

INTERROGATING CLASHES IN BENUE STATE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Clashes have negatively affected food production in Benue state. The armed nomadic herders have continued to pose a colossal threat to the lives and properties of the local communities in the state. For instance, the incessant broad-day and mid-night attacks being perpetrated and recorded in the state are quite alarming to the degree that farmers are afraid of going to farm. To this effect, the study investigated how Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Clashes in Benue State affected Food Security in the state and Nigeria in general. The study employed Ex-post facto research design and qualitative-descriptive method for data analysis. The theoretical framework relied on Environmental/Resources Scarcity theory by Homer-Dixon. The study found out that population explosion and land disputes between the farmers and herders due to scarcity of resources such as grazing and farming lands, is responsible for incessant violent conflicts. Consequently, farmers are afraid of going to farm and some have abandoned their farms. This negatively affected agricultural productivity in Benue state. Environmental pollution activities have no direct relationship with food security in Benue state but remain a challenge to the communities in the state. Consequently, there is need for the Nigerian state to review the existing laws as they relate to accessibility to land by members of community and strangers. There is also the need to initiate a viable policy framework that can handle population explosion in Nigeria, which has remained a great challenge in the country.

Keywords: Agriculture, Crop Farmers, Food Security, Fulani Herdsmen and Intergroup clashes

Introduction

The struggle to survive attitude of crop farmers and animal farmers has remained a protracted issue instigating disagreements and incessant conflicts between Fulani herders and rural crop farmers, particularly in Benue state. One of the sources of the conflict is due to the conservative nature of a typical Fulani who continues to sustain open grazing as the only means of animal survival. The nomadic Fulani do not believe in permanent abode. This type of grazing has often meant travelling long distances from one point to the other,

thus intruding into spaces long claimed by settled farmers and this has become a source of potential conflicts between them and the sedentary farming population, (Olaniyan, Michael & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015). Due to the migratory and nomadic nature of herders, there are clashes between herders and the local farmers over land ownership. Regrettably, increasing desertification in some parts of the Northern region as well as population explosion has been contributing to the diminishing range of grazing and farming lands. The overall implication of this scenario has been the food supply insecurity, speedy environmental degradation, dwindling GDP and distorted national integration.

Both cattle and crop farmers are perpetually caught in the web of irreconcilable conflicts due to accusations and counter-accusations emanating over land dispute. According to Onwunyi and Mbah, (2019), the Fulani herdsmen accuse the crop farmers of encroaching into their grazing routes and fields, thus preventing them from feeding their cattle, while crop farmers point accusing fingers on the herders for allowing their herds to destroy their cultivated crops. The open grazing system where animals are indiscriminately taken round is perceived to constitute a great danger due to their activities that pollute local streams, walk ways and a few available other water sources to the local people. In the face of this unpalatable scenario, the communities often react through resistance. This development has often generated conflicts between the two important agricultural units in Nigeria. Relying upon this very fact, Haman, in Imo (2017) stated that cattle farmers suffer material damages when the crop farmers inflict physical injuries on their cattle by using cutlasses, spears or guns or by poisoning the cattle.

Crop farmers, on the other hand, cry and argue that the fear of gun wielding cattle herders not only prevent them from going to the farm but also that cultivated farm lands and crop yields are destroyed by cattle, resulting in sweeping poverty and unemployment in the land (Famoriyo, 2017 in Chukwuemeka, Aduma & Eneh, 2018). The main consequences of the entire problems are loss of human lives, animals, crops and ethnic tensions, particularly due to the reactive behaviour of the Nigerian-state in tackling these perilous problems. The last few years witnessed violent clashes between pastoralists and crop farmers in various parts of the country over grazing resources which has led to the loss of numerous lives and properties, food shortages arising from abandonment of farm lands, destruction of crops, environmental degradation and conflicts of ethno-religious coloration among the various sections that make up the Nigerian State (Chukwuemeka, Aduma & Eneh, 2018).

The Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Clashes in Benue State has negatively affected food production due to the prevalent fear of the crop farmers who are usually uncertain of their future and whose lives are always in danger. The armed nomadic herders have continued to pose a colossal threat to the lives and properties of the local communities in Benue state. For instance, the incessant broad-day and mid-night attacks being perpetrated and recorded in the state are quite alarming, and the attitude of the Nigerian state has remained weak and nonchalant. It is a commonplace fact that farming system in Benue state has been distorted. Benue state popularly known as the food basket of the nation is today in perpetual fear to freely go to farm. The spate at which crises and insecurity threaten the peace of Benue State therefore calls for attention. In spite of the tremendous

amount of resources budgeted to maintain internal security, including food security in Nigeria by the government, the Fulani herds-farmers crises in Benue State has remained intractable leading to increase in food shortage, damage to farmlands, crops and crop yields destruction, exorbitant farm input, and farmers exterminated, the peaceful co-existence of communities and their hosts strained, socio-economic activities of host communities affected, all these leading to increase in the price of food items, commodities and persistent shortage of food available to consumers (Okoli & Addo, 2018).

