



Herders-Farmers Conflicts over Farmlands: Implications for Human and Food Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

Farmers and herders conflicts have remained an issue of public discourse in recent years, due to the violent dimensions the confrontations have taken. There are cases of human killings, destruction of farms and violent retaliations between herders and farmers in various parts of Nigeria. These have often contributed to human and food security challenges. While the native farmers accuse the nomadic herders of allowing their cows to destroy cultivated crops, the herders point accusing fingers at the farmers for blocking grazing routes. As a result, the groups are found in perpetual violent conflicts, leading to destruction of lives and properties. The attendant implication of this development has always been shortage of farm produce, leading to food insecurity. The study examined how struggles between nomadic herders and crop farmers have threatened human and food security in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary data and employed environmental/resources scarcity theory as a framework of analysis. The study concluded that there is need for the Nigerian government to review the existing laws as they relate to accessibility to land by members of community and strangers.

Keywords: Herders-Farmers Conflicts, Human Security, Food Security, Resource Scarcity, #SDG2, #SDG12.

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Introduction

The agricultural industry constitutes a very significant source of national revenue with a great potential of economic sustainability. However, due to increasing human population, weak land use system, poor institutional frameworks, identity politics and other primordial factors, the integration of animal and crop farming system for general economic growth and development has remained difficult. The protracted struggles between crop farmers and animal farmers have remained an issue public discourse. The nomadic Fulani herders often travel long distances from one point to the other, thus intruding into spaces long claimed by settled farmers and this has become the source of conflicts between herders and sedentary farmers (Olaniyan, Michael and Okeke-Uzodike, 2015).

Both cattle and crop farmers are perpetually caught in the web of conflicts due to accusations and counter-accusations emanating from land dispute. The Fulani herdsmen accuse the crop farmers of encroaching into their grazing routes and fields, thus preventing them from feeding their cattle, while crop farmers point accusing fingers to the herders for allowing their herds to destroy cultivated crops. This development has often generated conflicts between the two important agricultural units in Nigeria. Relying upon this very fact, Haman, in Imo (2017) stated that cattle farmers suffer material damages when the crop farmers inflict physical injuries on their cattle by using cutlasses, spears or guns or by poisoning the cattle. Crop farmers, on the other hand, cry and argue that the fear of gun wielding cattle herders not only prevent them from going to the farm but that cultivated farm lands and crop yields are destroyed by cattle, resulting in sweeping poverty and unemployment in the land (Famoriyo, 2017 in Chukwuemeka, Aduma and Eneh, 2018). The main consequences of the entire problems are loss of human lives, animals, crops and ethno-religious tensions (Chukwuemeka, Aduma and Eneh, 2018).

The complex land-use system and grazing route system is yet to address the lingering tension that has remained protracted between the herders and farmers in the communities of the latter over grazing land. In this situation, Tenuche and Ifatimehin (2009, p. 361) reported that:

the land tenure system is vogue in Nigeria, and it is a precipitation of conflicts. This is because this process has created acute shortage of arable land thereby engendering disputes over the little that is available. To correct this anomaly and ensure effective utilization of arable land in Nigeria, agricultural development agencies like River Basins, Agricultural Development Projects (ADP), Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Agricultural Land Development

Agencies (NALDA) etc. were introduced as panacea for improved agricultural projects.

A major fallout of this conflict is food crisis. Chukwuemeka, Aduma and Eneh, (2018, p. 3) explain that ‘...the sedentary crop farmers are heavily affected as the herds destroy crops, farmlands, and other agricultural products’. Our country’s media space has lately become awash with skirmishes between what has come to be known as the migrating Fulani herdsmen and the locals over cattle rustling, damage to crops/farm lands and pollution of the environment, including village streams that serve as the source of water to the people. Although many parts of Nigeria have experienced this conflict, it is mostly prevalent in the North-Central states of Nasarawa, Plateau, and Benue. The study examined how the struggle over land between crop farmers and herders affects food and human security in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary sources of data such as journal articles, books, newspaper briefings, reliable internet sources. The data were analyzed and discussed thematically.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted environmental/resources scarcity theory by Homer-Dixon. In his study of environment, scarcity and violence, Homer-Dixon (1999) asserts that large populations in many developing countries are highly dependent on four key environmental resources that are fundamental to their livelihood: fresh water, cropland, forests, and fish. Scarcity or shrinking of these resources as a result of misuse, over-use or degradation, population growth, climate change and resource access lead to competition over the scarce ecological resources among groups, and may under some circumstances trigger conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Homer-Dixon synthesizes a wide range of international research projects to develop a detailed model of the sources of environmental scarcity. He refers to water shortages in China, population growth in sub-Saharan Africa, and land distribution in Mexico. Scarcities stem from the degradation and depletion of renewable resources, the increased demand for these resources, and/or their unequal distribution. He shows that these scarcities can lead to deepened poverty, large-scale migration, sharpened social cleavages, and weakened institutions. Homer-Dixon describes the kinds of violence that can result from these social effects, arguing that conflicts in Chiapas, Mexico and turmoil in many African and Asian countries, for instance, are already partly a consequence of resource scarcity.

