

THE EFFECT OF PASTORALISTS (FULANI HERDSMEN) AND FARMERS' CONFLICTS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDDLE-BELT REGION OF NIGERIA

DR. EDWARD KURUKU

Abstract

The paper examined the incessant and perennial conflict between pastoralists otherwise called Fulani herdsmen and farmers' conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria especially in states like Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Plateau and Kaduna. The objective of the paper was to critically examine the recurrent herdsmen and farmers' conflict in the region, which has devastated and destroyed socio-economic activities in the region and proffer lasting solution to this conflict. The conflict has also taken very dangerous ethnic and religious dimensions, which have polarized the government and security agencies in curbing the trend. Different conflict management approaches were reviewed with the aim of

finding lasting solution to the conflict. Based on empirical studies and observation from other parts of the world, it was revealed that the best way of curbing herdsmen and farmers' conflict is the provision of ranches for livestock in confinement with modern facilities in line with global best practices. The paper therefore recommended, among others, the provision of ranches in parts of the country or region where livestock is domesticated to avoid reoccurrence of the conflict.

Key Words: Pastoralists, Farmers, Conflict, Socio-economic, Development, Middle-belt.

Introduction

Conflict has since time immemorial been a part of the everyday life of groups, individuals and communities. Conflict has often been viewed as abnormal, undesirable and retrogressive. However, conflict itself is not bad, but the dysfunctional and destructive nature of conflict makes it bad. Early sociologists such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim and Marx Weber shared this perception of conflict. However, radical scholars of society like Karl Marx saw conflict as not only normal, but also a necessary element that leads to growth, competition and development.

Agriculture is perhaps the oldest occupation of mankind throughout the period of man's existence on the planet earth. Man has survived as hunter and as a gatherer of fruits, nuts and berries. Another very critical resource of human existence is access to fresh water for both human and animal consumption. Gardner (2010) and Stockholm (2009) reported that water scarcity is growing in urgency in many regions as population growth,

climate change, lack of investment, and management failures restrict the amount of water availability relative to demand.

The specific objective of this paper is to critically examine the perennial and recurrent pastoralists and farmers' conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, causes of such conflicts, the role of law enforcement agencies and solutions to these conflicts. There have been perennial conflicts between Fulani nomadic herdsmen (pastoralists) and farmers in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria for decades without any feasible solutions insight. The middle belt region consists of states such as Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Plateau and the southern part of Adamawa State of Nigeria.

Several studies on farmers-pastoralists conflict have been conducted in some parts of Nigeria by Zakari et al. (2006) and Isa (2011), but these studies have not actually addressed the issues of legislation and the role of security agencies, religion and ethnic factors in these conflicts. The Middle Belt region has suffered devastation, poverty, low standard of living, with the lowest per capital income and underdevelopment as a result of this conflict. The upsurge and invasion of middle belt communities by Fulani herdsmen has assumed a very frightening and destructive dimension, as these pastoralists now carry and move around with

Department of Psychology, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria

Corresponding Author
EDWARD KURUKU
E-mail: edwardkuruku@gmail.com

sophisticated weapons, such as AK-47 rifles, grenades, surface to surface missiles, knives and other dangerous weapons and freely use them on their victims with impunity.

The situation is compounded by the nonchalant attitude and insensitivity of the security agencies who turn the other way round, when these acts of criminalities are committed. This attitude of law enforcement agencies has raised suspicions of connivance, and religious and ethnic biases of support for these pastoralists who share similar ethnicity and religious beliefs with the powers that be. It is instructive to note that the structure and composition of the Nigerian Military and the police who are expected to enforce the laws of the land is skewed to and lopsided in favour of the far north of Nigeria, where these Fulani herdsmen (pastoralists) originated, thus the inaction on the part of the security agents.

Generally speaking, several factors have been identified as being responsible for the frequent occurrence of farmers and herdsmen conflict in the middle belt region especially in Benue State. Some of these factors include migration of cattle in large number from the northern part of Nigeria, destroying crops and farmlands as they move. The second is scarcity of freshwater for the herds and other uses. The conflict occurs virtually every year, during cropping and farming seasons, the worst being in 2014 and 2017, when herdsmen killed and destroyed lives and properties worth millions of money.

In other parts of the world like Sudan, a study by Montenegro (2012) and Brown, Hammill and Mcleman, (2007) reported an 18-month study of Sudan by United Nations Environment Program (MNEP) which concluded that the conflict in Darfur had its roots in water shortage as a result of disappearance of pasture for grazing of livestock and evaporating water holes and rivers. It is in realization of checking and controlling the movement of livestock by pastoralists to avoid conflicts with farmers that the Benue State government of Samuel Ortom signed into law the anti-Open grazing law of 2017. Ekiti State had earlier on also signed the law.