Despite the plethora of views and contributions of researchers, there are little studies conducted on the resource scarcity, population explosion and struggle for land as explanatory variables responsible for the nomadic Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers' conflicts, as well as the attendant consequences on agricultural productivity in Benue state. Scholars often superficially concentrate on the conflict, with little and insignificant attention to the major sources of conflict. It is on this bases that this study examines the impact of Fulani Herdsmen/Farmers conflict/clash on food security in Benue State nay Nigeria, between 2011and 2018.

Literature Review

There is a plethora of theoretical and empirical literature on our subject matter. The theoretical studies have attempted to provide theoretical bases on the nexus between Fulani herders/farmers conflicts and food security in Nigeria. Theoretical studies have adopted theoretical approaches to expound relationship between the two stated variables. On the other hand, empirical studies adopted certain scientific methods. Consequently, this part of the study is poised to embark on intellectual excursion to scholarly review of already existing literature so as to x-ray scholarly contributions on the subject matter in order to identify gap(s) in literature and knowledge which influence the problem statement and objectives of the study. This is in line with, Obasi (1999) position who rightly maintained that literature review offers an opportunity to identify gaps in existing literature, and through the identification of such limitations, new problems worth investigating, can be discovered. The review was done thematically in which the main and important themes in the context of the study were reviewed.

Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts in Nigeria According to De Haan (2002), farmers maintain that the 'destruction of crops by cattle and other property (irrigation equipment and infrastructure) by the pastoralists themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts, whereas burning of rangelands and FADAMA and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the pastoralists'. De Haan (2002) further stated that antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources. Adisa (2011) is of the view that the perceived causes of farmer-herdsmen conflicts include inequitable access to land, diminishing land resources, antagonistic values among user groups, policy contradictions, and non-recognition of rights of indigenous people. In this regard, there are interwoven factors responsible for the herders-farmers' conflicts, and the complexity of each of them has resulted to the deepening of the conflicts in Nigeria.

According to Olayoku (2014), Abass (2012) contends that the major source of tensions between pastoralists and farmers is basically economic, with land related issues accounting for the majority of the conflicts. This can then 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 growing population (Olabode and Ajibade 2010; Solagberu 2012 in Olayoku, 2014), and the causes are fundamentally economic and centred around land issues, showing that the creation by the government of grazing routes did not mitigate the problem. Despite the fact that there has been no consensus agreement among scholars on the causes of the conflict, there is wide evidence that the negative impacts of the land ownership conflicts have resulted to colossal loss of lives and properties. Fajonyomi, Fatile, Bello, Opusunju and Adejuwon (2018) reiterated that it is evident that conflicts between farmers and herdsmen hinged on land resource control, which has been heightened by pressure on land from the two conflict actors. This phenomenon of farmer-herdsmen conflicts represents what can be called a 'land resource control conflict', which poses a threat to food security in Nigeria.

Drought and Desertification in the Northern Nigeria Drought is one of the most important natural disasters that show its influences slowly by time. It is one of the costliest natural disaster of the world and affects more people than any other natural disaster (Loukas and Vasiliades, 2004; Bacanlı, Dikbas & Baran, 2008). It occurs in virtually all climatic zones, but its characteristics vary significantly from one region to another. Desertification is seen as the process of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities (UNCCD, 2014). Studies have shown that desertification is the greatest environmental problems facing the dry land of northern Nigeria even till this very day (Nwokocha, 2015), and a major serious challenge and threat facing sustainable development in northern Nigeria and other African countries.

Drought and desertification are twin global environmental problems. Nigeria is faced with rapid desert encroachment affecting fifteen norths most states from moderate to severe rate. Out of the 909,890 km² of the country's land area, about 580,841 km² accounting for 63.83% of total land is impinges on by desertification (Olagunju, 2015). The author maintains that climatic variability and anthropogenic activities such as deforestation, extensive cultivation, overgrazing, cultivation of marginal land, bush burning, fuel wood extraction, faulty irrigation system and urbanization are major causes of desertification. Impacts of drought and desertification are felt in all aspects of the environment and human livelihood. Remedies to these problems involves awareness, protection of marginal lands, planting of indigenous tree and shrub species, sustainable agricultural practices and use of alternative energy source.