The conflicts between rural crop farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsmen are traceable to population increase without commensurate adequate resources. This has led to scarcity of natural resources such as farmlands, grazing lands, vegetation etc. for economic activities. The increase in the cattle population and influx of nomads

account for the problem, as they move their cattle to graze on peoples' farms (Kazzah, 2018). The struggle, competition and conflicts over farming and grazing lands have been driven mostly by the scarcity of land as a result of increase in population and economic activities where land remain the key resources, and competition between the farmers and the Fulani herdsmen to ensure their viability in the area (Kazzah, 2018). The farmers need the land for cultivation, while the herdsmen need the land for grazing and rearing of cattle. Adogi (2013) argues that as the population is increasing, there will be increase in demand for land, water, forest products and grazing land within the territories inhabited by Fulanis and farmers.

Growing Population and Land Struggle in Nigeria

The population explosion within the Sahel region, especially the Lake Chad Basin has contributed to insecurity in the region, and Nigeria in particular. According to Akosile (2017) in Njoku (2018), the countries around Lake Chad (that is Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon) are within the area of high demographic growth. He noted that the region's demographic growth is one of the highest in the world. He cited, as an example, that in the past 50 years, the population of countries in the Lake Chad region had quadrupled from 60 million in 1960 to more than 243 million in 2017 (Akosile, 2017). The burgeoning population of the area has put much pressure on the scarce environmental resources.

The pressure, in addition to the effects of climate change, has resulted in fierce competition for resources such as water, green pasture, and arable lands amongst groups (Njoku, 2018). The author further noted that, in most cases, the competition has given rise to bloody conflicts and emigration. As already stated, the herdsmen in the area has continually moved southwards with their cattle leading to incessant clashes with the sedentary farmers in the Middle Belt region and Southern Nigeria, with enormous implications. The internal pull factors are today not enough to accommodate external pressures. When available resources were sufficient to satisfy the existing population, there were mutual and symbiotic relationships between the nomadic herders and crop farmers. In fact, the deteriorating relationships have led to destruction of properties and lives.

In the past, the sufficiency of land for both farmers and herdsmen, given the subsistence nature of farming and the few numbers of cows that the herdsmen breed then, made them to co-exist peacefully, devoid of unhealthy competition over scarce resources (Nzeh, 2015). This same cordiality had usually played out between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria until recently. However, conflicts between farmers and herdsmen emanated as a result of the increase in population of both the farmers and the herdsmen (Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwande, 2018). For instance, in 2006,

according to National Census Commission reports, the human population figures showed that Nigeria had 140 million people in Nigeria. Today, there have been reports that the population of Nigeria is approximately 200 million people, thus exerting unprecedented pressures on the available scarce resources such as lands, waters, vegetation, wealth etc. In most cases, the movements of nomadic herdsman are caused by the absence of good and veritable land for their flock to feed on.

The study by Imo (2017) revealed that Nigeria's population is dynamic and growing at a very rapid rate compared to land that is relatively static which constitutes the most important cause of pressure and demand for food resources. The geometrical population growth without adequate infrastructure and population control mechanisms by the Federal Government of Nigeria remains a formidable factor. In the face of this unhealthy competition, the Fulani herders and rural crop farmers are caught in the web of perpetual violent conflicts. Moritz (2003) posited that the conflict between farmers and herdsman is reinforced by the farmers' habit of extending the boundary of their farms to livestock route and the herdsman's habit of allowing cattle to veer into the farmers' farm to eat their plants and drop their dung either on the farm or on the pedestal route.

