

Dynamics of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria: The Implication to Social Work Policy Intervention

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Abstract

Farmers and herdsmen clashes are feuds that have led to wanton destruction of lives and properties over the years largely across Africa and Nigeria in particular. The Basic trust of this paper is to examine the dynamics of farmers' and herdsmen clashes in Nigeria. This study adopted descriptive research design with systematic review of literatures. The study made use of secondary data such as newspapers and journal publications. The study adopted Conflict theory by Karl Marx as its theoretical orientation. The study explored the effects of farmers and herdsmen clashes on the nation's life, causes and prospect for peace and lasting solution in view of social work policy intervention.

Keywords: Dynamics, Farmers/Herdsmen, Conflict, Nigeria, Social Work.

1. Introduction

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. 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. Yet to date, response to the crisis at both the federal and state levels have been poor (International Crises Group, 2017). Nigeria has experienced a considerable increase in natural resource conflicts since the early 1990s. The increasing conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have recently become a cause for worry, especially in wetland areas of the middle belt, North Central Nigeria (Leme, 2017). In a particular attack by fulani herdsmen in 2016 on Nimbo residents in Uzo- Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, left about 40 persons dead (Abiodun, 2016).

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; in the absence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, most seek shelter in other poor, rural communities, straining their already scarce resources. For women and girls, the impact is frequently magnified. The relatives of men killed in the violence often evict widows from their farmland. Moreover, post-conflict economic and social disenfranchisement renders women and girls even more vulnerable to sexual and economic predation (International Crises Group, 2017).

Farmers and herdsmen conflict have remained the most preponderant resource-use conflict in Nigeria (Ajuwon, 2004; Fasona and Omojola, 2005). The necessity to provide food of crop and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever-growing demands, has led to intensification of land use (Nyong and Fiki, 2005). The competition between farmers and herdsmen, however, has often times turned into serious hostilities and social friction in many parts of Nigeria.

The conflicts have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized, with reverberating consequences nationwide (Adisa, n.d). Based on the foregoing this paper is geared towards exploring the dynamics of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria and it's implication for social work policy intervention.

2. The Fulani People

The *Fula* people, also known as *Fulani* in *Hausa* language, are a mass population widely dispersed and culturally diverse in all of Africa, but most predominate in West Africa and Nigeria in particular. The Fulani's generally speak the Fula language. A significant number of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry grass lands of their environment, making them the world's largest pastoral nomadic group. They are massively spread over many countries, and are found mainly in West Africa and northern parts of Central Africa, but also in Sudan and Egypt. The main Fulani sub-groups in Nigeria are: Fulbe Adamawa, Fulbe Mbororo, Fulbe Sokoto, Fulbe Gombe, and the Fulbe Borgu (Eyekpimi, 2016).

There is diverse speculation about the origin of the Fulani herdsmen. In the accent Arabic writing, *fula* people were mentioned too. Anthropologist says that the origin of Fula is connected with Egypt. Some hypothesis states that Fulani is one of the Israel tribes. Others experts believe that Fula originated from the region of present Northern Senegal. Capturing vast territories, Fula managed to create powerful states that even Europeans tried not to touch them for many centuries. Fula proverbs say: "Cattle surpass everything, it's even more important than father and mother" "if cattle die, then fulbe dies". The herdsmen have often come into conflict with local farmers. The clashes also continued in the last several years. Recently the nature of the attacks has changed. It is often contained in news reports that Fulani Herdsman now allegedly uses firearms to kill farmers both in their farms and homes (Soriola, 2018).

3. The Dynamics of Farmers and Herdsmen Clashes

All over Nigeria there is an emphasis on the need for the promotion of agriculture as an alternative to oil as a major source of national revenue. A lot of agricultural programmes are put in place by governmental and non-governmental organization. Due to this emphasis on agricultural production, many people are going into farming; likewise more people are going into livestock and cattle breeding in particular. The effect of this agricultural surge is that there is a competition for the available land resources between farmers and herdsmen. A dimensional problem arises as cattle do graze on the farms of farmers and farmers in retaliation attacks the cows of the herdsmen. The herdsmen go on a reprisal attacks on the farmers largely because they value their cows immensely. So the attacks and reprisal attacks by farmers and herdsmen leads to destruction of lives and properties and also precipitate national disintegration.

