

A THREAT TO PEACE AND PUBLIC HEALTH: FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICT IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The endemic crisis between farmers and herdsmen in rural communities in Nigeria poses serious threats to the overall population in terms of development, food security, health and peace. It has exposed the country to deadly transboundary diseases, debarring her from lawfully participating in the international animal trade, thus impacting negatively on Nigeria's economy. This study was conducted to investigate farmers and herdsmen crisis in Nigeria, causes, risk factors and possible solutions. A simple random sampling technique was used to assess 380 farmers and 220 herdsmen drawn from 38 rural communities in Kwara State, Nigeria. Standardised questionnaire was employed to capture data from the target populations and analyses of the parameters revealed: destruction of crops by grazing cattle (41%), contamination of streams by cattle (18%), over-grazing of land (10%), and disregard for local traditional authorities by the herdsmen (4%); others are sexual harassment of female members of the community by herdsmen (8%), harassment of herdsmen by the youths in the communities (2%), indiscriminate bush burning by herdsmen (1%), indiscriminate defecation of cattle on roads (1%), cattle rustling (4%) and stray cattle (1%). The implications of the crises as it relates to food security, food safety, animal and human health were enumerated. There was statistical difference in the response of farmers and herdsmen with respect to one of the causes of the crises ($P < 0.05$). The study suggested the establishment of long term developmental plans as permanent solution to the crisis between farmers and herdsmen in the study area.

Keywords: Crisis, Farmers, Food Security, Health, Herdsmen, Peace

Introduction

The crisis between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has led to loss of lives, property and livestock in many parts of the country, including Ilorin, Kwara State. It has affected the peace and health of humans and livestock in the affected areas with probable tendencies of spread to other parts of the country if practical solutions are not proffered and implemented. Farmers, host communities, herdsmen, hoodlums and school dropouts may be culprits. Many believe that it is

simply a farming, grazing land and water dispute, whereby farmers accuse herdsmen of destroying their crops, farm product and failure to control their animals. On the other hand, the herdsmen under the cattle breeders association claim that they are just defending themselves against attacks by gangs from farming communities that try to steal their cattle and (Adebayo, 1997; Ofuoku and Isife, 2009). Majority of herdsmen are the Fula people also known as Fulani in Hausa language. They have a mass population widely dispersed and

culturally diverse in all of Africa, but most predominant in West Africa. The majority of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry grass lands of their environment, keeping isolate from the local farming communities, 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 (Adebayo, 1997).

They have always ventured in search of land on which to feed their cattle; some are semi-nomadic, rooted in communities across Nigeria, while others travel along courses leading from Niger and Chad to Nigeria. But the combined effect of competition for land and droughts (climate change) has made their search increasingly desperate leading to clashes (Nweze, 2005). This paper presents a brief overview of the elements required in any policy that is aimed at developing a sustainable plan for resolving the herdsmen and farmers' crises in Nigeria (Kehinde, 2011). The result of the study would be useful for a further understanding of farmers-herdsmen crises in other West African countries (Abubakar, 2012). It would also give an insight into the way forward in such clashes situations. The public health implication of these clashes was reviewed and ways to curb the clashes were recommended.

Literature review

The incessant attacks have a drastic effect on food security, food safety, animal and human health and have caused losses of billions of Naira. Global humanitarian organization, funded by the

British Department for International Development (BFID) carried out a research between 2013 and 2016 on the causes and effects of the persistent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. Herdsmen and farmer clashes is thwarting the country's economic development. Also, affected by herdsmen and Farmers clashes is the Internally Generated Revenue. Other impacts of the clashes include: impeding trade practices, reduction in crop yield, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties, loss of products in storage and destruction of public and private buildings (Breuserset *al*, 1998; Tonah, 2006).

There have been increasing incidents of violent clashes between pastoralists and farmers in different parts of Nigeria, from the North-West, stretching across to the North-East, North-Central, South-West and South-East and South-South of the country. The clashes have often left thousands of innocent victims injured or dead and properties burnt or totally destroyed in affected localities (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009).

In the search for pastures and water for their cattle, herdsmen, usually from Northern parts of Nigeria move their herds of cattle, mostly on foot, from their base through different states across the country, stopping at some designated points along the way to drop off some of their stock at some of the various cattle markets, to fulfil the beef supply needs of consumers across the country (Adebayo and Olaniyi, 2008). The movement from one point to another was likely due to the effects of climate change, which has resulted in water scarcity and draught, tsetse fly infestation, dry pastures, cattle-owners and herdsmen have increasingly

finding it difficult to access suitable pasture and water for their cattle in their own base (Okello *et al*, 2014).

Therefore, hectares of arable farmland are often invaded by herdsmen at night or on market days (when most of the farmers must have gone to sell their crops). Such ambushed fighting and armed attacks which characterize most pastoral conflicts, have become the norm, with the usually heavily armed herdsmen invariably having the upper-hand as they often kill, set huts, houses, properties ablaze, sometimes going as far as to abduct innocent victims from the affected communities. In some cases entire communities have been torched or sacked by marauding herdsmen, leading to disruption of community life, damage to source of livelihood, or in some instances, displacement of the locals, who rendered homeless, or too afraid to return to the ravaged communities, subsequently end up in some of the Internally Displaced Persons' Camps set up by the government in conjunction with some Non-Governmental Organisation (Tukur, 2014).