The Impact of the Conflict on Human and Food Security in Nigeria

There have been several cases of farmers-herdsman conflicts across various states and locations in Nigeria (Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwande, 2018). These conflicts have now become so threatening to the country's national integration, such that the hitherto peaceful relationship between farmers and herdsman across various parts of Nigeria is degenerating to a carnage level, leading to loss of lives and properties. The farmers/herders conflicts affect the entire geo-political zones of Nigeria (Ajibefun, 2018). In their study, Okereke (2012) and Kasarachi (2016) observed that the consequences of the conflict include loss of lives and valuable properties, and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands, thereby posing serious threat to food security. For fear of attack, many farmers could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. The January 1, 2018 Fulani herdsman attack in Benue is still fresh on the minds of the people. The attack led to the mass burial of about 70 persons that were killed by Fulani herders. There were other attacks by Fulani herdsman in Benue, Taraba, and Nasarawa States. There were also pockets of attack in other states. This conflict does not imply that livestock production or animal grazing is bad. In its 2011 report, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) noted that livestock production and animal grazing in particular can be seen as lending indispensable support to agriculture as it contributes greatly to food security through:

- a. supply of global calories, proteins, and essential micronutrients;

- b. support to agriculture in areas that have difficulty growing crops;
- c. consumption of the feed that are not appropriate for human consumption; and
- d. provision of manure for crop production (FAO, 2011).

However, where animals are grazed the way they are done in Nigeria, the first concern is that of food security (Abba and Usman 2008; Chukwuemeka, Aduma and Eneh, 2018). In all the states studied by Abba and Usman, particularly Taraba and Benue States, the majority of those displaced by herders-farmers clashes are women and youths who make up substantial part of the farming communities, just like in Nasarawa, Kaduna, and Plateau States. These displacements will lead to food shortages in the immediate communities in particular and in the general economy. The reason is that those directly involved in farming are today scared of the Fulani herders who often attack and subject them to horrific experiences. According to Fayinka (2004), rural-based small-scale arable crop producers, who account for about 80% of total food requirement, dominate Nigerian agricultural production. Accordingly, of an estimated 71 million hectares of cultivable land, only half is currently used for farming. This situation may not be unconnected with the worrisome open grazing of animals on farmlands as farmers helplessly continue to abandon their farms.

Fulani herders have also always expressed their frustration about how crop farmers encroach on cattle routes for more cultivable land. In their opinion, this encroachment has always been the trigger. A local Fulani cattle farmer has this to say,

what do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment on grazing fields and routes by farmers is a call for war... Wherever we turn, we find the land reserved for our cattle to feast taken over by farmers... It becomes difficult for our herd to move and graze without veering into crop fields... Once that happens, the farmers confront us and we have no option but to fight back (Odoh and Chilaka, 2012, p. 113).

Crop farmers, on the other hand, believe that the massive influx of herdsmen and their cattle into farming communities (and destroying farm crops while grazing) has been a major cause of incessant clashes between herdsmen and their host communities in Nigeria (Njoku, 2018). Another factor in the conflict is the Fulani herders' access to sophisticated weapons, including AK47 rifles. While explaining the fratricidal conflicts between Fulani herders and their host communities in the context

of Benue State, the Chairman of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee on Agatu-herdsmen conflict, Mr. Akpaldu, observes that

...for over five decades, the people of Agatu in Benue state had lived in peace and harmony with the Fulani pastoralists in their midst... At that time, reports of destruction of farm crops by Fulani cattle were settled by the 'Gado' or Village Head and sometimes at the police station. However, between 2011 and 2012, the herdsmen began to carry highly sophisticated weapons such as AK47 rifles as against their traditional swords and sticks... On March 5, 2013, the herdsmen attacked the Agatu communities with swords and sophisticated weapons, thus resulting in massive killings and destruction of properties in many Agatu communities along the bank of River Benue (Duru, 2016, p. 11).

In all, according to Chukwuemeka et al (2018), these conflicts have exacted a heavy humanitarian toll with thousands killed and tens of thousands displaced. Chukwuemeka et al (2018, p. 55) further observes that

some estimates suggest that about 2,500 people were killed countrywide in 2016 - a toll higher than that caused by the Boko Haram insurgency over the same period. In Benue, one of the hardest-hit states, Governor Samuel Ortom reported that more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016 and tens of thousands also displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states. In the absence of any arrangement like Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, most of these displaced people seek shelter in other poor, rural communities and end up overstressing the already scarce resources in the area.

