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THE EFFECT OF HERDER-FARMER'S CONFLICT ON THE FEMALE GENDER IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Conflict is inherent in all human society and has been a matter of concern to social and political thinkers. It's the responsibility of government to protect and secure the lives and property of the people. Security in any society can be achieved in an atmosphere devoid of threats to lives and properties of the people. This study therefore, examines the effect of herder-farmer's conflict on the female gender in Benue state, Nigeria. The study relied heavily on secondary sources of data such as Books, Journals, Magazines, Newspapers and other internet materials. The study therefore, adopts conflict theory as theoretical framework of analysis. Based on the analysis carried out, the followings were revealed: The various effects of the farmer-herder conflicts on female gender in Benue State include, the killing of women, rape, early marriages, their livelihoods are destroyed (crops, animals and other items), they experience posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSDs), they are socially dislocation and separation from their husbands and other relations and their economic activities such as farming, trading are destroyed among others. The study therefore, recommends that, the Federal government should find a way of mediating and reconciling the issues igniting conflicts between herders and farmers through the introduction of cattle ranches to reduce migration and free grazing of farm land which will create room for more conflicts in Benue State. The government should provide free education and make it compulsory for all children especially the girls to enable them compete favourably with their male counterpart in Benue State. The community leaders, Fulani leaders in the affected areas, and parents should be conscientized on the importance of education to every child and the need to enroll their wards in school. This would afford the female gender equal opportunity with the male, and in turn discourages early marriages which make them more vulnerable in conflict situations.

Keywords: Herders, Farmers, Conflict, Gender, Women, Sex.

Introduction

Conflict is inherent in all human society and has been a matter of concern to social and political thinkers. Continents around the world today, are passing through brutal confrontations and conflicts of great magnitude occasioned by differences in race, political ideology, ethnicity, religion, demography, cultural affinity etc. Conflict is globally becoming a household word as there is no nation that is completely absolved from its effect. It has become a frightening phenomenon and a concern for many governments and citizens around the world which draws one's attention to the vulnerability of

female gender to its debilitating effect in modern societies. In this regards, Nigeria has taken and is still taking a fair shear of conflicts across six (6) geo-political zones, ranging from book-haram, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, herder-farmer clashes among others.

One major problem confronting world peace today is the manifestation of conflicts in different dimensions across the globe. From Europe to America, Africa to Asian, conflicts are common phenomena (Johnson, 2022). Nigeria has experienced and is still experiencing conflicts of grave proportions among several ethnic and religious communities across the country. In recent

times, resource induced conflicts have been occurring between pastoralists who are predominantly Hausa-Fulani and depend on rearing animals for their survival and the farmers who as well depend on their farm produce for survival in the country, with the North Central and North East of Nigeria suffering more of such conflicts (Johnson, 2022).

Benue State, located in the North Central region of Nigeria, has been grappling with recurring conflicts in recent years, primarily stemming from farmer-herder clashes and communal violence. These conflicts have had profound impacts on the local population, with women and girls often bearing a disproportionate burden of the consequences (Ajibo et al., 2020). The complex nature of these conflicts, intertwined with issues of resource scarcity, climate change, and ethno-religious tensions, has created a volatile environment that particularly threatens the security and well-being of women and girls (International Crisis Group, 2021).

There have been several cases of herder-farmer conflicts across various States and locations in Nigeria. These conflicts have now become a threat to the country's national integration, such that the hitherto peaceful relationship between farmers and herders across various parts of Nigeria is degenerating to a carnage level, leading to loss of lives and properties. Adisa (2012) has argued that the farmers-herdsmen conflict has remained the most preponderant resource-use conflict in Nigeria. National unity remains one of the cardinal objectives of every multi-ethnic nation such as Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria, the objective of developing the national economy for meaningful national development has remained a mirage because the country has been bedeviled with problems of several conflicts across the length and breadth of the country, this make it incapable of conceiving and conscientiously implementing National integration and development agenda (Egbefo, 2015).

Men must fight even if they do not possess arms or when tools of violence are not within reach; and as Morgenthau (1948) cited in Folarin (2016) posits, when there are no arms to fight, men will fight even with their

bare fists. This presupposes that men will continue to fight as long as they have emotions that have the potential to love or hate; to be happy or sad; to be pleased or angry. So long as man has other men around him, there will be issues of disagreement, because interest differs and interests do clash, which may lead to disagreement or confrontation. Conflict as a process therefore, cannot be understood in isolation from its effect on the vulnerable people in the society, especially female gender (i.e. women and girls), which is the fulcrum of this paper.

According to Abbas (2009) rightly observed that the major sources of conflicts between the Fulani pastoralists (to be used interchangeably with "herders" or "herdsmen") and farmers shows that land related issues, especially on grazing fields, account for the highest percentage of the conflicts. In other words, struggles over the control of economically viable lands cause more tensions and violent conflicts between farmers and the Fulani pastoralists.

