

HERDERS-PEASANT FARMERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA AND CHALLENGES OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The core objective of this study is to examine the nexus between farmers-herders conflicts and the extent to which the crisis has impinged on adequate food crops production, as well as agricultural development as it relates to food security in Nigeria's north-central zone. The challenges of insecurity orchestrated by the eruption of conflicts between cattle nomads and rural peasants, to say the least, been increasingly devastating. The issue of transhumant and crop farmers conflicts spirals across several states and communities ranging from Nasarawa, Niger, Kogi, Benue and Plateau states. The carnage caused by the conflict has continued to raise several concerns due to the dangerous impacts it has brought to bear on the socio-economic and development fabric of the affected communities. Conversely, there now exists not only the quagmire of escalation of food prices, but essentially, there are high risks of human insecurity, destitution, homelessness, inflation, poor agricultural crop production, and increasing death tolls arising from banditry. This paper is a theoretical exploration of existing works of experts in the broader field of conflict studies. The work relies on secondary methods for data collection. Findings reveal that due to the rising cases of conflicts in some of the affected states and peasant communities, there may be a prolonged food crisis, increased inflation, bloodbaths and homelessness over a long time. The paper therefore suggests that arresting this challenge requires adopting both horizontal and vertical conflict resolution mechanisms, including the role of government and other stakeholders in the region to stem the tides of conflicts. These holistic measures, it is hoped, can trigger the anticipated development required to bring succour and sustenance to food crop production in the affected states.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts, and particularly, herders and crop farmer's conflicts have continued to pose serious concerns to experts and scholars in recent times in Nigeria. Conflicts manifest in Nigeria in form of ethnic/tribal crises, terrorism, banditry, sectional agitations, religious tensions and of late, crop farmers and herder's conflicts. All of these, to experts such as Udo (2021) and Adisa (2012) are attributable to contestation for land space and other natural resources such as access to vegetation's for grazing, water resources, amongst others. Udo (2021) argues that land resources and

competition for space account for majority of the increasing rates of conflicts recorded in Nigeria, and particularly, in the nation's north central geo-political zone.

From the classic works of Ogu (n.d), conflict between cattle herders and crop farmers has become a new norm, with devastating consequences in terms of loss of human lives and resources, food scarcity, inflation, low food supply chain, inadequate food production, among others. In terms of loss of human lives, the International Crises Group (2018) claims that several hundreds of

thousands of people have been killed, and many others, rendered homeless in the wake of conflicts.

In one of his studies on the impacts of crop farmers and trans-human conflicts in the north central Nigeria, Mustapha (2023) opines that the contradictions of conflicts in the region take the form of economic and resource interest, respectively. On the one hand, people must survive the harsh realities of global meltdown, orchestrated by rising cost of goods and services, inflation, disease pandemics (for instance, the COVID-19); climate change variabilities, changes of economic and political structures, etc. on the other hand, the population has constantly been on the rise, with attendant food scarcity and/or insecurity, shortages of farm lands, flooding, terrorism and insurgency, to mention but a few.

The report further states that of the 415 grazing reserves in Nigeria, only one-third is being put into use. The remaining 270 routes are either under cultivation by crop farmers, which is why the clashes between farmers and transhumance cattle grazers have remained unabated.

Given the foregoing, it is clear that agricultural production has been badly affected. Corroborating this view, Adisa and Adekunle (2010) in one of their pilot studies on conflicts between crop farmers and herders noted that the multiplier effects of these conflicts are ferocious, particularly on peasant households. For instance, Adisa and Adekunle lamented that during conflicts, farmers experience huge material losses, among others. All of these losses may have boomerang effects on food supply, while the few available food items continue to skyrocket in terms of price due to competing demands by the growing population. It is in light of this that successive governments over time have attempted to enunciate agricultural policies ranging from, among other things, the Green Revolution, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the recent RUGA system (though this was vehemently opposed by sections of the Nigerian Society based on ideological reasons), among others.

The problem of this study however, is that in spite of efforts being put in place by the government to arrest the raging conflicts, these strategies, one way or the other, have hardly succeeded in taming the tides of conflicts. This scenario therefore raises very fundamental questions to address the ensuing quagmire that has continued to grow faster, particularly in Nigeria viz:

What are the pre-disposing factors to farmers-herders' conflicts in Nigeria?

What are the drivers of conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria?