It has been estimated that between 50-75 percent of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara States in Nigeria are being affected by desertification and are particularly vulnerable to wind and erosion. These states, with a population of about 50 million people, account for about 43 percent of the country's total land area (Nasiru, 2007 in Medugu, Majid & Choji, 2008). In these areas, population pressure resulting in over-grazing and over-exploitation of marginal lands has

aggravated desertification and drought. Medugu, Majid & Choji (2008) maintain that it is obviously a complex inter-relationship, which includes: poor physical conditions in terms of soils, vegetation, topography and inherent extreme variability of climate as manifested in frequent drought; disruption in ecological balance caused by poor land use and ever increasing demand being made on the available resources by the expanding population and socio-economic systems of the affected areas; and improper land-use practices and poor land management.

It is a fact that desertification and drought have severe impact on food security, livelihood, socio-economic and cultural activities of the affected people. They also have serious consequences on available water resources. For instance, desertification can cause internal displacement and migration, which possibly lead to intra or inter-communal conflicts over the pursuit of scarce resources. Loss of Grazing Reserves in the Northern Nigeria has predominantly accounted for the new search for pastures by herders in the Southward parts of Nigeria. Drought and desertification have degraded pastures, dried up many natural water sources across Nigeria's far-northern Sahelian belt and forced large numbers of herders to migrate south in search of grassland and water for their herds. Insecurity in many northern states also prompts increasing numbers of herdsmen to migrate south (International Crisis Group, 2017). The migration of herders to other parts of Nigeria has created resentment and violence between inhabitants of local communities (where the herdsmen are migrated) and the herdsmen. This situation is not unconnected to more competitive and Confrontational relations between herders and farmers over occupation. The aggravation of the conflicts has really manifested significantly due to absence of negotiations between farmers and herders to ensure access to grazing grounds and livestock routes.

Loss of Grazing Reserves and Changes in Pastoralists/Farmers Practices Land acquisition by capitalist farmers exacerbates the upsurge of conflict as pastoralist can no longer find where to pass let to talk of where to stay (Abbass, 2012). Changing access rights as traditional communal property are being replaced by private ownership (Adisa, 2012). Communities in Central Nigeria are locked in a worsening cycle of violence between largely Christian farming communities and predominantly Muslim pastoralists, most of whom are ethnic Fulani. Environmental degradation, population growth, and regional instability have altered migration pattern, pushing herders further southward during seasonal migrations. Limited access to arable land and unreliable water sources have increased natural resource pressures, resulting in blocked grazing routes and destruction of farmland by Fulani cattle (Bagu& Smith, 2017). Heavy pressure on lands due to other uses: agricultural expansion, urbanization, construction works etc. has seriously affected the dynamics of grazing lands and pastoralism and it is the major cause of farmers-pastoralist conflicts (Abdullahi, Daneyel, and Aliyara, 2015). According to Ezeomah (1987), in the past, pastoralist did not make any serious effort to acquire lands largely because of their conservatism, independence and abundance of grazing lands. However, in recent years increased crop cultivation associated with other land needs due to the rapidly growing population has created serious pressure on many traditional grazing areas (Abdullahi, Daneyel, and Aliyara, 2015). These and other related problems have made the

pastoralist to start seeking for the lands to settle for at least wet season. Dasam and Ibe (2018) maintain that although the Fulani herders in the past largely enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with sedentary agriculturalists in Nigeria, this relationship has been disturbed in recent years by environmental changes that have driven the herders further south, massive growth in the size of Fulani herds, the growth of practices such as agro-pastoralism and the expansion of farmland into traditional corridors used by the herders.

Banditry and Cattle Rustling in Nigeria Cattle rustling refer to criminal intent of organised individuals who are involved in stealing of grazing cattle. In order words, it is an organized crime that is carried out by criminal elements either for the purpose of expropriating cattle for meat or for sale. In this regard, Gueye (2013) puts it that the basic understanding regarding contemporary cattle rustling is that it is a form of livelihood crime, motivated by both 'subsistence' and 'commercial' imperatives, and a form of organised crime, motivated by wealth accumulation given that proceeds are never subject to state taxation (Alemika, 2013, Okoli&Okpaleke 2014). A major impetus for the syndicated criminality as phrased by Kwaja (2014), is captured as "underground economy," The fundamental fact is that the current situation has remained a big threat to internal security due to its multiplier consequences, particularly leading armed conflicts.

Cattle rustling have been a veritable threat to public safety and security in Nigeria. It has led to loss of lives, human injury, population displacements, as well as loss of cattle in their numbers. This situation goes with repercussions that do not portend well for the collective wellbeing of the herding communities. What is more critical and dicey is the correlation between cattle rustling and spiral violence in some parts of northern Nigeria. The incessant attacks by cattle rustlers on herding communities tend to set them at loggerheads with their ecological neighbours - the settled native farmers. In some instances, the farmers are arbitrarily accused by the herders as the culprit and masterminds of their cattle raids. This engenders ill feelings that exacerbate the already conflictive herder/farmer inter-group relations, leading ultimately to vicious circle of violence (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014).

