fresh water, forests and arable land portends to be the leading cause of conflict in the 21st century. This is to say that scarcity generates adverse social effects which, in turn, cause violent conflict. The main social effects are decreased economic productivity or lower agricultural production, migration or expulsion from zones of environmental scarcity and a weakening of the state. According to Percival and Homer-Dixon (1998), there are three types of environmental scarcity namely; supply-induced scarcity caused by the degradation and depletion of an environmental resources such as the erosion of cropland, demand-induced scarcity results from population growth within a region or increased per capita consumption of a resource and structural scarcity arises from an unequal social distribution of a resources that concentrates it in the hands of relatively few people while the remaining population suffers from serious shortages.

In the analysis of resource capture and ecological marginalization, Homer-Dixon (1994) explains that decreased in quality and quantity of renewable resources or resource depletion and population growth causes unequal resource access and eventually leads to increased environmental scarcity. Hence, unequal resource access combined with population growth causes migrations to regions that are ecologically fragile, such as steep upland slopes, areas at risk of desertification, and tropical rain forests. Thus, Williams (1996) states that large-scale population movements may result from expulsion or migration. That expulsion is an involuntary action, resulting from a dominant group's ability to deny resource access to another group. Migration on the other hand, is a voluntary action, stemming from a deliberate decision to leave one place in search of better condition in another. Hence, both actions can create ethnic conflicts as migratory groups clash with indigenous population.

More so, high population densities in those areas, which combined with a lack of knowledge and capital to protect local resources causes severe environmental damage and chronic poverty. This process is often called "ecological marginalization" (Homer-Dixon, 1994). Thus, the theory considers environmental changes as a serious potential security threat to land resource users.

Hence as theorized, Homer-Dixon (1994) asserted that decreasing supply of these physically controllable environmental resources such as clean water and good agricultural land would perhaps provoke resource conflict, also, large population movements caused by the environmental stress would induce group identity conflicts such as ethnic clashes and more so, severe environmental scarcity would simultaneously increase economic deprivation and disrupt key social institutions which in turn would cause deprivation conflicts such as civil strife and insurgency. Consequently, Shetima and Tar (2008) maintain that environmental scarcity theory considers conflict between multiple resource users as an inevitable outcome of the competition for scarce natural resources to achieve security of livelihood.

Although, the theory has been criticized as being biased which only focuses on the sources of conflicts thus, prevents thorough understanding of conflict as a social manifestation. Environmental Scarcity theory is therefore, suitable for this research work considering its sound theoretical postulations of linking environmental related problems and resource conflict. However, the Fulani-Agatu conflict is by and large a product of competition over scarce natural resources or "environmental scarcity" as often called by Homer-Dixon (1994). It is important to state that among the three main sources of environmental scarcity espoused by Homer-Dixon, two are of immense important for the analysis of this research work. Starting

with climate/environmental change, this factor indeed was the precipitating factor that caused depletion and degradation on land resources in the Sahel belts regions located in the far northern Nigeria. Thus, the inhabitants of the region who had hitherto relied on the land resources for a livelihood could no longer find the environment habitable as a result of the depletion and degradation hence, had to leave for regions with abundant resources for survival. This therefore, explains the south-ward migration of large number of Fulani herdsmen from the Sahel regions or belts of the northern Nigeria to the north central Nigeria and part of the southern Nigeria for abundant grasses and water. According to Blench (2018), migration of herders is a rational response to uneven rainfall and not cultural pattern so to say.

Also, part of the effects of migration, is the indigene-settler dichotomy which has glaringly manifested in the conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and Agatu people where Agatu people see themselves as the autochthonous or aborigines and Fulani herdsmen as settlers and this has indeed generated a serious controversy between the two groups. This therefore, has proved the assumption of Homer-Dixon (1994) that large population movements caused by the environmental stress would induce group identity conflicts.

Furthermore, the second source of environmental scarcity identified by Homer-Dixon was population growth. Thus, no doubt increased population has effect on the land use considering the fact that population has always been increasing while land resources remains fixed. This shows that as the population increases also demand on land resources increases which would ultimately lead to shortage, scarcity and competition. This is exactly the case of Fulani herdsmen and Agatu farming communities in Benue and Nasarawa states. The Agatu farmers and Fulani herdsmen compete over limited land for both farming and grazing activities respectively and this ultimately resulted in to the violent clashes and confrontations between the two warring groups.

