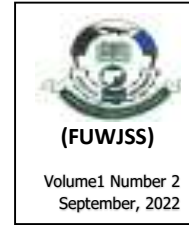


A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF NOMADIC PASTORALISTS AND FARMERS' CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria, conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and farmers have been among the most serious security challenges that have led to major setbacks in the nation's socio-economic development. This paper provides a sociological assessment of the menace of nomadic pastoralists and farmers conflicts in Nigeria. The paper utilized materials obtained from secondary sources of data including journals, newspapers, magazines and textbooks. The paper used frustration-aggression as its theoretical lens. The paper identified illegal trespass on farmlands for grazing purposes, government failure in enacting and implementing policies that can mitigate farmer-herders conflict, proliferation of small and light weapons, corruption, greed and selfishness, weak security system and porous borders as the major causes of violent clashes between nomadic pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria. The paper recommends that government at all levels; communities and other stakeholders should formulate and implement legislations that prohibit open grazing while also encouraging and supporting herders to establish ranches for their animals. Nigerian government and other security stakeholders should work hard to address the issue of proliferation of small and light weapons into the country because the use of such weapons escalates the level of violence and triggers the need for reprisal attacks between the warring parties.

Keywords: Ranches, herders, frustration-aggression, violence

Introduction

The need to produce food and breed animals to meet the ever-growing demands of people and raw materials for industries have led to the extensive use of land across the globe. However, changes in climatic conditions often lead to competition between the two most land users,

namely: farmers and herders. This competition has recently turned into serious concealed and sometimes unconcealed manifestation of hostilities and social frictions in African countries, such as Nigeria, Niger Republic, Kenya, Cameroon, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Togo, Chad and Ghana, among others. In Nigeria, the clashes between the two parties became very violent and intensified after some state governments approved the Anti-Open Grazing Law. Today, farmers-herders conflicts represent one of the serious security challenges that generate researches and debates among the Nigerian scholars, policy makers, media and other citizens. Thus, Abbass (2012) posited that conflict between herders and farmers is age long event which become severe shortly after Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999. Although, the violence may significantly vary in terms of dimension, frequency, intensity, geographical scope, process and casualties, many parts of Nigeria have experienced and still battling with farmers-herders conflicts of different magnitude.

The phenomenon of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria becomes obvious in the number of violent attacks that resulted in many human and material casualties in various states such as Adamawa, Taraba, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Enugu, Abia, Katsina, Zamfara, Kaduna, Ondo and Oyo. Shittu (2020) observed that farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria began as a phenomenon of local status and today has assumed a worrisome proportion considering the attendant consequences on human lives and property. According to Kasarachi (2016), there were more casualties from herdsman-farmers violence than from *Boko Haram* insurgency in 2015, which signifies that the most potent threat to the existential continuity of the Nigerian state has shifted from *Boko Haram* to the rampaging herdsman and farmers' conflict. Furthermore, West African Network for Peace (WANEP) (2018) noted that between 1997 and 2015, there were 461 incidents of conflict between herdsman and farmers in Nigeria with the vast majority occurred between 2011 and 2015 in the Middle-Belt, South-East and South-South parts of the country. This may be the reason why Okereke (2012) posited that the unfolding violence between herdsman and farmers has become so alarming to the extent that Nigeria is now at a cross road and gradually drifting to a 'conflict society'.

As matter of consequence, violent clashes between farmers and herders alongside others heinous acts have combined together and

create an atmosphere of violence, anxiety, fear, terror and felling of uncertainty. Many lives and properties have been lost due to the violent clashes between farmers and herders. For instance, having accounted for about 1,229 deaths in 2014, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) has placed the Nigerian Fulani herders as the fourth deadliest militant group in the world (GTI, 2015). This is in addition to more than 100,000 people who have been displaced in Benue and Enugu states alone (Idowu, 2017). Moreover, Onwubiko (2017) noted that in the states where herders and farmers conflicts are persistent, the property destroyed; massive killings and cases of rape negatively affect their economic and social affluences. This is supported by Kasarachi (2016) who also noted that the violence between herders and farmers has disrupted the socio-economic, religious, political and educational activities, thereby threatening national security stability and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a geo-political entity.

Meanwhile, several factors have been identified and held responsible for this insecurity situation by many scholars. Thus, Okoro (2018) and Aliyu (2015), the competition over grazing land and scarce resources has over the years resulted in perennial and growing violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Other factors responsible for clashes between the two parties revolve around incoherence of the government policy, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, corruption, greed and selfishness, bad governance, weak security system and porous borders (Shettima & Tar, 2008; Folami, 2010; Sapru, 2012; Kasarachi, 2016; Onwubiko, 2017; Ningxin, 2018).