Daily reports across the northern region have confirmed that cattle rustlings have significantly contributed to the increasing security challenges facing the Nigerian state and seem to have become big business involving the herders, big-time syndicates, and heavily armed bandits (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Crisis Group (2016) also reported that over the last decade, cattle rustling have grown in scale and organisation in several northern states where large bandit groups operate with mounting audacity. According to the group, while this occurs throughout the north, the main theatres have been the Kamuku forest in Kaduna, Falgore forest in Kano, Dansadau forest in Zamfara and Davin Rugu forest stretching through Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states. Reports of bandits with automatic weapons storming herders' settlements and farms with the mission of killing people and pillaging cows proliferate (Olaniyan &Yahaya, 2016). Akowe and Kayode (2014) submitted that in most cases, the rustlers kill and maim their herders and rape the women before

dispossessing them of their cows, while in some instances, the rustlers kidnap girls or women in the process of dispossessing the owners their cows (Adeniyi 2015; Yusuf 2015).

In their point of view, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) maintain that cattle rustling as a criminal enterprise has consequences for the socio-economic, political, cultural, and psychological spheres of society. To them, at the economic level, it constitutes a major threat to the livelihood of herders and those who depend on cows for survival; at the socio-political level, rustlers' activities have resulted in death, loss, and the destruction of lives and property, thereby disturbing peace and security; while at the psychological level, a vast number of people have been disposed of their belongings, and families have been traumatised. There have been reported cases of rape and kidnapping, which have caused psychological trauma of the victims.

Incessant Herdsmen Attacks and Casualties in Benue Violent conflicts between herdsmen from northern Nigeria and farmers in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's security, stability and peace (Ajibo, Onuoha, Obi-Keguna, Okafor and Oluwole, 2018). With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. The authors further stated that these conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have exacted a heavy humanitarian toll with thousands killed and tens of thousands displaced. In Benue, one of the hardest-hit states, Governor Samuel Ortom reports more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016. Tens of thousands also have been displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states.

The global institute for economics and peace based in Australia, recognized the attacks by the Fulani herdsmen as terrorism and in her global terrorism index ranked these herdsmen from the north as one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups in 2013 at below 5th position, but in 2014 the group was ranked 4th world's deadliest terrorist groups having killed 1,229 people across Nigeria in that year (Akpor-Robaro & Lanre-Babalola, 2018). Human Rights Watch (2013) noted that in these attacks about 90% of the deaths are civilians where over the last 20 years Kaduna and Plateau people are the worst affected with over 10,000 deaths since 2010. According to Dickson (2016) the profile of killings by the herdsmen has continued to rise by the year, despite the serious condemnations that their activities have received from all over the world. In general, the series of attacks, killings and destruction of private properties by the herdsmen have been reported in 22 States out of the 36 States of the country besides the three original states of Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa where they have operated with greatest impact (Akpor-Robaro & Lanre-Babalola, 2018). These recent infiltrated states include, Adamawa, Niger, Ekiti, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Ebonyi, Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Imo, Cross River, AkwaIbom, Delta, Edo and Rivers state (Omilusi, 2016). Each of these states has suffered a number of human losses from the Fulani herdsmen attacks over time.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted environmental/resources scarcity theory by Homer-Dixon. In his study of environment, scarcity and violence, Homer-Dixon (1999) asserts that large populations

in many developing countries are highly dependent on four key environmental resources that are fundamental to their livelihood: fresh water, cropland, forests, and fish. Scarcity or shrinking of these resources as a result of misuse, over-use or degradation, population growth, climate change and resource access leads to competition over the scarce ecological resources among groups, and may under some certain circumstances trigger off conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Homer-Dixon synthesizes work from a wide range of international research projects to develop a detailed model of the sources of environmental scarcity. He refers to water shortages in China, population growth in sub-Saharan Africa and land distribution in Mexico. Scarcities stem from the degradation and depletion of renewable resources, the increased demand for these resources, and/or their unequal distribution. He shows that these scarcities can lead to deepened poverty, large-scale migrations, sharpened social cleavages, and weakened institutions. Homer-Dixon describes the kinds of violence that can result from these social effects, arguing that conflicts in Chiapas, Mexico and ongoing turmoil in many African and Asian countries, for instance, are already partly a consequence of resource scarcity.

Homer-Dixon (1999) argued that resource scarcity is the product of an insufficient supply, too much demand or an unequal distribution of a resource due to political economic, social and environmental factors. This situation triggers unhealthy competition and violence among groups within the society due to conditions of deprivation and limited resources. In effect, resource scarcity raises the competitive stakes and premium that the various societal groups place on available resources, which may engender violent conflicts among groups. He, however, acknowledges that human ingenuity can reduce the likelihood of conflict resulting from the resource scarcities, particularly in countries with efficient markets, capable states, and an educated populace.