When these herdsmen take their cattle to drink at rivers in the community, the water is polluted by the animals as they indiscriminately urinate and defecate in them. Thus, women and children who source water for household use are put through a lot of stress seeking clean water for drinking and cooking. It has also been reported that some of these herdsmen kidnap, beat up, rape and murder some of the women that dare to challenge them about the destruction of their farmlands or pollution of their water sources (Nweze, 2005; Turner, 2014).

Different methods of conflict management strategies have been

advanced by different scholars. For example, Gyong (1998) stated that the traditional method of conflict management before the advent of colonialism in Africa was better than the present strategies. According to him, the desire was to remove the cause of the dispute and reconcile the two parties in such a way as to restore the social structure of society to its state of equilibrium. That settlement of conflict was usually done in a "village square" under the leadership of a team of elders representing various clans, and they amicably settle and reconcile the parties involved (Berger, 2003).

The result of a research conducted by (Adebayo and Olaniyi, 2008) showed that, informal traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution are still functional in some areas, while both crop farmers and pastoralist have preference for the issue of conflict arbitration. The desire for sustaining relationships is the major factor that informed farmers and pastoralist preference of informal authority because taking disputes to formal authority like police/courts may worsen the relationship between the disputants. Antonio and Silvia (2009) identified some basic strategies of conflict resolution as follows: Alternative dispute resolution, is about the search for, and application of, "non-conventional" peaceful methods of settling disputes and resolving conflict situations using the least expensive methods, and in ways that satisfy the parties, as well as ways that preserve relationship after a settlement might have been reached.

African traditional dispute resolution, according to him, is a method used to resolve conflict by the use of the authority given to the traditional leaders.

Africans use collaborative methods of conflict resolution. Another method is Western alternative dispute resolution, which is a process of conflict resolution without violent means. It is also collaborative in nature. Grassroots community-based activities, good governance, collaborations, negotiation, reconciliation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication and crisis management are all elements of western alternative dispute resolution (Bello, 2013; Best, 2009). The best way of dealing with conflict situations according to Antonio and Silvia (2009) is to pre-empt or nip them in the bud. This implies an ability to pick out conflict situation in their infancy; to understand their nature, causes and the possible danger signals that may herald their eruption, and to act quickly and decisively to arrest such situations before they explode into open violence. He gave three important dimensions in conflict managements, conflict analysis, conflict containment and confrontation, and conflict resolution.

Ibrahim et al. (2014), suggested negotiation, adjudication and violent confrontation as the ways of managing the conflicts. However, Adisa, (2012) believed that the most effective solutions to the problem of unhealthy competition of land resources are: to introduce the nomadic herdsmen to sedentary life and getting them to adopt farming as an occupation in conjunction with cattle rearing (Adisa, 2012). He further stated that, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had also developed Strategic Action Plan for Livestock in West Africa to develop and transform the sector. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the

United Nations had also developed an Action Plan for Transhumance Livestock Breeding in West Africa.

There are also other interventions and support by other agencies and development. These include establishment of dialogue and peace committees (Elombah, 2017; UNDP, 2019), Networking of regional bodies and other stakeholders (Nwangwu et al., 2020), involvement of traditional/religious leaders in crisis mediation, sponsorship of social events like sports in conflict prone areas and private media stations' jingles on peaceful coexistence among farmers and herdsmen (Gukas, 2020). Some of these interventions are already on board and some are about taking off. If properly implemented these interventions would significantly reduce conflicts between Farmers and Grazers, enhance pastoralism and bring about economic, ecological and political stability in not only Nigeria but in sub-Saharan Africa (Tukur, 2013).

Methodology

A simple random sampling technique of 380 farmers and 220 herdsmen were selected from 38 purposively selected communities. A structured questionnaire was administered by the two research assistants recruited for this work. They went into those communities where the herdsmen and farmers clashes commonly occurred. Six hundred respondents were captured during the one-month period of the field work of this research. The data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Gender of respondent farmers / herdsmen

Sex	Farmers	Herdsmen	Total
Male	187	124	311
Female	193	96	289
Total	380	220	600

Table 2. Causes and frequency of clashes between farmers and herdsmen in the study area

S/No	Causes of clashes between farmers and herdsmen	Number of respondents to which questionnaire were administered	Number of respondents that indicated each cause as reason for crises	Prevalence (%)	p value
1	Destruction of crops	600	246	41	< 0.05
2	Contamination of stream by cattle	600	108	18	
3	Indiscriminate bush burning	600	66	11	-
4	Over - grazing of fallow land	600	60	10	-
5	Sexual harassment of female by herdsmen	600	48	8	-
6	Disregard for traditional authority	600	24	4	-
7	Harassment of herdsmen by the youths in the community	600	12	2	-
8	Indiscriminate defecation by cattle on roads	600	6	1	-
9	Cattle Rustling	600	24	4	-
10	Stray cattle	600	6	1	-
Total			600	100	

Destruction of crops was the major (41%) reason for the clashes between farmers and herdsmen in the study area. This was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Other reasons for the clashes were contamination of streams by

cattle (18%), indiscriminate bush burning (11%), overgrazing of fallow lands (10%), and sexual harassment of female members of the community by herdsmen (8%). Both cattle rustling and disregard for traditional authority had prevalence of 4%

while the prevalence for harassment of herdsmen by youth of the community, indiscriminate defaecation by cattle on roads in the community and stray cattle were 2%, 1% and 1% respectively (Table 2).