Timeline of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria as recorded by Gbaradi (2018) showed that Fulani herdsmen killed 3,780 Nigerians in attacks across the country excluding the injured and abducted. On the other hand, farmers have killed scores of cows and Fulani herdsmen in reprisal attacks for the destruction of farms and farm produce by cows. For example, from the records of Gbaradi (2018) herdsmen invaded 2 villages in Agatu LGA in Benue state killing 8 villagers allegedly in retaliation for the killing of 112 cows.

4. Effects of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria

The insistent feud between the herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has devastating effects on the citizens. The effect of this conflict ranges from wanton destruction of lives and properties to decline in agricultural product which is the major source of sustenance in the nation.

Lose of live and properties: In 2016 there was an estimated death toll of about 2,500 arising from herdsmen attacks (International Crises Group, 2017). Farmers and herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today pose a threat to national survival and integration. Thousands of people have been killed, communities have been destroyed and so many farmers and herdsmen have lost their lives and property in an extended orgy of killings and destruction that is not only continuously destroying livelihoods but also affecting national cohesion (Gambari, Luther-Agwai, Ibrahim, Jega, Kwaja, Balla, Fesse, Muhammed-Oyebode&Ya'u, 2018). Adisa and Adekunle (2010) in a quantitative study examined farmers-Herdsmen conflict and its socio-economic implications in North Central Nigeria. Random sampling was used to select 300 farmers. The result of the study showed that greater number of farmers 64% lose quality relationship and loved once as a result of farmers and herdsmen conflict.

Among the major effects of farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflict in Nigeria are destruction of properties; theft of cattle and goats; destruction of crops; physical fight with machetes and sticks; pollution of drinkable water; destruction of reservoirs and source of drinkable water; burning of rangelands, fadama¹ and houses; and damages to irrigational facilities. The destruction has direct impact on the peoples' livelihood as their economic activities are tied to these environmental resources like water, land (soil), and vegetation (herbs and food crops) (Bello, 2013).

Economic Depletion: The persistence and consistency of farmers and herdsmen conflicts portends grave socioeconomic consequences (Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). Farm products which also serve as Nigerian foreign exchange products are destroyed during attack. These farm products like cash crops add to Nigerians' National Domestic Products but when these crops are destroyed it leads to depletion of economic growth. Economically Nigeria does not fare well with the incessant attacks on farmers and farm produce by the Fulani herdsmen, at the advent of conflict. On the other hand, cattle rearing have in no small measure contributed to the Nigerian economy. Nigeria is part of the country that exports cow meat and products and this adds to our GDP, however it can be observed that when farmers' farm products are destroyed by cows, there is always a reprisal attacks on the cow leading to the killing and injuring of hundreds of cows and this immensely Nigerian cow meat production which in turn leads to the depletion of the Nigerian economy.

The economic effects have also been huge. According to a 2015 study, the federal government was losing \$13.7 billion in revenue annually because of farmers and herdsmen conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states. The study found that on average these four states lost 47 percent of their internally-generated revenues. In March 2017, Benue state Governor Samuel Ortom asserted that attacks by herders coming from more northerly states, and possibly also from Cameroon and Niger, had cost his state N95 billion (about \$634 million at that time) between 2012 and 2014 (International Crises Group, 2017). Adisa and Adekunle (2010) in a quantitative study examined Farmers-Herdsmen conflict and its socio-economic implications in North Central Nigeria. Random sampling was used to select 300 farmers. The result of the study showed that 90.8% of the respondents lost their income as a result of farmer and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria, 85.0% lost their farm yield, 23.5% lost their house hold resources and 22.5% lost their stored products. Loss of farm yield could pose far-reaching consequences by reducing family food and income as well as planting stock for the next farming season. Clashes that involved loss of household items and stored farm products also have the potential to exacerbate indigence among farmers.