Social and economic factors continue to provoke violent conflicts among the Fulani pastoralists and farmers. These changes have increased confrontations between farmers and herders, leading to violent conflict, deaths, forced displacement and migration, erosion of inter-communal relationships, as well as the destruction of agricultural and livestock outputs (Johnson, 2022). These conflicts have constituted serious threats to the means of survival and livelihoods of both the farmers and pastoralists and what both groups are tenaciously protecting. For instance, in the process of the violent conflict against women do not often report as Eze-Anaba (2010) cited in Johnson (2022) observes that most forms of violence directed specifically against women in Nigeria seem to be met with silence not only by the state but also by much of the human rights community. Amnesty International (2005) thus observes that where a victim summons the courage to report to law enforcement agents, the issue is trivialized and termed a "private matter". This paper therefore makes a bold step to bring to the fore the effects of herder-farmer's conflicts on female gender in Benue state, Nigeria. The paper relied heavily on secondary sources of data such

as Books, Journals, Magazines, Newspapers and other internet materials. The paper therefore, adopts conflict theory as theoretical framework of analysis. Women and girls are the most affected in the protracted conflicts of any kind in their communities, with many of them killed, raped, displaced, widowed, and generally suffering economic, social and psychological violence in several communities.

Conceptual Review

Sex

The term “sex” refers to the biological characteristics of male and female. These characteristics are congenital and their differences are limited to physiological reproductive functions. Sex roles are classified by sex biologically either by male or female in the society, for examples, female sex breast feed a child which a male cannot do and issue of pregnancy is peculiar to only female gender.

Gender

The word gender is a universal concept that classifies human being to males or females in terms of social characteristics. These social characteristics are constructed based on different factors, which differ both within and between cultures and define identities, status, roles, responsibilities and power relations among the members of any society or culture. Gender roles are social roles classified by the society, there are certain roles that society presume that other sex could not do, which is not true e.g. sweeping, cooking, etc some people feel that its only female gender can do them in the house in which the male can do them even more better and effective. UNESCO (1997), describes genders as those characteristics of men and women that are socially determined, and in contrast, those that are biologically defined. Gender can be described as how human sexes are classified among the social elements in terms of roles play. In other words, gender is a social parallel of unequal division that classified human nature into feminist and masculinity. It is used to designate human cultural definition of identities between men and women. Gender is neither static nor innate, but evolves to respond to changes in the social, political, and cultural environment. Gender is learnt through socialisation. It

also refers to the differential social roles that define women and men in a cultural context- and to power relationships that perpetuate these roles. The perception of gender discrimination between men and women to some extents can be culturally attached

Conflict

The word conflict is derived from two Latin words *con* meaning “coming together”, and *fligere* meaning “to strike” (Jegede, 2019). Therefore, conflict means a state of opposition or hostilities, a fight or struggle. It is a clash of opposing principles, the opposition of incompatible wishes or needs. It is an interaction that aims at beating or defeating opponents. According to Coser (1956), conflict is a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aim of the groups or individuals involved is not only to obtain the desired values but also to neutralise, injure or eliminate rivals. According to Rummel (2006) is the balancing of vectors of powers of capabilities to provide effects. Kirk (1976) sees conflict as a state of antagonism, that is, the result of disagreements that arise between two or more people or group of people that have either produced or threaten to produce loss of life, freedom, land, property or livelihood, or cause mental or physical abuse. This means that either people in the society are in "cooperation" or in opposition (Ojoduwa & Abubakar, 2022).

In other words, these definitions revealed that conflict is inevitable, unavoidable, and a pure natural phenomenon that is as old as man himself. It is an integral and ephemeral part of human existence and society. But ironically sees or perceives as negative phenomenon that must be avoided or ignored at all costs, which is a wrong perception or notion about conflict. Conflict in the Chinese language means “an opportunity or chance for changes as well as a risk of danger. It can bring progress, mutual understanding and development, if it is managed or handled properly, that is, constructively or positively. In Chinese belief conflict is neither positive nor negative, but the response to a conflict situation determines its outcomes. The people with the negative connotation or wrong perception tend to handle it destructively. That is, conflict is not gender bias in manifestation and

management, and requires efforts from both genders to manage it successfully. Nigerian women on several occasions have contributed immensely and still contributing to the management of conflict and peace building. They need to be given equal opportunities in order to achieve development goals (Adedoyin, 2012).

Violent conflict often involves or results in the use or threat of gender-based violence against women and girls. This comes in form of sexual violence by armed forces or groups; and for this and similar reasons, women and girls are prevented from going outside their homes for fear of violence. This accordingly militates against women playing any meaningful role in conflict resolution. Thus, they hardly speak out nor stand against the violence (Abdulkadir & Dahiru, 2019).