In order to lessen the situation, however, Nigerian federal and many state governments have formulated laws governing land use in the country and embarked on the heightening of physical security measures to disrupt potential attacks as well as the development and broadcasting of security tips in the mass media. Notwithstanding the efforts of government, ethnic group associations and community-based security organizations, issues related to the safety of lives and properties are becoming increasingly dubious due to the problem of herders-farmers conflicts. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that the paper sociologically discuss the menace of nomadic pastoralists and farmers conflicts in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Nomadic Pastoralism and Farming

In the context of this paper, nomadic pastoralism refers to a very mobile agricultural system that is based on opportunistic movements according to pasture availability in order to rear and breed animals, especially cattle. On the other hand, farming refers to the historical and traditional occupation practiced by many people, who work the ground (land), plant seeds and grow edible crops for both human and industrial uses. Most of the nomadic pastoralists are *Fulani* people, who are widely dispersed across Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Sudan. The Fulanis, also known as the “Fula people or Fulbe” are the largest pastoral nomadic group in the world with root in West Africa, Northern part of Central Africa and Egypt (Adisa & Adekunke, 2010). Farmers, on the other side, cut across other tribes in Nigeria. This makes it possible for conflicts between farmers and herders to be triggered by some ethnic and tribal undertones and sentiments. This is because a simple verbal argument or physical assault between a *Fulani* and a person may be considered an ethnic and class issue, thereby involving the whole communities. In every part of the world, however, one thing shared by both nomadic pastoralists and farmers is the use of land, which has been one of the key factors responsible for violent clashes between the two parties.

Nomadic Pastoralists and Farmers Conflicts

The concept of conflict has been variously defined by different scholars. One of such definitions is that of Diller (1997) who defined conflict as any form of confrontation between two or more parties resulting from a situation where (these) two or more interdependent groups or systems of action have incompatible goals. Conflict can also be seen as “a state of incompatibility among values, where the achievement of one value can be realized only at the expense of some other values (Maoz, 1982). However, this paper sees conflict from the perspective of the ongoing violent clashes between nomadic pastoralists and farmers. Therefore, nomadic pastoralists and farmers conflicts, in the context of this paper, refer to the violence, mutual suspicion, mistrust, fear and inclinations towards violent confrontations that characterized the relationships of these two most land users (i.e. pastoralists and farmers) and often lead to enormous human and material casualties.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts frustration-aggression theory propounded by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears in 1939 which was later refined by Neal Miller in 1941 and Leonard Berkowitz in 1961. The theory is based on the assumption that aggression is the product of frustrating an individual's efforts to attain a goal (Friedman & Schustack, 2014). When first formulated, the assumption suggested that frustration always precedes aggression, and that aggression is the sure consequence of frustration. However, the theory assumes that frustration leads to stress and aggression that may eventually lead to violence. Thus, violent actions are more likely to be taken if the current leadership or the socioeconomic/political systems are not always responsive to the needs of the concerned parties, a typical situation of Nigerian government and the farmers-herders conflicts in the country.

With regard to the menace of farmers-herders conflicts, the herdsmen are sometimes frustrated due to desertification. This is because they are usually forced to migrate; as they migrate, series of challenges are encountered which in turn brings frustration. Similarly, farmers who have struggled to cultivate farmlands also get frustrated whenever herds of cattle destroy their farmlands. The *Fulani* herdsmen terror is a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources in which their aim is to neutralize, injure or to eliminate the host communities in a bid to fend for their animals. Moreover, if a herdsman losses his flock to drought and water scarcity, he may be frustrated because of the loss of livelihood. From this reality, he may be aggressive and since he cannot channel it to the natural causes, he may in the long-run channel it to any person or group that obstructs his migration to a safe area. On the side of farmers and host communities in Nigeria, frustration arises whenever animals of the herdsmen trample on their farmlands and eat up their crops. The fact that the farmers are also frustrated, they become aggressive and channel their aggression to the herdsmen and their cows. Owing to this situation, conflicts and violent confrontations between these two parties become inevitable.

Methodology

This paper utilizes secondary data that were obtained from several sources including journals, newspapers and textbooks, which were subjected to critical analysis.

