



Crop Farmers and Herders Conflict in Nasarawa State: Causes, Effects and Solutions

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Abstract

This study analysed the nature of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nasarawa State by investigating the causes, effects and its solutions. Conflict Resolution theory was adopted because of its relevance which help us to understand the issues in focus. Secondary sources of data were adopted. Content analysis was used in evaluating the data and information gathered. The study reveals that, the major causes of the farmers-herdsmen conflict are; the climatic change, environmental factors, inadequacy of grazing resources and poor management of the existing grazing reserves. It also reveals that displacement of farmers, reduction in agricultural production, low income of farmers/nomads and killings of both farmers and herders are the major effects of the conflict in the state. On this basis, the study recommends the establishment of ranches in the state to stop the massive movement of the cows, and reduce clashes.

Keywords: Causes, Conflict, Effects, Farmer, Herdsmen, Management

Introduction

The return of democratic government in Nigeria in 1999 has witnessed high level of security challenges such as banditry, kidnapping, and farmers-herders conflict among other. The middle belt region has experienced conflicts that results to deaths, displacements and reduction in agricultural production particularly as a result of clashes between farmers and herders.





The movement of herdsmen and subsequent clashes with farmers has heightened insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central region and Nasarawa State in particular. The main factor driving the clashes is the struggle for available resources, especially grazing land by the herders. The federal government and the Northern government have dumped the grazing reserve system established in the 60s with the capacity and facilities to address the need of the herders and their cows such as enough space and land for grazing, good and adequate water, animal clinic for vaccinations of livestock. The abandonment and neglect of agricultural activities by the Northern government due to the discovery, exploration and export of oil in Nigeria also spark the farmers-herders conflict in the North-central region of the country.

The herders are also known as Fulani and are most predominant in the West African region. They are large in number and are nomadic in nature, herding cattle and other animals across the large dry grasslands of their environment making them the world's largest pastoral nomadic group (Eyekpimi, 2016). The main Fulani sub-groups in Nigeria are: Fulbe Mbororo, Fulbe Sokoto, Fulbe Adamawa, Fulbe Borgu and the Fulbe Gombe, (Eyekpimi, 2016).

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nasarawa state has remained a topical issue in Nigerian political landscape and has claimed the lives of many people and destroyed a lot of properties in most parts of the state such as Bassa, Awe, Kadarko, Nasarawa Eggon and Udeni Ruwa etc. The farmers are so passionate in preserving their agricultural and economic resources while the herdsmen cherish their cattle more than human lives. Therefore, the Fulani herdsmen strive to look for wherever they can find good water and green grasses for the nourishment of their animals. Fasona and Omojola, (2005) hold that, the struggle for the use of agricultural land for planting and grazing has become uncontrollable and increasingly widespread in Nasarawa state and Nigeria at large due to intensification of production activities that are necessitated by raising human population.

The research study is qualitative in nature and employs the use of comprehensive explanations. Similarly, the data in this study is derived from secondary sources. Additionally, the study employed content analysis of journal publications, internet materials, library materials, newspapers, and other documented materials that are relevant to the study. The content analysis method was applied to examine the existing literature on the subject matter.

Conceptual Definitions

Farmer: A farmer is a person who owns, works on or operates an agricultural enterprise, either commercially or to sustain himself or his family (Akande, 2006). In this study, a farmer is a person living in a community whose primary duty is farming of agricultural crops for both subsistence and commercial purposes.

Herder: A herders known as the Fula people are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and





sheep across the vast dry grass lands of their environment (Eyekpimi, 2016). In this study, a herder is a Fulani person who moves cows across our local community and destroyed the crops of a local farmer

Conflict: Conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both; each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal; and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal (Stagner, 1967). Wallensteen (2002) sees conflict as a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strike to acquire at the same moment in time on available set of scarce resources. Conflict, according to Hornby (1995) is a serious disagreement, argument, struggle and serious difference of opinions, wishes or a clash. Wilson and Hanna (1979) defined conflict as ‘struggle involving opposing ideas, values, and/or limited resources’.

Literature Review

Mohammed and Abdul (2020) analysis the solution to herders-farmers’ violent clashes in Nigeria: The Academic Perspectives and Business Implications. The study employed library-and-desk research methods for data collection. The population of the study constitutes journal articles on Herders-Farmers clashes in Nigeria. Twenty-eight papers were sourced and analyzed using content analysis. The study found that the majority of the academics recommended conflict resolution mechanisms, mass orientation, and ranches as the sustainable panaceas to the constant herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria.