Climate change has caused desertification in the far north, and has led to extended drought and an estimated 20% drop in crop yields across the country (Turner, 2008). The combination of a growing cattle population, the effects of climate change on the availability of water and forage crops, as well as the lack of access to North Eastern foraging grounds due to the Boko Haram crisis are possible reasons for the search for food for cattle by herdsmen which may lead to grazing/destruction of farmlands/fallow grounds and indiscriminate defaecation of cattle on roads. Cattle were also reported to stray and wonder around which were perceived as dangerous by these communities.

The average cow drinks about 30-40 gallons of water per day, and consumes as much as 20-30 kg of hay or forage crops (Okello *et al*, 2014). This implies that Nigeria's cows require about 1 billion gallons of water, and 500,000 metric tons (500 million kilograms) of hay and forage products on a daily basis. Since there are no commercial ranching operations in Nigeria, these significant nutritional needs are met through nomadic foraging activities by herdsmen who roam the country with their cattle, following natural water ways and foraging reserves (Okello *et al*, 2014). The activities of the herdsmen and their cattle may have led to the contamination of streams in the communities in the study area, their natural behaviour could have also been misconstrued to be disregard to traditional

authority. Cattle rustling and harassment of herdsmen by youth in the study area may have led to reprisal attacks on the communities that led to burning of farmland and sexual harassment of female community member by revenge seeking herdsmen. Reprisal attacks and provocations exist on both sides and sometimes cattle are stolen from herdsmen by criminal groups and communities often attack the herdsmen, assuming them to be a threat. This crisis has been able to go on partly because there is very little security present in village communities, and attacks in rural fields are hard to police.

Majority of the food consumed by the country are produced in rural communities, about 1.3 million cows are also slaughtered annually to provide a portion of the meat for Nigeria's population of about 170 million people. Nigeria's cattle provide about 30% of the meat consumption and are therefore critical and important in assuring Nigeria's food security (Turner, 2008). There is need for resolution of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen to ensure conducive environment for the production of food, the health and wellbeing of the public.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In preventing these frequent clashes between farmers and herdsmen the government has initiated policies to provide security in the form of increased military and police presence in and around the affected areas. Besides the restoration of some temporary calmness, these policies seem not to do much, particularly in terms of addressing ways and means towards sustainable peace.

Peace-building efforts, which address the root causes and effects of these conflicts should include, among other things, the setting of structures that identify the said root causes of herdsman and farmer clashes, enhancing or promoting local capacities for conflict resolution and management. As part of such peace-building efforts the affected communities and herdsman could be assisted in initiating and building up conflict resolution mechanisms, which would come into effect at the early stages to prevent or ameliorate actual or impending conflicts. Possible avenues for engagement and interactions through dialogue, periodical meetings, negotiations or other physical interactions, if created, would equally go a long way in building "bridges" between both sides, thereby reducing tensions and the likelihood of future conflicts (Vanderlin, 2005; Tukur, 2014).

There is need for the Federal Government and the affected state governments, to take necessary action towards tackling the incessant problem of acute water shortage and drought which are the two key issues that drive the herdsman out of their base to farmland and communities. The government has decided to set up a special taskforce to secure agro-investments and investors in the country. This is in tandem with the government's plan to diversify the economy with a focus on agriculture. An inter-ministerial committee has been set up to work out modalities and fine tune the security of agro-investments and the investors (Tukur, 2014).

Nigeria's cattle are an essential part of securing Nigeria's food security. The 19th century farming practices that the herdsman rely on can no longer be

sustained. It is the duty of the Nigerian government to midwife this transition from pastoralism to mechanized and commercial ranching. This is the best practice in developed countries. Poultry and animal husbandry are supposed to be done in an enclosed environment. Herdsman can form themselves into cooperative societies and jointly operate a ranch. Government can also grant them soft loans to facilitate the establishment of such ranches. Effective border control is equally needed to ward off herdsman who migrate from other countries to wreak havoc in Nigeria. This is visible and achievable if the political will is there (Ifatimehin, 2003)

The adoption of a participatory epidemiology planning process that involves all stakeholders (herdsman and farmers) in the dispute resolution mechanism will help to promote consensus instead of clashes. Another approach is nomadic education for herdsman in Nigeria and Neighbouring Countries. All stakeholders can only operate optimally while carrying out their economic activities in a peaceful environment. This will result in the expansion of cropped area and motivate higher cropping intensity and problem-free environment.

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