Methodology

The data for the study were obtained from two principal sources namely primary and secondary. For the primary source, information related to the causes of the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and Agatu farmers have been obtained from Key Informant Interviews and three Focus Group Discussion sessions involving Agatu Traditional Rulers, Fulani Traditional Rulers, Market Women representative. Also, in order to augment and strengthen the result of the findings, field household questionnaire survey was carried out only among the residents of the affected Agatu communities. This is because reaching out to Fulani on the household basis was very difficult, considering the fact that great number of them had left the areas only fourteen (14) of them were interviewed and engaged in a focus group

discussions. The secondary data was sourced from an array of academic published documents such as books, reports, journals, and newspapers of which some were physically accessed and others retrieved online.

The Population size for the study comprises the Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State which has ten (10) Council Wards and the seven (7) affected Council Wards in Nasarawa and Doma Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State. The Agatu speaking people are predominantly found in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State and averagely densely found in Nasarawa and Doma Local Government Areas of Nasarawa state. The four (4) affected council wards in Nasarawa Local Government Area comprise of Loko, Udeni, Guto-Aisa and Tunga-Bakono while the three (3) affected council wards of Doma Local Government Area include Agbashi, Akpanaja and Rukubi, bringing the total council wards under study to seventeen (17).

The seven (17) council wards were thus purposively sampled as the only areas directly affected by the conflict. However, ascertaining the exact total population of all the affected seventeen council wards was not possible hence the researcher resorted to improvising, thus using the estimate of five hundred people as the list number of the registered voters in each of the pooling unit proclaimed by INEC to determine the study population and the sample size of the population. Below are the lists of the Council Wards or Registration Areas in the three Local Government Areas under study as prepared by the directory of Polling Units (PUS) of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2015).

Thus, from the seventeen (17) council wards affected by the crisis, five (5) wards in Agatu Local Government Area were randomly selected using simple random techniques or randomization and they include Enungba, Odugbeho, Ogbaulu, Okokolo and Oshigbudu. Also, five (5) council wards out of seven (7) in Nasarawa and Doma Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State were purposively selected based on high concentration of Fulani settlements in the areas. The Council Wards include Udeni, Loko, Guto/Aisa, Rukubi and Akpanaja making a total of ten (10) wards as the sampled Population of the survey. Thus, these ten (10) Council Wards have a total of seventy-eight (78) poling units with the estimated five hundred people in each of the polling unit as the registered voters (INEC, 2015). Hence, the study has a total of 76,000 population and Krejcie & Morgan table is thus used to arrive at sample size of 390 respondents at 95% confidence level and 5.0% margin of error (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Table 1: Population / Sample Size

LGA	S ACW	PUS	E R	T R
Agatu	Enungba	7	3500	35

	Odugbeho	4	2000	20
	Ogbaulu	5	2500	25
	Okokolo	8	4000	40
	Oshigbudu	5	2500	25
Doma	Rukubi	12	6000	60
	Akpanaja	8	4000	40
Nasarawa	Udeni	10	5000	50
	Loko	12	6000	60
	Guto/Aisa	7	3500	35
Total	10	78	39000	390

Source: Computed by Researcher

Key:

LGA: Local Government Area

SACW: Sample of Affected Council Wards

PUS: Polling Units

E R: Expected Respondents

T R: Target Respondents

The data for the work were obtained from a combined data collection methods involving Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussion and Field survey questionnaire. Therefore, three hundred and ninety (390) questionnaires were administered across all the seventy –eight (78) polling units. In each of the polling unit five (5) questionnaires were randomly administered based on House hold and using random sampling technique. Meanwhile a key informant interview was conducted among all the identified key people selected in the study community.