Afeez (2020) examines the Causes and Socio-Economic Consequences of Herdsmen-farmers conflict on Sustainable development in Nigeria on how it affects livelihood and security of those involved. The study relies on secondary source of data collection and analyzes same using qualitative descriptive method. Some of the findings caused by the incessant crisis are destruction of crops and farmland belonging to the farmers, none payment of damages caused by herds of cattle owned by herdsmen, killing of herdsmen cattle by farmers, misunderstanding between the two actors caused by lack of proper institution on conflict management, inadequate access to water, land, soil compaction and law enforcement agencies are the major causes of the conflict between herdsmen-farmers crisis. However, the socio-economic consequences of the crisis between the herdsmen-farmers have a negative implication on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Ofuoku and Isife (2019) examine Causes, effects and resolution of farmer’s nomadic cattle herders’ conflict in Delta state, Nigeria using simple random and positive sampling techniques, 80 farmers and 20 nomadic cattle herders were selected respectively from 8 purposively selected communities. Data were collected using a structured interview schedule. The causes of such conflict were: destruction of crops, contamination of streams by cattle, over- grazing of land, disregard for local traditional authorities, female harassment, and harassment of nomads by





youths of host communities, indiscriminate bush burning and defecation of cattle on roads, cattle theft, and straying of cattle. The socio-economic effects of the conflicts include reduction in crop yield and income of farmers/nomads, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and property and loss of products in storage. T- test of the data showed differences in the response of farmers and nomads in respect to the causes of the conflicts.

Harrison (2019) examines the Effects of Conflict on Household Agricultural Investment in Nigeria using a household panel dataset from Nigeria's Living Standards Measurement Survey - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA) with detailed data on conflict events from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED). Using an event studies framework, these data allowed to estimate the effects of conflict on a variety of household agricultural decisions. Additionally, the study find evidence that households shifted production to riskier crops in the years prior to experiencing conflict. Finally, the study find little evidence that households change their use of inputs such as pesticide and equipment following a conflict.

Rukwe, Abdullahi, Faruk and Nwaeze (2019) evaluate the effects of Farmers-Herders conflict on the farming households of in southern Taraba State, Nigeria. Data were collected from 102 farming households using structured questionnaire, as respondents for the study. Multi-stage sampling was used for the study. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. The results of the study shows that 61.8% of farmers were males, Majority (81.4%) of the farmers fell within 21-50 years with mean age of 41 years, majority (55.9%) were married with average household size of 11 persons. Majority of the farmers are predominantly small-scale farmers with average farm size of 2.82 ha, about 88.2% of the rural farmers had formal education. The major crops grown were cereals crops (47.1%), 73.5% of the respondents belonged to organizations with average annual income of farmers was N181, 050.52. The major perceived causes of conflicts by crop farmers in the study area was uncontrolled grazing and damage to crops by cattle (95.1%). The most severe consequences of conflicts were decrease in output and income of farmers (99.0%) and Loss of lives and injuries sustained (98.0%).

Ajibefun (2018) investigated the social and economic effects of the menace of Fulani herdsmen crises in Nigeria. The sample of the study consisted of 250 farmers and 150 respondents from Fulani tribe selected from affected Local Government areas in Southwest, Nigeria via purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire titled Economic and Social Effects of Herdsmen Clashes Questionnaire (ESEHCQ) was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics of t-test were used to analyze the data generated from respondents. The findings revealed that the major cause of the conflict was destruction of crops. The social effect of the menace of Fulani herdsmen are loss of human life, sexual harassment of human life, acquiring of weapons/arms, reduction in quality of social relationship, reduction of social support and high cases of rape





while the economic effect of the menace of Fulani herdsmen are reduction in output and income of farmers/nomads, loss of produce in storage, displacement of farmers, scarcity of agricultural products, loss of house and properties and infrastructural damages. The findings also revealed that farmers and Fulani perception of the causes of Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria are not different while farmers and Fulani perception of the social effects and economic effects of Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria are different.

Theoretical Framework- Theory of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution theories addresses the deep-rooted sources of conflict, which are taken to be structural (and therefore, in contrast to our understanding of conflict, not discursive) and cultural. Different to conflict management where the cause of conflict is a consequence of the anarchical nature of the international system, conflict resolution theorists 'argue that conflict has an ontological base in human needs, the denial of which causes violent conflict' (Fetherston, 2000).

This interpretation of conflict has been greatly influenced by Burton's work on human needs theory. Burton distinguishes between needs that are universal human motivations conditioned by biology; values, which are ideas, habits, customs and beliefs characteristic of particular social communities and interests which are the aspirations of individuals or identity groups within a social system (Burton, 1990). Interests can be negotiated while 'needs will be pursued by all means possible' (Burton, 1990) as they are ontological. The needs that seem to be important are security, identity, recognition, food, shelter, safety, participation, distributive justice and development (Burton, 1990).

The analysis as well as the broader participation of actors drawn in problem-solving workshops demonstrates that 'the parties do have a choice. They are not trapped by fate; they can control their own future' (Mitchell & Banks, 1996). Interestingly enough this approach shows that once the relationship between the parties 'have been analysed satisfactorily, once each side is accurately informed of the perceptions of the other, of alternative means of attaining values and goals, and of costs of pursuing present policies, possible outcomes are revealed that are acceptable to all parties' (Burton, 1990). While the starting point of this approach is therefore largely non-discursive in its focus on needs, the proposition for conflict resolution relies on the transformation of conflictive discourse through self-reflection and a broadening of dialogue between conflict parties.