In a survey research conducted in Yobe State, Nigeria Bello (2013) examined "Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria; Causes, Repercussion and Resolutions". The sample size consisted of 500 farmers and 250 cattle herdsmen, making a total of 750. The study used quantitative methods with structured questionnaire as the major instrument for data collection. The result of the study revealed the following repercussion of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Yobe state Nigeria; (a) Economic repercussions such as loss of income/resources/yield. (b) Physical such as home/farm destruction, bodily injury or death of family member. (c) Socio-psychological repercussions such as emotional exhaustion (d) the social, economic and political tensions created as a result of numerous escalations of violent conflicts have raised fundamental national questions for the survival of the Nigerian State. The failure of the state to manage and resolve such conflicts has put a question mark on the suitability or relevance of the federal structure to the Nigerian reality.

5. Causes of Farmer and Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria

Problem does not exist in a vacuum and every problem was caused by something. A good number of factors gave rise to farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria. This section is geared towards discussing them.

Land use: Intensive crop farming has expanded into grazing lands in many areas over these years. These areas of encroachment agree with most of the conflict points recorded (Muhammed, Ismailia, Bibi, 2015). They argued that the incessant clashes between farmers and herdsmen were partly caused by increase in population which led to utilization of grazing pathways for agricultural activities and residential purposes. This made land very scarce for herdsmen and most often they graze on farmers' crop which leads to clashes.

¹Fadama is an Hausa language that simply means fertile or rich land

Past conflicts were solely due to overlap of farmlands with cattle routes, where farmers grow crops on the routes (Muhammed, Ismailia, Bibi, 2015). Other studies show farmers encroachment on cattle routes is the real cause (Nformi, M. I., Mary-Juliet, B., Engwali, F. D. and Nji, A. (2014). Farmer-pastoralist conflicts have been associated with the conflict of land resource use exacerbated by dwindling resources (Blench, 2004). Some researchers have linked this crisis to the theory of eco-violence (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014), where environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources leads to conflict and violence. This may explain the dwindling grazing resources (land, pasture etc.) and poor management of existing grazing reserves (Adisa, 2012) as one the major cause. Furthermore, the population is dynamic and ever increasing compared to land that is relatively static. The population growth rate of Nigeria per year is 3.2% (National Population Commission, 2012). Therefore, more and more people will continue to compete over land.

Ethnic and Religious differences: Recently, this conflict has escalated, taking another dimension of ethnic and Religious differences with little effort from government or community leaders aimed at addressing them (Muhammed, Ismailia, Bibi, 2015). Ethnic jingoists and politicians have been benefitting in these strives and without doubt have succeeded in creating a divide between the farmers and pastoralist, especially in communities that are less educated. Leaders at the Federal, State, Local Governments and even at community levels become perplexed and wondered on how these issues can be resolved (Muhammed, Ismailia, Bibi, 2015).

In a survey research conducted by Yobe State, Nigeria Bello (2013) examined “Herdsman and farmers conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria; Causes, Repercussion and Resolutions. The sample size consisted of 500 farmers and 250 cattle herdsman, making a total of 750. The study used quantitative methods with structured questionnaire as the major instrument for data collection. The result of the study revealed the following causes of farmers and herdsman conflict in Yobe state Nigeria; (a) Destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructure) by the herdsman themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers. (b) Burning of rangelands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herdsman. (c) Increasing rate of cattle theft which, is often accompanied by violence. (d) Antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsman could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources. In support of above claim, Ingawa, Ega, and Erhabor (1999) reported that the key underlying causes of farmer-herdsman conflict in Nigeria are: 1. Decline in internal discipline and social cohesion, as the adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods, and the authority of the traditional rulers is breaking down. This is exacerbated by increased rent seeking of the formal and traditional authorities in managing resource access. 2. Particularly severe on the traditional trek routes, which become favorite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas? Within the fadama areas, this is exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the crop plots, which makes prevention of animals straying in the crop plots difficult 3. Inadequacy of grazing resources, as increasing crop cultivation (and increasing commercialization of the crop-residues) and poor management of the existing grazing reserves have resulted in a significant reduction in available livestock feed resources, in particular in the Northern States. 4. Moreover the high value crops introduced by NFDP (tomatoes and onions) produce almost no crop-residues for livestock feeding. 5. Finally, the regulation that twenty percent of the fadama would need to be set aside for grazing (National Agricultural Policy, 1988) has not been adhered to.