Causes of Nomadic Pastoralists and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

There are several socio-economic, political, environmental, individual and sometimes trivial factors that cause or trigger the problem of farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria. Some of the major causes of nomadic pastoralists and farmers conflicts in Nigeria include the following:

Competition over Grazing Land: In most cases, violent conflicts between farmers-herders often occur because of struggle or competition over grazing land due to land scarcity caused by climate change, population growth and the ineffectiveness of land tenure systems on the part of the government. According to Baca (2015), Okoro (2018) and Aliyu (2015), struggle/competition over grazing land and scarce resources has over the years resulted in perennial and growing violent conflicts between farmers and herders. The struggle for survival and protection of economic livelihood (including, farmlands, crops and cattle) appears to precipitate conflict between herdsmen and farmers across many communities in Nigeria (Okoro, 2018).

Government Failure to Implement Policies: This is another cause of violent conflicts between the concerned parties. This is because failure of the government policy on grazing reserve has left Fulani herdsmen to their fates in determining where and how to raise their livestock. According to Okoro (2018), most times the attacks and counter attacks between herders and farmers in the rural areas are precipitated by government inactions. The herders and farmers often take law into their hands because they feel they are abandoned by governments. It is known that nomadic pastoralists live a sort of jungle life characterized by self-help and they can do whatever it takes to protect their lives and properties from wild animals and cattle rustlers. These, among other things, have led to a situation in which *Fulani* herdsmen carry dangerous and sophisticated weapons like AK-47 and other dangerous ammunitions, which in turn have led to a series of incessant bloody killings involving the Fulani herdsmen and local farmers in different rural communities across the country.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: The illegal proliferation of small arms and light Weapons is one of the major factors that trigger farmers-herders conflict in many developing countries like Nigeria. The diffusion of arms, particularly from the industrialized nations to the developing countries has played a significant role in the escalation and intensification of conflicts between farmers and herders alongside other violent criminal activities such as; cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed banditry, insurgency and militancy that pose a serious threat to security of lives and properties. It is a general knowledge that wide proliferation and availability of weapons in Nigeria makes possible for herders and farmers to easily possess weapons like AK-47 and other military hardware. By implication, this tends to escalate and intensify the level of conflicts and violence between the two parties with attendant consequences on human and material casualties.

Illegal Trespass on Farmlands for Grazing Purposes: The violent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers are often caused by alleged trespass on farmlands for grazing purposes which destroys crops and deprive farmers of high productivity and projected profits. When herders allow their cattle to eat up and destroy farm crops, the farmers must be frustrated as all their efforts have been wasted which will in turn make them aggressive and channel such aggression to the herdsmen and their cows, leading to enmity, conflicts and reprisal attacks between the two parties.

Porous Borders and Weak Security System: Nigeria's security institutions are very loose and weak to check the infiltration of foreign visitors who are mercenaries in Nigeria's incessant herdsmen-perpetuated killings, especially regarding the involvement of the nationals of neighboring countries such as Sudan, Mali, Niger, and Chad (Shettima & Tar, 2008). Nigeria does not have any special forces guarding our porous borders, which makes it easy for arms smuggling and escape. Recent reports of kidnapping and robbery of citizens travelling through forest regions by alleged nomads is a pointer to why Nigeria needs special policing at our forests and mountains. In most cases, the countries mentioned above serve as escape routes for the armed Fulani herdsmen when they are aware of the military presence.

Consequences of Nomadic Pastoralists and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

Violent clashes are usually accompanied by both human and material casualties or consequences that affect not only the warring parties, but the society or country as a whole. Some of the major socio-economic, psychological and physical consequences of nomadic pastoralists and farmers conflicts in Nigeria include the following:

Loss of Human and Animal Lives: It is undisputable fact that most of the violent conflicts between farmers and herders have claimed many human and animal lives and created a general atmosphere of fear, anxiety and social tension in the affected areas. On April 5, 2016, Fulani militants killed four individuals in Benue State and between 10th and 11th of the same month, they killed about 17 persons in Taraba and 40 people were massacred in Enugu State on the 25th of that same month. Following a rivalry between the Tiv and Fulani ethnic groups, a total of 853 people have lost their lives since June, 2014 (Burton, 2016). Whereas the Fulani herdsmen claimed to have lost 214 people in addition to 3,200 cows, the Tiv people reportedly killed are estimated to be 633 excluding children and women who died in ramshackle camps in 2014 (Abdulbarkindo & Alupse, 2015).