The imperativeness of this theory to the study stretches to the act that the conflicts between rural crop farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsmen are traceable to population increase without commensurate adequate resources. This has led to scarcity of natural resources such as farmlands, grazing lands, vegetation etc. for economic activities. The increase in the cattle population and influx of “alien nomads” account for the problem, as they deliberately move the cattle to graze on peoples' farms (Kazzah, 2018). The struggle, competition and conflicts over farming and grazing lands have been driven mostly by the scarcity of land as a result of increase in population and economic activities where land remain the key resources, and competition between the farmers and the Fulani herdsmen to ensure their viability in the area (Kazzah, 2018). The scarcity of land is due to the degradation and shrinking ecological space, human and cattle population explosion, and resource depletion. Therefore, the farmers need the land for cultivation, while the herdsmen need the land for grazing and rearing of cattle.

The general environmental-pollution activities of Fulani herdsmen often provoke animosity and conflicting relationships between the herders and farmers. The farmers while resisting the herders and their cattle adopt confrontational approaches due to years of rancor and acrimonies. As Haman (2002) pointed out that the nomadic herdsmen or grazers suffer from material damages when the crop farmers inflict physical injuries on the cattle by using cutlasses, spears or guns or by poisoning the cattle. This can then 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 growing population (Olabode and Ajibade 2010; Solagberu, 2012 in Imo, 2017). The quest for economic survival of Fulani nomads and rural farmers as well as weak institutional approaches has escalated the conflicts between the two groups.

Methodology

The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. The reason for choosing this method is based on the fact that the independent variable(s) had already occurred, but the study investigated the variable(s) in retrospect to establish how the explanatory variable(s) affected the dependent variable(s). The essence of this typology of descriptive method is mainly to study the relationship between variable (X) and variable (Y). According to Cohen and Manion (1977), ex-post facto refers to studies that investigate possible cause and effect relationships by observing an existing condition and searching back in time for plausible causal factors. For instance, the conflicts between the nomadic Fulani herdsmen and sedentary crop farmers had taken place, but the study investigated how the clash is affecting agricultural outputs in Benue state.

The study relied on qualitative-descriptive method of data collection and analysis. Qualitative-descriptive and exploratory methods of data generation, presentation and analysis are adopted to describe the existed and existing conditions. Descriptive research method is adopted to collect data in order to describe and interpret existing conditions as well as prevailing phenomena to understand the relational dimension of variables. Moreover, the study utilized historical method in order to examine and explain historical events that are reliably based on facts. This is in tandem with Obasi (1999) who clearly inferred that historical method deals with the determination, evaluation and explanation of past events essentially for the purpose of gaining a better and clearer understanding of the present and making a more reliable prediction of the future.

Secondary sources of data collection were employed to generate information from extant literature. Secondary data are important in this study in order to locate the study within the existing literature and make deductive and general inferences. This is suggestive that the review of related published literature on the relationship between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria, and how their activities condition the agricultural sector output. To attain this purpose, text books, journals, newspapers, official government documents and periodicals were carefully consulted as the sources data collection. Descriptive-qualitative method was employed to analyze qualitative data generated from secondary sources. Therefore, empirical verification of the formulated hypotheses in this study was done with the help of qualitative method of data analysis.

Area of the Study Benue state in Nigeria is one of the highest farming population with 657,767 crop farmers as at 2010 is also endowed with one of the longest stretches of river (River Benue) in the country with great potential for a viable fishing industry, dry season farming through irrigation and for an inland water-way (Benue Agriculture and Rural Development Authority, BNARDA, 2007). Furthermore, in the state, the records of cassava production show that the total number of farm families involved in the production were

413159. According to BNARDA, the state can boast of a great deal of livestock resources like goats, though the major occupation is crop farming, a lot of fishing activities on Rivers Benue and Katsina-ala are carried out; irrigation is widely practiced along the riverine areas during the dry season; growing vegetable crops such as tomatoes, okro, carrot, onion, pepper and amaratus in large quantities. The strategic location of Benue State between the Southern forest regions and the Northern semi and grassland regions of the country makes it easy to have fertile land for agriculture with the estimated arable land constituting about 60 percent of the total area with average farm size of 1.5 to 2.0 hectares (BNARDA, 2007). Benue State is one of the North central states in Nigeria with a population of about 4,253,641, according to 2006 human population census. It is inhabited predominantly by the Tiv, Idoma and Igede peoples as the major groupings in the state. These three groups speak Tiv, Idoma, and Igede languages respectively.