6. Difference between Cattle Colony and Ranches

Yusuf and Buhari (2018) colonies and ranches are the same thing in many ways except that a colony is bigger than a ranch; a colony is a biological expression for any species of animals whether by nature or by human design that are found in a large community sharing the same terrain, such as bee colonies in certain areas. Onyekakeyah (2018) cattle colony is not a strategy for grazing cattle but a centre for cattle and beef product sales. Besides, there is only one cattle colony in the whole world found in Pakistan. Onyekakeyah (2018) a ranch is an area of land with facilities and structures set up for raising grazing livestock such as cattle, for meat or wool. Yusuf and Buhari (2018) in colony 20, 30 ranchers can share the same colony, a ranch is usually owned by an individual or company with few numbers of cows, in a cattle colony you could find 100, 200, 300 cows owned by different individuals

7. Theoretical Orientation

This study adopted conflict theory as its theoretical orientation in effort to unfold the dynamic of farmers and herdsman conflict in Nigeria. Conflict theory was propounded by Karl Max. The basic tenet of the theory is that the society is in a state of perpetual competition for limited resources. In this case the limited resources are lands, and the competition for land resource is what originated farmers and herdsman conflict in Nigeria. Even though, the conflicts have taken political, religious and ethnic dimension.

8. Methodology

The study was conducted in Nigeria, which comprises of 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Nigeria is located in West Africa. The study adopted descriptive research design with systematic review of literatures. The study made use of secondary data such as newspapers and journal publications.

9. Social Work in Conflict Resolution

Social workers continually work in areas where conflict is prevalent on a daily basis including at home, in the work place, schools and society at large. In many respects, social work has always been about conflict and resolving conflict (Kelly, 2014). Conflict resolution is a core competency of social workers, and social workers have contributed immensely to this thriving field. Conflict resolution as a field of practice includes mediation, facilitation, conflict coaching, dispute system design, management, and arbitration. Conflict professionals provide preventative, restorative, substantive, procedural, and decision-making services to people in conflict situation (Mayer, 2013).

In researching the use of mediation/conflict resolution in social work practice, it is logical to consider that both social work and conflict resolution are linked in that “social workers regularly assume the role of intervener in almost all aspects of social work practice” (Mayer, 2013, p. 419). Kruk (1997) indicates that “Formal conflict resolution processes, especially mediation, have been used in a wide variety of social work settings” (p. 14). For example, mediation/conflict resolution skills are utilized in areas related to families such as divorce, aging, mental health, child/parent relationships, and adoption. In addition, mediation/conflict resolution skills are applied in areas of community, education, workplace, criminal justice, social policy, and intercultural issues. It appears that mediation/conflict resolution seems comparable to core competencies in social work as social workers are usually involved in all of these areas. Mayer (2000) indicates there are five general types of services that social workers provide related to mediation/conflict resolution, “prevention, reconciliation, decision-making, procedural assistance, and substantive assistance” (p. 312).

10. Social Work Application of Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Farmers and Herdsman Conflict in Nigeria

Social Workers can apply system theory to understand the dynamics of conflict between the herdsman and farmers. System theory stipulates that a system is a whole that is made up of component, the whole is not greater than the individual component and where there is a dysfunction in the individual component then the whole will inevitably malfunction. So here we see herdsman and farmers as respective systems. For the herdsman, its major component is the cattle. In the culture of the Fulani there is a saying “cattle are more important than father and mother and if cattle die then the Fulbe or Fulani dies. So it can be understood that a cattle’s life is more important to a Fulani cattle breeder than that of a human being. On the other hand, the farmer is a system and its major component is the agriculture process and produce, so if anything tempers with this, the farmer is affected adversely. In brief, the take away here is that the cattle of the herdsman have to be treated with respect and the farm or farm produce of the farmer have to be treated with respect for peace to exist.