The Nigerian constitution, 1999 as amended, makes provision for the free movement of people from one part of the country to the other. However,

this provision does not permit the possession of fire arms by citizens or herdsmen as is the case with Fulani herdsmen (pastoralists) in Nigeria where they move with sophisticated weapons as they migrate or move, killing and destroying lives and properties.

It has always been the contention of many observers including the governors of the middle belt states (region) that ranching of livestock is the only panacea and solution to farmers and herdsmen conflict in the middle belt region and the country at large.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Pastoralism

Pastoralism or pastoral farming is the branch of agriculture that is concerned with the raising of livestock. It also refers to animal husbandry that involves the care, tending and use of animals such as camels, goats, cattle and sheep (Likita et al., 2015). It may have a mobile aspect moving the herds in search of fresh water and pasture. Many traditional practices have also had to update and adopt to the changing circumstances of the modern world. Ranches of the United States and sheep stations as well as cattle stations of Australia are seen by some as modern innovations (Wikipedia, 2011).

Sedentary Crop Farming

Ekong (2003) in a study reported that crop farming is practiced by sedentary farmers, who are defined as farmers living in permanent settlements and gaining their livelihood mainly from crop production, with domestic animals molding income; thus the link between farming and herding is continuous.

Land

Land is a resource that has an economic value. Land is one of the factors of production from an economic point of view. It is a resource that is a major cause of farmers and herdsmen conflict (John, 2014).

Land resource has been defined by Blench (1996) as environmentally caused conflict. He reported that environmental or land conflicts manifest themselves as political, social, economic, ethnic, religious and territorial interests. Conflict

occurs when there is lack of access to land, encroachment and issues bothering on citizenship, indigene and settler as claims and counter claims of ownership by conflicting parties are made.

Pastoralism is economically viable to the extent that it contributes significantly to the economy of many developing countries, despite continued under investment (Harfield & Daries, 2006). In this part of the world, inland fishing is meager and offshore fishing has not been explored to produce food as part of a diet. Meat, milk as well as butter are major sources of protein. In addition, thousands of Nigerians make daily living from the sale, transport, processing and marketing of livestock products that include meat, milk, butter, hides and skin (John, 2014).

Agriculture provides the means of livelihood and economic sustenance of the people of the middle belt region of Nigeria. Farmers and pastoralists who are the main agricultural practitioners make significant contributions in meeting the nutritional needs of the region and thus contributing to food security.

Causes of Farmers and Herdsmen (Pastoralists) Conflict

Conflict between pastoralists and farmers is usually caused by herd grazing on farmlands and eating up crops. John (2014) reported the predicament of pastoralists and farmers as well as the true stories behind their conflicts and how these can be resolved. This result shows the existence of one-sided reporting by the media, research articles, and interested parties. A majority of these reports tend to favour farmers against pastoralists and tend to ignore the losses incurred by the other in the conflict.

Scarcity of Resources

Farmers and pastoralists all over the world make their livelihood within the same geographical, political and socio-cultural conditions, which may be characterized by scarcity of resources (Braukamper, 2000), or political inequality (Basset, 1988). Farmers-pastoralists conflicts have been associated with the conflict of land resource use exacerbated by dwindling resources (Blench, 2004). Some researchers have linked this crises to the theory of eco-violence (Okoli & Ateche, 2014),

where environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources lead to conflicts and violence.

This may explain the dwindling grazing reserves as culpable; in addition, the population is dynamic and ever increasing, compared to land that is relatively static (Adisa, 2012).

Climate Change

Climate change induced rainfall, shifting patterns and desertification reduce crop lands and farming has to follow these patterns leading to overlap on grazing lands.

Pastoralists are also competing with large-scale agricultural schemes that narrow the grazing lands. The use of herbicides and fertilizers have revolutionized agriculture in the country, leading to more grazing lands being farmed extensively (Iro, 2010). Other causes of this conflict are the blockage of water holes by farmers and fishermen and reprisal attacks on pastoralists by farmers (Umar, 2002; Abbass, 2012; Audu, 2014). Other factors causing conflict is the allocation of grazing land at government layout without law and order and taking side by local rulers or judges responsible for disputes resolution (Rasak, 2011; Fabusan & Oyeagbamin, 2009).