Hence, the study made use of both Quantitative and Qualitative methods of Data analysis known as triangulation. However, the retrieved Questionnaires from the three hundred and ninety (390) Households were captured and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science software (SPSS) Version 20. The quantitative data has been expressed in frequencies, percentages and presented in frequency distribution tables while data collated from Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interview were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

Demographic Data of the Respondents

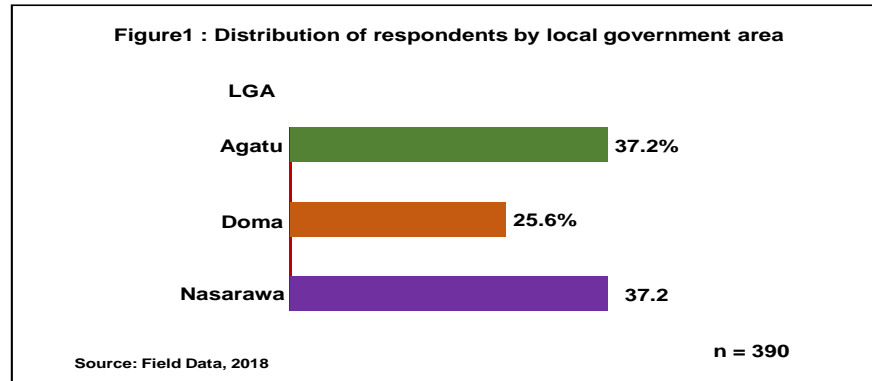


Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the three Local Government Areas of study. Thus, Agatu and Nasarawa Local Government Areas have similar number of the respondents with 37.2 % each. There are more Agatu communities in Nasarawa Local Government than Doma Local Government. This is because; the Agatu people are predominantly farmers and fishermen. Hence, most of them reside around the riverine communities of Nasarawa Local Government such as Loko, Ayele, Iga, Udenin-Magaji, Guto, kyereku, and Illa among others. This therefore, informed the basis for having greater number of respondents from Nasarawa Local Government than Doma Local Government. The number of Agatu communities in Doma Local Government is less than the number in Nasarawa and the reason for that is the nearness of the villages to river Benue.

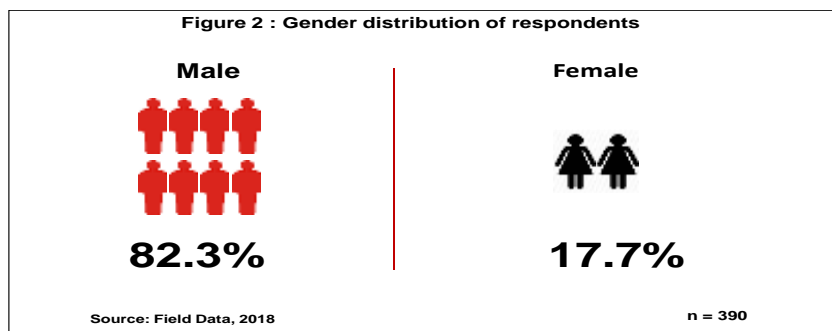


Figure 2 shows the sex distribution of the respondents with male sex having 82.3 % and the female sex having 17.7 % of the total respondents. In Nigeria, male are traditionally heads of house hold but the question here is why do we have female as respondents in a house hold survey? Thus, the explanation is that the communities under study were affected by crisis and according to the key informants most of the women lost their husbands during the crisis. Hence, some women now took over the responsibilities which ordinarily

were to be discharged by their late husbands. This explained why women constitute a certain portion of respondents under questionnaire administration.

The study's result shows the age distributions of the respondents. Majority of the respondents fell within the age range of 18 to 40 representing 70.3 % as depicted on the figure. The reason is that most of the people of older ages flee the communities and only the people of younger ages who constitute the youth stay around in the communities in case there may be attacks so that they can repel and save their communities from being destroyed by the opposing group

Major Causes of Conflict between Fulani herders and Agatu farming Communities

The study's result shows that (33.1%) of the respondents have confirmed and acknowledged the blockage of the cattle stock routes in Agatu communities. However, while interrogating the reasons behind the blockage, in a Focus group discussion with few members of the community, some of these members opined that it was as a result of population increase which led to an increased farming and fishing activities, building of more residential houses, schools, hospitals and other facilities while some of them attributed the blockages to the mechanized system of farming where large portion of land are cultivated compare to years of rudimentary methods of farming. That these have great influence on the blockage of the cattle stock routes in Agatu communities. Thus, the explanation provided here has affirmed the Homer-Dixon postulation on the Demand-Induced environmental scarcity arising from population growth.

The study's result shows that 73.3 percent of the total respondents believe that increased farming activities, construction of residential houses, roads, schools, and hospitals Arising From Increased Population has influence on the available farm and grazing lands in Agatu communities. Similarly, the unanimous submission by the participants in a focus group discussion conducted at Obagaji, the Agatu Local Government headquarter, was that, Agatu community has indeed expanded in terms of population and infrastructure.