Effects of Fulani Herdsmen Attacks on Agricultural Productivity in Nigeria

Violent conflicts have over the years affected Nigerian economy, particularly agricultural sector. This very point explains how internal conflicts affect farmers or agricultural productivity. According to Onwunyi and Mbah, (2019), although in the past government did not consider herdsmen-farmers conflicts as a threat to human and national security, but today the sophisticated dimensions of the clashed between the parties have immensely attracted much attention. In as much as there is other human induced conflicts in Nigeria, the protracted nature herders-farmers' conflicts have negatively affected peaceful coexistence in various parts of Nigeria. Natural and human induced crises have led to food insecurity in Nigeria. For instance, Eme, Onyishi, Uche and Uche (2014) noted that climate change and clashes between herdsmen and farmers and the activities of Boko Haram sect have added to food insecurity challenges in the polity as population displacement, death, and non-cultivation of farmlands and the burning down of farm produce have reduced the quality and quantity of food demand.

The frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the predominantly farming areas of the Middle Belt region which has resulted in the destruction of lives and farmlands, have become a major threat to efforts to boost food production (Eme, Onyishi, Uche and Uche, 2014). The authors noted that from Benue to Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau in the North Central region and Zamfara and Kaduna States in the North West, clashes between farmers and herdsmen have left in its trail heavy losses of lives and property. According to them, these losses of lives have adversely affected farming activities and other related businesses. This has resulted in a drastic reduction in farm outputs. In 2017, clashes between nomadic herdsmen and local farmers resulted in at least 549 deaths and thousands displaced across Enugu, Benue, Taraba, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Cross River, Adamawa, Katsina, Delta and Ekiti states (Amnesty International, 2018).

In Nasarawa state for instance, Okoli and Atelhe (2014) submitted that the conflicts between herders and farmers have led to the diminishing fortunes of agricultural productivity in Nasarawa State. They noted that when the conflicts occur during the farming season, the tendency is that most farmers would not go to farm for fear of being attacked. The implication of this is the possibility of low agricultural productivity in the

following harvest season. They further maintained that the conflicts have resulted in actual damage of farmlands and volumes of farm crops and produce. Nkwor (2016) maintains thus:

The constant clashes have threatened the security of Nasarawa state, reduced its economic productivity, and deepened food crisis. While there have been several clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and the farming communities for more than two decades, the escalation reached another level in 2014 with the Fulani herdsmen killing 1,229 people in comparison with 63 deaths in 2013. With more than 500 deaths by July 2016, the conflicts have been commonly credited to Fulani herdsmen expanding from the traditional grazing routes into the agricultural land which in turn always results into conflict over access to pasture.

In the same vein, Fajonyomi, Fatile, Bello, Opusunju and Adejuwon (2018) maintain that the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria and perennial civil unrests are exacerbating food insecurity for several millions of people in the country.

Herders/Farmers Conflicts in Benue State: 2011-2018

There have been several cases of farmers-herdsmen intergroup clashes and conflicts across various states and locations in Nigeria (Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwande, 2018). These conflicts have now become so threatening on the country's national integration, such that the hitherto peaceful relationship between farmers and herdsmen across various parts of Nigeria and Benue State in particular is degenerating to a carnage level, leading to loss of lives and properties. The farmers/herders' conflicts affect the entire geo-political zones of Nigeria and Benue State the worst hit. These Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash have pitched Christians and Muslims against each other (Ajibefun, 2018). In their study, Okereke (2012) and Kasarachi (2016) observed that serious conflict erupts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers leading to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers for fear of attack could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. The January 1, 2018 Fulani herdsmen attack in Benue is still fresh on the minds of the people. The attack led to mass burial of not less than 70 persons killed by the Fulani herder's invasion in communities in Benue state. There are other attacks by Fulani herdsmen in February 2018 which took place in Benue State, Taraba State, Nassarawa State and few cases of attack in other states.

In its 2011 report, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) noted that livestock production and animal grazing in particular can be seen as lending indispensable support to agriculture as it contributes greatly to food security through: (a) Supply of global calories, proteins, and essential micronutrients, (b) Support to agriculture in areas that have difficulty growing crops. (c) Consumption of the feed that are not appropriate for human consumption, and (d) Provision of manure for crop production (FAO, 2011).