Blench (2010) observes that judicial commissions set up to handle any such issues do not always yield any effective action as both farmers and pastoralists are in dire need to settle the conflict preferably by the customary institutions rather than the courts. Even though many of these conflicts are settled outside the courts, through the customary institutions, a lot of people do not seem to be aware of the existence of Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR).

The arbitrators are professionals at law and cases are resolved fairly quickly outside the courts in Nigeria. The ADRS are established by Arbitration and conciliation Act Cap. A18, the laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2004). Revisiting Grazing Reserve, the Land use Act of 1978 has granted equal rights and opportunities to Nigerians to live in any part of the country unhindered and regards all citizens as Nigerians and not natives, unlike the prevailing Land Tenure Act of 1962 that did not spell this out (Rasak, 2011). According to this law, the Federal Government has the capacity to redraw the boundaries between cattle routes,

range, lands and farmers accordingly and envisage coexistence of various groups.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Grazing Reserve Act of 1964 was passed for the purpose of accessing grazing lands to the pastoralists thereby encouraging sedentarisation and addressing conflict with a plan to improving productivity and social amenities (Awogbade, 1978; Ibrahim, 2012).

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria

The Middle Belt region of Nigeria comprises states such as Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Plateau, and Southern Adamawa State. The dominant activity in the region is farming. However this farming activity is continuously undermined by Fulani herdsmen attacks on farmers. In addition to this is the problem of inter-tribal conflicts among the tribes in the middle belt region itself bothering on indigeneship, settlers, and ownership of land. This has over the years destroyed the socio-economic activities thereby rendering the region very poor and underdeveloped.

Theoretical Review

The paper is anchored in the Dialectical materialism theory by Karl Marx; however other theories such as the following are being reviewed.

Tragedy of the Commons

This theory postulated by Hords (1968) states that when a resource is collectively owned by a group of people, each will exploit the resources, overusing it, ignoring the group's collective interest and this ultimately destroys the resources. Using pasture for example which is open to all to use, this open pasture is used by herdsmen to allow their cattle to graze and each herdsman will continue to add cattle to graze on the pasture, so as to expand the amount of proceeds coming from their herd.

The dialectical materialism, which this paper is anchored on in propounded by Karl Marx, states that man's consciousness of himself in the society is determined by his material condition.

Material condition here refers to what he owns and possess as what he can allude to as in the society and the way the society organizes the production, distribution and exchange of these goods and services that man perceives as his possessions is

central in determining man's material condition.

According to this theory, given the fact that these materials are limited, man's aspiration to possess usually results in conflict with other men seeking the same resources. It is this resultant competition that they call dialectics, thus the term dialectical materialism.

Conclusion

Conflict between pastoralists and farmers has existed since the beginning of agriculture in West Africa. The introduction of drugs like trypanocides and other veterinary drugs has increased the size of herd compelling herders to migrate, coupled with population increase as a result of improvement in health condition of the people. This resultant population increase leads to pressure on land and the resultant conflict.

The conflict between farmers and pastoralists has taken a frightening and destructive dimension to the extent that herdsmen now arm themselves with sophisticated weapons with which they attack and kill their victims, farmers and others in the community. The role of security agencies has not helped matters as they are often accused of aiding and abating the commission of these acts of criminality, with ethnic and religious biases.

In order to put a permanent end to this recurrent conflict, some states like Benue and Ekiti decided to enact the anti-open grazing law. It is expected this will go a long way in stopping the killing and destruction of innocent lives and properties, as the passage of these laws are in line with global best practices where livestock is ranches, with modern facilities and better management.

Recommendations

After a critical analysis, this paper makes the following recommendations that would curb the perennial and recurrent conflicts.

1. Establishment of Ranches: The establishment of ranches with the provision of modern amenities will control the movement of livestock and better management.
2. Anti-open-grazing law: Anti open grazing law should be enacted by the states in the middle belt region and the country at large. Already Benue and Ekiti States have done this. This will reduce clashes, migration and environmental

degradation.

3. Public enlightenment on modern animal husbandry and management should be carried out among pastoralists especially organization like Miyeti-Allah Cattle Breeders Association, to sensitize their members about modern cattle management, in line with global best practices.
4. Security agents should enforce anti-open grazing law without religious, political and ethnic biases.
5. Farm inputs such as loans and fertilizers among others should be made available to farmers at affordable rates to boost production of food in the country.
6. Agro-Allied industries such as agric-blending plants should be established in the middle-belt region of the country to increase food production and employment, eradicate poverty, and raise the living standard of the people.

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