Based on the above analysis, lasting solution to farmers and herdsman conflict in Nigeria is the creation of new grazing reserve and not cattle colony which has been critically opposed by Nigerians. According to Gambariet al (2018) the establishment of grazing reserves provides the opportunity for practicing a more limited form of pastoral and it is therefore a pathway towards a more settled form of animal husbandry. Nigeria has a total of 417 grazing reserves out of which only about 113 have been gazette.

Social workers are trained in areas such as identifying and analyzing underlying interests of conflicting parties, developing resources, and generating options (Kelly, 2014). Social worker should develop mechanism to protect the interest of both herdsman and farmers.

Social workers can drive home to the herdsmen the benefits of grazing reserve to their cattle healthiness as against open grazing. It is worthy to note that some states in Nigeria enacted anti-open grazing law such as Benue State, Taraba State and Ekiti State. The Fulani herdsmen vehemently opposed these laws and said that they will continue with their open grazing practice most especially in Benue State where they have unleashed several attacks. Social Workers in collaboration with the government agencies such as the security apparatus and the legislatures can enlighten the herdsmen association on the best practice of grazing reserve which will also end the incessant clashes between herdsmen and farmers.

11. Social Work Recommendation for Policy Actions

In this section recommendations are made for policy formulation and implementation from the social work perspective as a lasting solution to the Fulani and herdsmen clashes:

- ✦ Enactment into law of grazing reserves as the prerequisite to breed cow in Nigeria. Citizens of Nigeria should operate grazing reserve in their own indigenous land to avoid religious and ethnic conflict.
- ✦ Creation of soft loans for herdsmen to enable them to secure ranches for their cattle.
- ✦ Portioning severe punishment for herdsmen seen open grazing their cattle.
- ✦ Meticulously portioning severe punishment to bandits who steal and maim cattle of herdsmen thereby provoking them to unleash the carnage they have being unleashing on innocent citizens of Nigeria over the last decade.
- ✦ The government should develop strategies and programmes to disarm herdsmen of their dangerous weapons. It was observed that herdsmen use AK 47 to unleash terror attacks on their victim and with other dangerous weapons.
- ✦ The security apparatus should make concerted effort to fish out foreign machineries that facilitate the unleashing of the carnages by Fulani herdsmen. It worthy of note that among some of the Fulani herdsmen arrest because of terror attacks where foreign machineries.
- ✦ For peace to exist there must be a deliberate design to enlighten and mobilize the parties in conflict to understand the ecology and the resources available in the localities.
- ✦ Establish or strengthen conflict mediation, resolution, reconciliation and peace building mechanisms.
- ✦ Involve neighboring countries to help and curb the movement or entry of insurgents in Nigeria through their own borders.

12. Conclusion

The conflict and clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have claimed enormous scores of lives in Nigeria. The death toll of the killing of Nigerians by herdsmen is about 3,780 from 2012 to 2018 (Gbaradi, 2018). The effects of farmers' and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria are overwhelming. This conflict has led to the destruction of lives and properties in Nigeria; it has also affected the Nigerian economy adversely, the destruction of farm produce and killing of cows have not fared well with the Nigerian economy, psychological wellbeing of victims' relatives and survived victims of the attacks have been distorted adversely (International Crises Group, 2017, Gambari, et al, 2018, Adisa and Adekunle, 2012 & Bello, 2013). Scholars have identified some fundamental causes of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria; land use which also involves scarcity of land resources, ethnic and religious differences were among the major factors (Muhammed, et al 2015, NPC, 2012, Adisa, 2012, Okoli, & Atelhe, 2014, Blench, 2004, Nfomi, 2014). Other identified causes of clashes between farmers and herdsmen includes; destruction of crops by cattle, burning of rangelands, increasing rate of cattle theft, decline in internal discipline and social cohesion and inadequacy of grazing resources (Ingawa et al 1999 & Bello, 2013). Conflict resolution is a core competency of social work practice. Social Workers continuously work in areas where conflict is prevalent on a daily basis (Kelly, 2014 & Mayer, 2013). Social work proffered lasting solution to the conflict and incessant clashes between the farmers and herdsmen which is creation of grazing reserves which is healthier for cattle breeding when compared to open grazing. The study recommended 9 policy actions to be undertaken to permanently solve the problem of Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria.

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