However, where animals are grazed the way they are done in Nigeria, the first concern is that of food security (Abba & Usman 2008; Eje, Angai, Abdulahi, Eje, Wudaba, and

Ishaku, (2017); Chukwuemeka, Aduma and Eneh, 2018). In all the states studied by the Abba and Usman, particularly Taraba and Benue States, the majority of those displaced by herders-farmers' intergroup clashes are women and youths who make up substantial part of the farming communities, just like in Nasarawa, Kaduna (Southern Kaduna) and Plateau States. These displacements, (stemming from the clashes between herders and sedentary farmers over free grazing rights and instability caused by these incessant clashes), will likely lead to food shortages in the immediate communities in particular and in the general economy. This is possible due to the fact that those directly involved in farming are today scared of the Fulani herders who have in different occasions attacked, raped and killed them. The weak physical security as well as poor intelligence gathering by Nigeria has often encouraged a state of uncertainties. Provision of security to farmers is a project that is very far to achieve. According to Fayinka (2004), Nigerian agricultural production is dominated by rural-based small scale arable crop producers, who account for about 80% of total food requirement. Accordingly, of an estimated 71 million hectares of cultivable land, only half is currently used for farming. The reasons may largely be due to the worrisome open grazing of animals on farm lands as farmers now helplessly continue to abandon their farms. The situation has worsened today due to escalation of herders-farmers' clashes.

These problems stem both from the skirmishes that occur between herders and farmers as pasturing animals intrude on farmlands and watering points for free pasture, as farmers encroach on cattle routes for more cultivable land. As this happens, Saidu, a local Fulani cattle farmer said, 'what do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment on grazing fields and routes by farmers is a call for war... Wherever we turn, we find the land reserved for our cattle to feast, taken over by farmers... It becomes difficult for our herd to move and graze without veering into crop fields... Once that happens, the farmers confront us and we have no option but to fight back' (Odoh&Chilaka, 2012).

Herders/Farmer Land Struggle and Food Production in Benue State

The ownership and utilization and struggle over land have escalated the conflict between the sedentary rural farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsman in Benue state. Land has remained an overwhelming source of conflicts among various groups as well as individuals at varying thresholds. Conflicts of Fulani herdsman are also the use of agricultural land which is becoming fiercer and increasingly widespread in Southern Kaduna, largely due to intensification and extensification of production activities that is necessitated by increasing human population. (Zakka, et.al, 2017 in Kazzah, 2018). The land struggle that exists between the rural crop farmers and herders has negatively affected food production in Benue state for more than a decade.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (2004) cited in Onwunyi and Mbah (2019), communal violence costs Nigeria over \$12 billion worth of agricultural production during the last third of the 20th century, given the importance of agricultural

livelihood to overall economic wellbeing, especially in conflict prone areas of Nigeria. Abughdyer (2016) stated that a total of 664.4 hectares (56.4%) of farmland were destroyed in Benue state from 2010-2014 in three local government areas of Agatu, Guma and Logo as a result of farmers and herdsmen crises. This situation has led to reduction in the output due to inadequate availability of labour due to fear of death threat or violent attacks on farmers on their way to their fields, or in their farms. Owners of farms and those working for them are perpetually afraid of attacks from Fulani herdsmen. The whole scenario has deterred farm labourers and affected productivity due to inadequate and improperly timed weeding and harvesting. The fear of death has psychological effects on the farmers who are more or less uncertain of the future occurrences. Due to the activities of Fulani herders, farmers have experienced a situation where they were forced to abandon their farmlands leaving them to be overgrown by weeds. This resulted to low productivity. This development portends a great danger for food production in Nigeria since the state is the hub of the nation's food security (Okoli & Addo, 2018).

Empirical study conducted by Okoli and Addo (2018) through questionnaire, focused group discussions (FGDs) and oral interviews, revealed that:

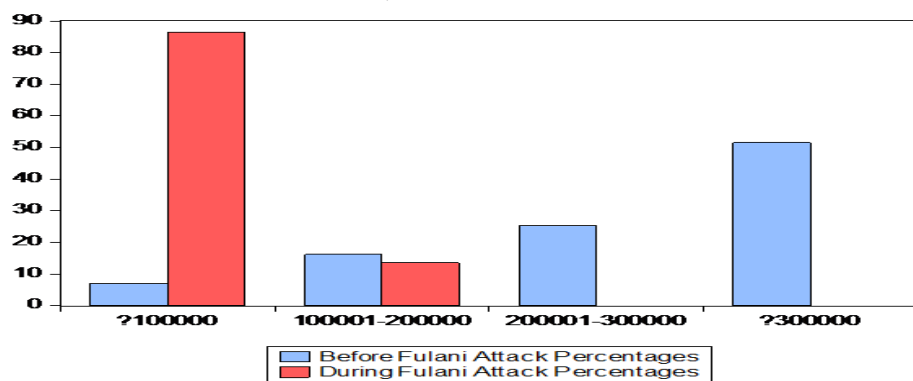
Crop farmers were predominantly male (85.2), married (85.9) and with mean age of 51 years. They were small scale farmers with average farm size of 2.9 ha and were engaged in the production of yam (97.8%), cassava (92.6%), maize (92.6%) and other arable crops, mainly for income and household food supply. The farmers indicated that violation of laws/tradition; livelihood interference and cultural factors were the major causes of conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen. Consequently, the socio-economic life, production outcome and settlement of crop farmers are affected, cumulating to breakdown in livelihood assets of farmers. The escalation of such conflicts which is usually driven by the very entrenched considerations other than just the destruction of crops by herds of cattle have resulted to food shortage in most states of the Middle Belt with Benue State as the most affected. The food production capacity of Benue State known as Food Basket of the Nation" has reduced from production capacity of 100% to about 65%.