How does the conflicts affect food availability in North central region of Nigeria?

These questions have become important to be able to sufficiently resolve the lingering conflicts and food crises ravaging the nation's landscape.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this investigation is to examine the nexus between crop farmer's conflicts and the extent to which the menace

affects successful implementation of agricultural development in Nigeria. However, the specific objectives seek to examine herders-crop farmers conflicts and the extent it affects food production in selected geo-political zones in Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory study. It therefore relies on existing works of experts and intelligentsias using secondary method of data collection. The work explores relevant research materials ranging from books, refereed journals, monographs and other relevant resource materials critical in the generation of information on herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria's north central geo-political zone.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

CONFLICT

Many scholars have looked at conflict in diverse ways, depending on the ideological leaning of the experts as well as the environment they find themselves.

Baba (2017) avers that Conflicts may take the form of friction, discord or disagreement. This occurs often when there is a clash of interest between one group of persons and those of the others. To a greater or lesser extent, this kind of conflict may become brutal and hence, involves expression of violence among contending groups. What is clear about conflicts is the fact that there exist animosity and antagonism with two or more parties competing for space or resources, these often results in fatalities and hence creates a sense of chaos in society. However, it can be said that all conflicts may not necessarily give rise to bloodshed. There could be ideological Conflicts such as those meant to address deep-seated disagreement over a set of belief systems. Conversely, ideological issues such as this tend to address complex political, economic, and cultural value systems either at the national or international levels, and define relationship between nation states in the international global market places. According to Stern and Jarret (2020), some of those conflicts take either symmetrical or asymmetrical postures and may become a source of peaceful resolution of divergent, but often mutual interest in the international system.

In the case of Nigeria's north central region, Conflicts often takes the form of violence. This state of affair tends to negate the opinions of Jarret and stern (2020) who merely present Conflicts as non-violent agitations between actors and or non-state entities in the international system. The nature of conflicts in north central Nigeria particularly in Benue Plateau, Nigeria and Nasarawa states over land resources and space has been extremely violent and destructive. From the studies carried out by Alston (2014) Bayed (2002) and Maun (2014), the struggle between herdsman and present farmers has given rise to several deaths. These scholars opine that conflict between the two steps is linked to competition for land control and ownership, which to a greater or lesser extent is defined by the extent to which each of the contending groups lay claims to either grazing route, water points and national vegetation for cattle and other livestock. Adisa and Adekale (2010) lamented that the increase arable land has most often resulted to serious hostilities and social friction between farmers and herders in north central Nigeria. This

conflict has not only worsened the level of insecurity, but has essentially demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the rising food crises currently being faced by Nigerian citizens, and particularly, north central geopolitical zone of the country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Quite a number of scholars and intelligentsias have attempted to explain the lingering crises and conflicts between herdsmen and peasant using several theoretical models. From the works of Atelhe and Okoli (2024), conflicts between herders and farmers are essentially an off-shoot of the devastating effects of changes in the natural eco-system orchestrated by global climate change. To Atelhe and Chukwuma (2014), these changes have become a force that propels unintended movements of cattle herders from one region to the other thereby leading to conflicts. Again, Adibe (2020) in his study on farmers and herders violent conflicts examine the political undertone that has continued to shape conflicts in Nigeria, and particularly the role of push factors ranging from ethnic, religious and cultural, among others.

For the purpose of this study, however, the social conflict theory was used as basis for theoretical analysis. The major tenet of this theory finds expression in the fact that social life is a contest and competition for the distribution of power and natural resources. The struggle according to Karl Marx, revolves around the distribution of resources, which to him, is couched in inequality, oppression, subjugation and exploitation. The underlying assumption, to Marx, is that apart from the scarcity and uneven endowment of natural resources by different societies globally, the most ferocious of it all is the way and manner these resources are being manipulated by the power elites in the economic distribution scheme of things. This scenario may result in a stage where the lack of satisfaction by the impoverished section of society could result to social unrest, conflicts and violence. This inability or the lack of political will for efficient resource distribution that could cater to the growing needs of people is the direct consequence of the ravaging conflicts in the country today.

Pre-Disposing Factors to Farmers-Herders Conflicts in Nigeria's North Central Region

From what is available in the public research domain by different research experts, it can be said that the pre-disposing factors propelling conflicts between herders and farmers are multidimensional in outlook. In one of the studies carried out by Mustapha (2023) on the impacts of farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria's north central zone, the author observed that the availability of lush vegetation, water sources and supportive weather conditions have continued to attract herders to the region in their droves. When this happens, there is the tendency for conflict to occur when the interests of herder's clash with those of the peasant farmers.