The focus here lies on the examination of subjective aspects of conflict as the main hindrances to resolution of interest-based issues. This implies that a third party intervention should take into account the mix of the objective and subjective elements that interact as the conflict escalates and de-escalates, this is also known as contingency approach. The theory of conflict resolution is



adopted here as it linked the relationships between two parties (farmers and herders) and also shows the best way to address conflict in the society

Causes of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict in Nasarawa State

The study identified a number of factors responsible for the incessant farmers-herders conflict in Nasarawa State. Some of these include: climatic factor, environmental factor, depleting arable land for farming, and poor political will to address the problem.

Climatic factor is vital in the activities of farmers- herders' conflict in Nasarawa State. The changing climatic condition is affecting the survival of herders and farmers' activities in the state as desert encroachment associated with other climatic conditions have continued to affect the livelihood of herdsmen as they move further south in search of grasses, water and space for their cattle thereby destroying farm crops for local farmers, which consequently resulted in killings of cows, death of farmers and other crime associated with the conflict.

Drought and desertification in the far Northern Nigeria are also responsible to the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria and Nasarawa state in particular. Far north of Nigeria is arid and semi-arid, with a long dry season and low rainfall. These environmental factors have pushed many pastoralists and others to migrate south, in search of productive land for their cattle. This has triggered increasing disputes over land and water use with central Nigeria's growing populations of sedentary crop farmers.

The loss of grazing reserves established in the 1960s by the northern government due to encroachment, creation of more states and poor management by the northern state governments has significantly reduce the availability of designated grazing reserves, forcing herders to seek pasture elsewhere thereby destroying farmers' crops.

Rural banditry and cattle rustling in recent time particularly in northern Nigeria have been identified as one of the factor responsible for farmers-herders conflict in Nasarawa State. Many herders loss their cattle and many killed due to the activities of the bandit. One report estimated that in 2013 more than 64,750 cattles were stolen and at least 2,991 herders killed in states across the north-central zone including Nasarawa State. These forced the herders to stay around the local communities thereby destroying farm crops.

Effects of Farmers and the Herders Conflict in Nasarawa State

Farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria has created a rift in human relations, caused serious threat to food security among many other effects (Basil, 2015). Reduction in agricultural output and meat production as well as the income of both the farmers and nomads are the major negative effects of the conflict between the farmers and the herders. The decrease in output in the state affects

the gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP) thereby causing poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria at large.

Information gathered from other literatures indicates that the lingering conflict between herders and farmers have affected negatively the money people generated annually in the state and loss of potential business opportunity for both farmers and nomads in Nasarawa State. Another serious effect of this conflict is the hike in food prices. Due to the drop in output supply of agricultural produce in the state has drastically reduced while the demand is still in an increasing rate. This situation pushes food prices up and affects the living standard of the people.

It has also been revealed that the conflict between them will disrupt and threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production in the state and the nation in general if nothing is done to address the menace. Additionally, many farmers are reluctant to go to farm and those going have reduced their farm size. The herders are also not interested in going out with their cattle for grazing due to the fear of attack by community youths.

The crisis has had devastating effects on intergroup relationships especially in Nasarawa Eggon in Nasarawa State and Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. Apart from the loss of lives, farmlands, food produce and property, it has profound influence on residential relationships, leading to new trends in the polarization of communities (Ajibefun, 2017).

Solutions to Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nasarawa State

In addressing the problem of farmers-herders conflict in Nasarawa State, the state government should establish grazing reserves by providing grazing space, adequate water and animal clinic as well as other infrastructures that will help to improve livestock production and management. The state government should not take any land from the local farmers for grazing reserves by force but acquire the land with good compensation.

The Northern government should address environmental factors that are pushing herders' movement from the north to the north-central region (Nasarawa State). The government should pay attention to programs and projects that will restore drought-and-desert degraded environments and develop strategies for mitigating climate change impact in the far northern states.

The government of Nasarawa State should deploy modern technology like electronic chip to track animals (tracking of animals could help address the problem of cattle rustling and crises that have become so rampant) which is today practiced in Katsina State (Premium times, 2018).

The Nasarawa State Government should establish and constitute a body that will intervene through conflict mediation, resolution, reconciliation and peace building mechanisms in both



state and local government level. This will help in addressing the frequency of conflict between farmers and herders in the area

Conclusion and Recommendations

Herders and farmers' conflict is dangerous and should be curtailed by Nasarawa state government as many lives have been cut short in the state and the country at large as a result of this devilish act. The trend of herder/farmer conflict in Nasarawa State symbolizes what is known as resource conflict in current development literature. The study concludes that neglects of grazing reserve is one of the causes of conflict between herders and farmers in Nasarawa State. And one of the major effects of the conflict is destruction of farm land and consequently food insecurity. On the basis of this, the study recommends the establishment of ranches in the state and some selected local government areas. This will address the cattle movement across farm lands and reduce if not eliminate clashes between farmers and herders in the state.

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