The position maintained by the leadership of the Fulani Socio Cultural Association *Miyeti Allah KautalHore*, buttresses the point that the nomadic Fulani herdsmen are not remorseful of the indiscriminate attacks unleashed against the people of Benue. The struggle over the use of land in the state has caused properties and lives. The people of Benue are the worst victims of those violent incidences. Okoli and Addo (2018) have also observed that the frequent clashes between herders and farmers in the predominantly farming areas of the State have resulted in the destruction of lives and farmlands and have become a major threat to efforts to boost food security. Accordingly, this has also resulted in a drastic reduction in farm outputs, a development that has heightened the fear of hunger. Seven out of the twenty-three local government areas in Benue State, namely Guma, Gwer- West, Agatu, Logo, Kwande, Buruku, Tarkam mostly affected by the rampaging herdsmen have tables of woes to tell. The effects of the sustained Fulani war in

the affected localities have led to farmers’ reluctance to go back to their farms even in this current farming season (Okoli & Addo, 2018). One of the greatest consequences of this is that the economic base of and activities of the people of Benue State have been greatly affected arising from the abandonment of their various communities by the farmers for their dear lives (Nformi, Mary-Juliet, Engwali, & Nji, 2014).

For instance, in an empirical study conducted by Apenda (2016), in order to show clearly the annual income of the respondents before and during groundnut production in Benue state, see the data in a bar chart as shown below.

Figure 1: ANNUAL INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS BEFORE AND DURING GROUNDNUT PRODUCTION IN BENUE STATE,



The chart showed the agricultural output of the sampled respondents before and during Fulani Herdsmen attack on Tiv farmers in Benue state. It is evident from the table that majority (87.5%) of the respondents have agricultural output of less than or equal to N100,000 during the Fulani herdsmen attack on Tiv farmers while 12.5% of the respondents have agricultural output of between N100 001 and N200 000 but no percentage of the respondents that have agricultural output of neither between N200 001 and N300 000 nor above N300 000 during the Fulani attack. Before the Fulani attack, the agricultural output of the sampled respondents showed 51.6% of the sampled respondents agricultural output of above N300 000 as compared to the 0% when the respondents had been attacked by Fulani herdsmen. The percentage of those who have agricultural output of between N200 001 and N300 000 rose from 0% to 25% while the percentage of those with agricultural output of below N100,000 has decreased during the Fulani herdsmen attack which indicates an increase in the agricultural output of the respondents during the times of no conflict (Apenda, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has investigated how farmers’/herders conflicts have affected food security in Benue state. There are various factors responsible for the conflicts. However, the study observed that the population explosion in Nigeria is a contributing factor. The struggles for land between the farmers and herders due to scarcity of grazing and farming lands have remained an inevitable factor provoking the two warring groups. The native farmers

accused the nomadic herders of allowing their cows to destroy their cultivated crops while the herders on the other hand, pointed accusing fingers at the farmers of blocking grazing routes. To this effect, the groups are found in perpetual and intractable violent conflicts leading to destruction of lives and properties. The attendant implication of this development has always been shortage of farm produce, thus leading to food insecurity. Farmers who are afraid of going to farm as well as abandoning their farms negatively affect agricultural productivity in Benue state, known as the food basket of the nation. Though the pollution activities of Fulani herdsmen are a factor, but based on the findings of the study, it was not the actual factor that negatively affected food production during the period under investigation. The content analysis technique adopted in the study did not show that environmental pollution is a factor that condition farming in Benue state. The major factor is population explosion which has contributed to perpetual land dispute between rural sedentary farmers and nomadic Fulani herders.

In view of the challenges between Fulani herdsmen and farmers which have negatively affected peaceful co-existence and food security in Benue and Nigeria in general, the following recommendations are made: There is need for the Nigerian state to review the existing laws as they relate to accessibility to land by members of community and strangers. In doing the review, issues like indigeneship and settlers rights in communities, the land use acts which have been largely abused should be reconsidered for review in the front burner in the constitution review process.

The Federal Government of Nigeria should understand that one of the major factors responsible for Fulani herders/farmers conflict in Benue state and Nigeria in general is growing population without commensurate resources and policy framework. Based on this, there is the need to ensure strong border control to reduce influx of foreign herders into the country. There is also the need to review Land Use Act as well as initiate a viable policy that can handle population explosion Nigeria.

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