Again research findings carried out by Mustapha (2023) in Benue state about the frequency of occurrence of herders-farmers conflicts reveals that one of the major factors of clashes includes destruction of farm lands and crops by herders, contamination of water sources and streams that often serve source of drinking water for the

communities; overgrazing, lack of regards for laid-down rules by herders, sexual harassment by young herders as well provocative use of vulgar language and indiscriminate infliction of injuries on community members and even deaths. According to reports from Giza Development Area of Nasarawa State by one Mrs. Adi (2023) averred that:

The way and manner herders destroy my maize and groundnut farm is alarming. I have become a maiguard (local name for watchman) in my farm all these months, I need to be on the farm to stay around and drive away straying cattles from my crops so that they are not eaten up by cattles. Even as a widow, I know the level of harassment I have received from the herds-men, sometimes, all alone in the bus. On many occasions they threaten to beat me up if I dare open my mouth to ask them to leave my farm. At that point, I resolved that I was going to die with my crops rather than allow them (herders) to destroy my only source of food....(2023).

Aside these reasons, some experts and scholars such as Atelhe and Okoli (2014) maintain that changes in climatic conditions have proved to be one of the changes in climatic conditions have proved to one of predisposing factors to conflicts by herders and farmers. Climate-induced change, which is more of a global problem, has brought about eruption of inclement and an unfavorable weather condition. The adverse weather undoubtedly affects food production adequate enough for consumption by cattle and other livestock which is why conflict occurs (Atelhe & Okoli, 2014).

Buttressing the fact, climate change and weather conditions across the globe have constituted challenge to conflicts due to scarcity of resources; Mnguashima and Olushola (2022) agree that the problem of desertification and loss of arable lands to expanding settlements as well as south wards migration by nomadic herders have constantly provoked violent competition over land resources with local peasants.

To be sure, most experts are of the view that the incidence of drought and desert encroachment here increasingly degraded fodders and pastures as well as divide up a wonder of national water resource in Nigeria north east geographical zone including Borno, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe States. Under this situation, majority of farmers have been forced to migrate with their cattles down south (including the north- central region). Added to this, there is also the factor of insecurity occasioned by Boko Haram terrorism and late, the widespread waves of banditry, that are actively engaged in killing, theft, and occupation of farm lands originally owned by local peasants as well cattle rustling, among others.

There is also the challenge of exponential growth of farmer settlement as a result of population exploitation of critical infrastructure by the government and the investment drives of private-sector developers. Awogbade (1987) earlier noted that a vast portion of grazing routes have been converted to residential areas, by private housing and real estate developers. This scenario has continued to put pressure on available land material meant for grazing and farming, which of course is one of the reasons for frequent herder-farmers conflict in Nigeria.

Scholars have argued that Nigeria's attempt to confronting food insecurity using agricultural production strategies dates lead to unit

history. Erunke (2017) in his investigation of the nature of bad Akashi administrations, both military and civilian advice, have gleaned through a retinue of reforms in the section, these include among other things, the national accelerated food production programme, whose larger interest was designed to abolish import duties on agricultural equipment as well as import duties on critical agricultural sub-sectors. The Nigerian government has also attempted the introduction of Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, the agricultural transformation agenda, aimed at not only increasing agricultural productivity and food security but also to enhance and promote agribusiness development expansion drive among the teeming Nigerian rural populace.

According to Sonny (2023) noted that the APC-led government's attempted to declare a state of emergency on food security recently. This measure is a fall-out of the incessant attacks by herders on farming communities and rural farming settlement across the country (including north central geopolitical zone). Undoubtedly, the heightened and increasing attacks on farmers by not only bandits, but also the clashes between herdsman and farmers have had untold influence on food availability in the region and elsewhere. This step taken by the federal government, to Sonny (2023) appears inadequate, and therefore has hardly addressed the challenges of agricultural production and food security. According to Critics, Nigeria should have gone beyond window-dressing approaches in her efforts to address insecurity, which appear to be the major driven of food shortage, citing instances from major food supplies globally it has been reported that developed countries such as United States, China, India, etc.; have for several decades, formulated strategic plans and policy frame works that have seen millions of their citizen out of food shortages, insecurity, starvation and excruciating multidimensional poverty. All of these have been made possible using appropriate and pro-poor models and guaranteeing best practices in agriculture and food production for instance, Sonny (2023) opine that China, which in the largest food producer globally has achieved this feat through a combination of several strategies. These strategies, among other cement in agricultural technology through effective use of improved agricultural seedlings, farm inputs, mechanization and lot automation of agricultural production practices and zero-tolerance for corruption.