The ownership and struggle over land has escalated the conflict between the sedentary rural farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsmen. Land has remained an overwhelming source of conflicts among various groups as well as individuals at varying thresholds. This conflict is becoming fiercer and increasingly widespread due to intensification of production activities that is necessitated by increasing human population (Zakka, et.al, 2017 in Kazzah, 2018). The land struggle that exists between the rural crop farmers and herders has negatively affected food production in many places in Nigeria.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2004), communal violence costs Nigeria over \$12 billion worth of agricultural production during the last third of the 20th century. This situation is unfortunate because agriculture and food

production are very important to overall economic wellbeing, especially in conflict prone communities of Nigeria. Abughdyer (2016) states that a total of 664.4 hectares (56.4%) of farmland were destroyed in Benue state between 2010 and 2014 in three local governments of Agatu, Guma and Logo as a result of farmers and herdsmen crises. This situation has led to reduction in food output due to inadequate availability of labour, occasioned by death threats or violent attacks on farmers on their way to their fields, or in their farms. Owners of farms and those working for them are perpetually afraid of attacks from Fulani herdsmen. Farmers are therefore forced to abandon their farmlands, leaving them to be overgrown by weeds. The whole scenario has deterred farm labourers and affected productivity. This development portends a great danger for food production in Nigeria (Okoli and Addo, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated how farmers/herders conflicts affected human and food security in Nigeria, particularly in Benue state. There are various factors responsible for the conflicts. However, the study observed that population explosion in Nigeria is a major factor. The struggle for land between the farmers and herdsmen due to scarcity of grazing and farming lands have remained a factor provoking the two warring groups. The native farmers accuse the nomadic herdsmen of allowing their cows to destroy their cultivated crops while the herdsmen point accusing fingers at the farmers for blocking grazing routes. As a result, the groups are found in perpetual and intractable violent conflicts, leading to destruction of lives and properties. The attendant implication of this development has always been shortage of farm produce, leading to food insecurity.

In view of the challenges between Fulani herdsmen and farmers, which have negatively affected peaceful co-existence and food security in Nigeria, some recommendations are made. First, there is need for the Nigerian state to review the existing laws as they relate to accessibility to land by members of community and strangers. In doing the review, issues like indigeneship and settlers' rights in communities must receive attention. Second, the Federal Government of Nigeria should understand that one of the major factors responsible for Fulani herdsmen/farmers conflict in Benue state and Nigeria in general is growing population without commensurate resources and policy framework. Based on this, there is the need to ensure strong border control to reduce the influx of foreign herdsmen into the country. There is also the need to review Land Use Act as well as initiate a viable policy that can address population explosion Nigeria. Third, the government should prioritise the provision of ranches to serve as grazing reserves as may be approved by the legislature. Fourth, there should be a routine dialogue with the Herdsmen association and farmers association by peace building experts approved by states and the federal

government in the conflict areas. The routine dialogue should sensitise the various local actors on the effects of land crisis on food security and quality of lives.

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APPENDIX**Table 1: Chronicle of Herdsmen Dastardly Activities and Killings**

S/ N	Date	Incidence	Place
1	JAN, 2002	30 people were killed in conflicts between farmers and herders over grazing land in BarkinLadi local council area of Plateau State.	Plateau State
2	Feb, 2003	About 100 people were killed in clashes over the past days between Fulani and the Yungar ethnic groups in Adamawa State.	Adamawa State
3	May, 2003	Herdsmen attacked and burned 34 farming villages in Adamawa and Gombe States, which resulted in 63 dead and over 500 people were injured.	Adamawa/ Gombe States
4	Feb, 2004	49 farmers were killed as they flee nomad attacks by Nomads in the farming town of Yelwa, Plateau State	Plateau State
5	Feb, 2005	Dozens of people were killed in Adamawa state when Fulani herdsmen alleged to come from Chad and Niger attacked farming communities in a dispute over grazing land.	Adamawa State
6	Dec, 2009	32 people were killed, scores of houses burned, and several farms destroyed following clashes between pastoralists and farmers in Nassarawa State. About 700 pastoralists were sent away from Borno State	Nasarawa and Borno State
7	March, 2010	Fulani herders invaded three villages of Dogo Na Hauwa, Ratsat and Jeji in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State killing many people including mostly children and women in a barbaric manner.	Plateau State
8	Nov, 2011	Fulani/ farmers clash in Kirikasamma Local Government area of Borno State left one person killed and over 17 people from the farmers' side seriously injured. This was triggered when farmers in the area took measures to protect the perennial destruction of their yet -to-be harvested farm produce and frequent attacks on them by the Fulani pastoralists. Conflicts between farmers and Fulani pastoralists in Benue State, left two soldiers, some 50 men, women, and children dead.	Borno and Benue State
9	March, 2012	The conflict between Fulani pastoralists and sedentary farmers in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State left over 30 people dead.	Benue State
10	March, 2012	Sixteen people were killed in a clash between Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Kadarko community, Giza Local Council of Nasarawa State. About 5,000 residents fled to safer areas in nearby towns.	Nasarawa State
11	April, 2012	April 2012 One person was killed, and several others were injured in a Fulani - Hausa Clash in Sokoto.	Sokoto State
12	May, 2012	A clash between farmers and herders in Gwer West area in Benue State left five people dead, and many others displaced	Benue State
13	June, 2012	At least six people were killed, houses burnt, and several farmlands were destroyed in NgandumVill age, Adamawa State as pastoralists and farmers engaged in a fierce battle. These occurred after Herdsmen led their cattle into rice fields resulting in the death of a farmer.	Adamawa State
14	July, 2012	About 200 persons, including a serving federal senator, GyangDantong, were killed in Matse and Kakuru villages during a funeral for some people killed earlier by suspected Fulani herdsmen.	Plateau State
15	Dec, 2012	Clashes between Gbagyi farmers and Fulani nomads near Abuja left two people dead, five injured, and over 1,500 people displaced from about 27 settlements that were destroyed.	Plateau State
16	April 23, 2013	10 farmers killed in Mbasenge community, Guma LGA	Benue State
17	May 7, 2013	47 mourners killed in Agatu while burying 2 policemen killed in neighboringNassarawa town	Benue State
18	May 12, 2013	83 killed by Fulani herdsmen in the Okpanchenyi and Ekwo communities of Agatu	Benue State
19	May 14, 2013	40 killed as over 200 herdsmen stormed Ekwo-Okpanchenyi, Agatu LGA	Benue State