Food Shortage/Scarcity: Violent conflicts between herders and farmers have led to the issue of food shortage in Nigeria. As observed by Ofuoku and Isife (2009), more than 40 million worth of crops are usually lost annually due to invasion of cattle in the South-South region of Nigeria, especially Delta and Edo States. According to Ofem and Inyang (2014), herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria has not only led to internal displacement of persons, but also resulted in reduction of income/savings and crops output level. This is supported by Aliyu (2015) who argued that conflicts between farmers and herders have led to the destruction of properties and crops in Nigeria, leaving an already endangered populace even poorer. This situation has not only created an impediment to the survival of many host communities, but also forced many crop-farmers to abandon their farming profession for lesser occupations like *Okada* and other artisan work. The outcomes of this are food shortage with attendant consequences of high cost of living and social problems like poverty, street begging, theft and robbery, among others.

Displacement of Individual Citizens: As a result of farmers-herders clashes, many Nigerians who survived the conflicts were forced to abandon their ancestral homes and seek refuge in neighboring communities for their safety and fear of future attacks (West Africa

Network for Peace Building, 2018). Idowu (2017) observed that apart from those who are still struggling to rebuild their lives, the violent conflicts between farmers and herders have displaced more than 100,000 people in Benue and Enugu states. This is in addition to other people displaced in various communities of different states of Nigeria. Thus, if the problem of farmers-herders clashes is not sufficiently tackled, the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) will continue to increase drastically. By implication, this will increase the problems of shelter, accommodations and infectious diseases that are considered critical security issues in the country.

Psychological Trauma/Disorders: Violent clashes between farmers and herders have left many people, especially children and women with various psychological problems related to frustration and feeling of helplessness. Generally, violence experiences have the potential to result in some negative issues like aggression, traumatic disorder, anxiety, fear, nightmares, revenge seeking, depression and potentials to involve in future criminal activities (Chinwokwu & Arop, 2014). As reported by Humanitarian Needs Overview (2014), an estimated 2.15 million Nigerians are facing physical and psychological trauma due to their negative experiences from insurgency and other violent crimes. As a matter of fact, regular loss of life, witnessing the death of loved ones, watching one's spouse being serially raped, burning of one's cash and food crops/cattle and other merciless activities associated with violent conflicts are more than enough to cause post traumatic disorders to their victims.

Mutual Suspicion and Mistrust between the Two Parties: It is clear that the conflicts between farmers and herders have created suspicion and distrust between them as they now see each other as intruders and enemies as well. According to Burton (2016), majority of the members of the expanse Fulani ethnic group are solely pastoralists without connection to militant violence. Even these peaceful ones, however, are largely viewed with suspicion and anger by the sedentary communities on whose land they take their cattle, largely as a result of the actions of the violent group. The fact that many of the herdsmen do not understand the languages of their host communities, they will always get provoked or frustrated at any movement or action of anybody within the community pointing at them, all because of the existence of distrust. This has negatively altered the historical mutual

relationship and trust that had existed between the *Fulani* and most of their host communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper concludes that violent conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria have created an atmosphere of violence, fear, anxiety and terror with many human and material casualties across many communities in the country. The conflicts are products of various political, economic and individual factors. Many people have died, many displaced and properties in form of crops, animals, houses and vehicles were destroyed. Although, farmers have occasionally been involved in carrying attacks or reprisal attacks against the Fulani herdsmen, they have been seen to be mostly at the receiving end of the conflicts as some of previous empirical studies revealed that they count more losses than the herdsmen. Thus, the paper recommends that governments at all levels and other community stakeholders should formulate and implement legislations that prohibit open grazing of cattle, while encouraging and supporting herders to establish ranches for their cattle. Nigerian government and community stakeholders should engage peace and conflict resolution experts in dealing with the issues concerning herdsmen-farmer crises. This will enable effective dialogues, negotiations and of course a win-win resolution. Also, poor water management practice in Nigeria should be improved by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources. This is because climate changes, water shortage and drought are among the major reasons why herdsmen are migrating southward in search of fresh water and grass for their cattle which causes the crisis between the migrating herders and farmers. Any form of aggression as a result of past issues should be discouraged and anyone found wanting in that respect should be prosecuted and accordingly punished, so that it will deter others from engaging in such act. And Nigerian governments and other security stakeholders should work hard to address the issue of proliferation of small and light weapons into the country because the use of such weapons escalates the level of violence and triggers the need for reprisal attacks between the warring parties.

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