In another dimension, it has been reported that China has not implemented modern farming techniques, such as formulation of improved on irrigation system. Fertilizer and pesticides, provision of beans and genuine supports to farmers free from undue political interference. The Chinese government has also increased her drive for research and development to improve crop yield introduction of high-yielding crop varieties. The same case is time of India and the USA. The duo has gone several steps ahead to implement policies and programmers in the agricultural sector namely, enhancement of provision of agricultural subsidies, credit facilities and agricultural extension agencies; enhancement of precision agriculture, mechanization as well as deliberate use of agricultural biotechnology. More, these countries in a view to upscale food security, have gone ahead to create well-developed infrastructure for food storage, transportation and distribution to final consumers in their various communities across the nation.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined herder's farmers conflict in the north-central geographical zone of the Nigeria state using agricultural development strategies as a point of departure. The paper is a theoretical exploitation of some of the issues that were continued to initiate against food security in Nigeria generally and particularly in some part of the North Central State such as Plateau, Nasarawa, Benue, Niger State, among others. One major discovery in this work is the fact that banditry and undue clashes by herdsman with peasant farmers in a major undoing in the propagation of conflict and food shortage in the country, the study uses social conflict thesis as theoretical stand prompt to underpin the increasing conflict revenging the affected geopolitical entities. The theory presupposes that at the heart of divergent political social economic and cultural ideology lies the cattle for supremacy and conflicts in every society. The study X-rayed some of the strategies that have been applied by other nations of the world and the level of success recorded. The attempt is to see how the Nigeria state and some of the conflict zones can interline these strategies so as to ensure maximum success in militating not only insecurity and conflict but majority to guarantee adequate food security.

In line with the finding made in this study the Nigerian state can achieve greater feats given that conflicts are inimical to socio-economic and human development and security. In view of this the following recommendations, if properly deployed could assist in Nigeria quest to food sufficiency and peaceful coexistence among its teeming population. They are the following:

First, there is a need to re-configure the nation's security architecture, employ the necessary political will to trade insecurity and address the lingering squabbles between transhumant herder and famers in the country. The growing policing of human life and the politics of grand standing, sectionalism, stereotypes and religious bigotry should be discarded while insecurity should be seen and treated as collective pandemic rather than sectional interest.

Again, there is the need to confer and discuss further the plan to effectively ranch live stocks-cattle's, goats and sheep, by the government into confined environments while essential supports are created for the herders in their respective reaches this is to avoid encroachment into farms and cause destruction to crops.

Moreover, the Nigeria government must as a matter of responsibility engage in research and development in the agricultural sub-sector in the country. This can be done by allocating adequate resources to agricultural seed production and monitoring the level of compliance by beneficiaries to ensure probity and accountability.

Training and retraining of farmers can also be of help in a bid to improve food security. Farmers should be trained in modern agricultural practices and effective use and application of technology go as to improve inter- personal skills, thereby improving on productivity and better-quality produce. Encouraging farmers to employ modern machinery and agricultural equipment such as factors, harvesters and irrigation system can no doubt improve food production and food supply. There is also the need to ensure that farmers in north central regions can easily access credits out zero interest rates from banks and other financial institutions in

the country. This will enable farmers invest in modern farming techniques for crop production, animal breeding, hatchery, building of silos, purchasing of improved variation of crops and animals, among others.

Government should also encourage and enhance private-sector participation and investment in agricultural sub-sector. Government can apply soft-landing strategies such as granting of tax incentives, land reforms, granting market access and development of efficient market linkages nationally or across international boundaries.

The Nigerian government can also improve on its policies on food production through enhanced diversification, invest in agro-processing and adding value to existing crops produced locally. Some of the produce such as groundnut, millet, soybeans, sesame seeds, tomatoes if allowed to experience value-addition can further enhance the nations agricultural value chains, thereby enhancing adequate food production and food security.

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