There is indeed continuous rise in number of schools, hospitals both public and private, residential houses and road construction as the human population continue to increase over time. Also, there was the issue of high influx of Fulani herdsmen in the community occasioned by the continuous land depletions in the far northern states. For instance, the 2006 population and housing census distribution by LGA in Benue State indicates that Agatu LGA has a total human population of 115,597 (NPC, 2010). Consequently, increased farming and grazing activities arising from population increase in

Agatu Local Government over time was indeed a driver to Fulani-Agatu conflict. This has vindicated Homer-Dixon theory on environmental scarcity which shows how growing population in Agatu communities has inadvertently led to shortage of land. This therefore, ultimately led to unhealthy competition for land between the Agatu farmers and the Fulani herdsmen which in the end, culminated in to deadly clashes.

The study's result indicates that 89.7% of the total respondents had confirmed to frequent crop damages by the Fulani herdsmen. Thus, the Agatu farming communities have been consistently complaining of the farm destruction by the Fulani herdsmen said the key informants which according to them, is the major issue they were having with the pastoralists.

Table 2: Views of the Respondents on the Cases of cattle rustling in Agatu community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	92	23.6
No	298	76.4
Total	390	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 2 shows that 76.4 % of the respondents forming the majority of the total respondents in Agatu communities did not agree on case of cattle rustling in their communities. However, only 23.6% of the total respondents have concurred with having occasional cases of cattle rustling in the Agatu communities. Thus, the Fulani Ardo of Agatu LGA and the Secretary of Miyetti Allah Benue State, have remarked that cattle rustling was the “last straw that broke the camel’s back” in the Fulani-Agatu deadly clashes that, it was the case of rustling of about two hundred (200) cattle and killing of Alhaji Ardo Mama (Shehu Abdullahi) in a village called Ocholonya by Agatu and Tiv militias of the April 20, 2013 that sparked off the whole crisis. Thus, cattle rustling here appeared as a reaction to the consequence of dichotomy between the Agatu farmers as indigenes and Fulani herdsmen as settlers.

Table 3: Respondents' view on Proliferation of sophisticated weapons such as AK47 as a driver to Fulani-Agatu clashes

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	294	75.4
No	40	10.3
No idea	56	14.4
Total	390	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 3 shows that 75.4 percent of the respondents have agreed with assertion that availability and proliferation of sophisticated weapons such as AK-47 has indeed been a propeller to the perennial conflict between Fulani herdsmen and Agatu farmers in Benue and Nasarawa states. As mentioned earlier, that one of the social effects of migration has always been indigene-settler dichotomy, hence suspicious mutual coexistence between and among different ethnic nationalities co-habiting same community can result to surreptitious illegal possession of deadly weapons for attack, defence or counter.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear to state that several factors played roles at different point in time with regards to the intractable Fulani-Agatu conflict in Benue and Nasarawa states. Thus, such factors were identified to include the disappearance of the erstwhile cattle stock routs (Burtali), farm encroachments by the cattle, population increase, proliferation of modern sophisticated weapons and cattle rustling. Thus, the forgone issues were indeed predicated upon the environmental degradation in the far northern states previously referred to as the ecological zones of the Fulani herdsmen. However, these would not have made any impact if the Nigerian government had integrated the nomadic Fulani into national life by settling them in reserved areas with adequate provision of all the basic infrastructural facilities needed by man. However, the study hereby recommends that the Nigerian Federal Government in collaboration with state governments needs to revive the erstwhile grazing reserve system and demarcated cattle stock routes with some improvements for permanent settlement of the nomadic Fulani pastoralists. Also, the pastoralists should be served with grazing licenses or permits by the state governments on a freehold tenure basis. This would perhaps put an end to the seasonal migration (transhumance) thereby preventing cattle from encroaching and destroying farm produce. Also, it would provide the opportunity for the average Fulani pastoralists who cannot afford the ranches system to continue and retain their old but refined cattle rearing system. The colonial administration has in several instances emphasized the economic need for settling Fulani through the then Ministry of Animal Health and Forestry of the Northern Region. Governments at all levels need to come up with stringent legislations that would restrain unauthorized persons having access to small arms and light weapons.

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