20	June 11, 2013	1 killed, by Fulani rubbers. Also, over 40 cattle belonging to the Catholic Church Otukpo were led away. A number of people were injured. Ichama Village, Okpokwu LGA, Benue State.	Benue State
21	July 1, 2013	40 people killed Fulani gunmen attacked in Okpanchenyi village	Benue State
22	March 29, 2014	More than 200 villagers and a few herdsmen in army camouflage killed. 3 villages about 250km south of kaduna metropolis destroyed	Kaduna State
23	Dec 14, 2014	10 people in Benue state by Fulani Herds men.	Benue State
24	March 5, 2015	10 people were killed by herdsmen with more than 100 houses burnt in Ryan L.G.A.	Plateau State
25	April 12, 2016	15 people were killed as the Fulani Herdsmen attacked two villages in Gashaka Local Government area of Taraba State.	Taraba State
26	Jan 17, 2017	Herdsmen opened fire in Samaru Kataf Market, killing 3 persons and injuring 5 in Zango-Kataf Local council Area.	Kaduna State
27	Feb 10, 2017	8 people were confirmed dead in clashes between community members and suspected herdsmen in Rukumawa Tsafe LGA	Zamfara State
28	May 8, 2017	3 persons were killed in a clash between herdsmen and farmers in Tse-Akaa village, Ugondo Mbamar District of Logo LGA.	Benue State
29	Jan 1, 2018	Suspected Fulani herdsmen-turned gunmen visited communities in two LGA and killed over 50 villagers, including women and children	Benue State
30	Feb, 2, 2018	2 person were killed by herdsmen attack in song Adamawa	Adamawa State
31	June 23, 2018	86 people killed by herdsmen in ii communities in Barkin Ladi, LGA.	Plateau State

Source: Adapted from Ukwayi and Anam, (2017), Ezeonwuka and Igwe (2016), Idowu (2017), Oli, Ibekwe&Nwankwo (2018), Chukwuemeka, Aduma, and Eneh, (2018).

Table 2: More Cases of Herders/Farmers Conflicts

	Date	Incidence	Place
	July 2018	Not less than 187 people have been killed in the North-West geo-political zone during attacks not unconnected with farmers-herdsmen clashes	North-West
	In June, 2019	Fulani herdsman armed with sophisticated weapons went on a killing spree in 15 communities, leaving more than 230 dead in Jos.	Plateau State
		Suspected Fulani herdsmen killed 41 of its people in repeated attacks in several communities Miango District in Bassa LGA.	Plateau State
		Fulani herders attack was recorded in Southern Kaduna with 33 residents killed and properties worth billions destroyed.	Kaduna State
	7 persons were killed by herdsmen in Ebonyi State in the South East of Nigeria		

	Between February and May 2021	a Deeper Life Pastor and 3 others were killed in herdsmen attack in Benue communities.	Ebonyi State
		Fulani herdsmen killed 23 people in an attack in two communities, Mbadwem and Tiortyu of Benue.	Benue State
	July 14, 2021	Herders killed three in Boripe, Osun	Benue State
		Herders killed three in Guma, Benue	

Source: Compiled by the authors from different sources