Herder

A herder is a person who looks after a herd of animals such as cattle. Cambridge dictionary conceptualized a herder as a man who takes care of a large group of animals of the same type. Moving further the concept of a herder refers to a person who takes care of herds of cattle or flocks of sheep especially in an open field. A herder therefore implies a breeder, or a custodian of cattle or flocks of sheep. Herders are more often than not people from the Fulani ethnic group of the Western Savanna. In this case the Fulani extracts are domiciled in Northern Nigeria as noted by Okeke O. (2014), it was through the series of events called the Fulani jihads, the Fulani conquered a greater part of the area that later became Northern Nigeria between 1804 and 1810. They are not only located in the Northern part of Nigeria, they are also located in Mali, Chad, Senegal and Sudan. The Fulanis' also known as the Fula or Fulbe are predominantly herders, hence the name 'Fulani-herdsmen'.

Farmer

Farmers are people who engage in agricultural activities such as farming with the primary objective of producing food and other cash crops either for subsistence consumption or for public consumption. In Nigeria, they are located in the both the Southern and Northern parts of the country. It also refers to group of people in

agricultural activities of tilling and cultivation of land, harvesting, processing and marketing of food crops to earn a living.

Theoretical Framework (Conflict Theory)

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is recognized as the founder of conflict theory. While Marx himself didn't use the term 'Conflict Theory', his work laid the theoretical foundation for this sociological perspective. His analysis of capitalism and class struggle became the basis for what later sociologists developed into conflict theory as a distinct sociological paradigm.

Some of the central assumptions of this theory according to Marx are:

That the society is characterized by inequality and competition: Conflict theory assumes that society is fundamentally defined by competition over scarce resources, whether, wealth, power, status or opportunities.

That the power and coercion maintain social order: the theory also assumes that social order exists not through consensus or shared values, but through the dominance of powerful groups over less powerful ones.

That the class conflict is central to social life: Marx emphasized that the primary conflict in capitalist societies occurs between the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (workers).

That the social structures benefit the dominant groups: It assumes that the institutions, like the government, law, education and religion are not neutral but instead serve the interests of those in power. They function to legitimize inequality and maintain the existing power structure.

That social change is inevitable and often revolutionary: The theory opines that because of the inherent contradictions and conflicts within society, social change is constant and necessary. Change often occurs through struggle and conflict that is (revolution) rather than gradual evolution (Marx & Engels 1978).

Conflicts theory explains the basis of violence in any sector be it an organized sector or unorganized sector. The theory generally surrounds different social classes or groups. Conflict theory offers a decent analysis that is in line with process-oriented theories in anthropology. The interdisciplinary field of conflict studies aims to explain all kinds of conflicts, from domestic quarrels to international disputes. The field defines conflict generally as "any state in which two or more social entities or 'parties' perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals" (Mitchell, 1981 cited in Abubakar & Yahaya, 2018). Conflict theorists have offered three general models for conflict escalation: the contender-defender model, the conflict spiral model, and the structural change model (Pruitt and Kim 2004). The models have slightly different foci, respectively parties, interaction, and psychology, which clearly overlap and complement each other. The contender-defender model describes conflicts in terms of the actions of one party (the contender) who seeks change and the reactions of the other party (the defender). Conflicts escalate, in this model, because the contender uses increasingly more coercive strategies to attain its goals. The conflict spiral model focuses on the interaction between the two parties, in particular the vicious circle of actions and reactions of retaliation and deterrence. The structural change model focuses on psychological changes that take place in the parties as conflicts progress. These psychological changes are the result of escalation but also contribute to further escalation because they reinforce hostile attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. The psychological changes involve emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and behavior of individuals, for example, the dehumanization and deindividuation of the other. The psychological changes also affect the social dynamics in groups, for example, the development of group goals, enhanced group identity and cohesiveness, emergence of militant subgroups and leaders. The model is called the structural change model because some of these changes are persistent (Pruitt & Kim 2004 in Abubakar & Yahaya 2018). However, there are three primary criticisms of conflicts theory. Conflicts theory tends to ignore the many areas in which most people arrive at the same consensus about important values of life. Both the rich

and the poor usually tend to admire hardworking, courteous people. Conflict theorists tend to side with the people that lack social power. Critics says that this violates scientific objectivity. Finally, the focus on economic factors is the sole criteria for all conflict in society. Thus, most conflict theorists today take into account gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other factors that lead to conflict (Iduwo, 2017). Notwithstanding, the relevancy of Conflict Theory is inevitable to the study of farmers-herdsmen conflicts and the effects of these conflicts on female gender in Benue State, Nigeria.

Causes of Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict

Historically, studies have shown that the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial times. According to Blench (2017), traditional pastoralist movements were largely peaceful due to established indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. However, colonial land tenure policies disrupted this balance by formalizing land ownership in ways that favored sedentary farming over pastoralism (Bassett and Turner, 2007). This shift led to increasing marginalization of herders, laying the foundation for future conflicts (Ogunleye, 2019).

Empirical evidence from recent studies highlights how post-independence agricultural expansion further complicated relations between the two groups. Research by Adetula (2019) indicates that government-led land reforms disproportionately allocated land to farmers, forcing herders to migrate further in search of grazing land. As a result, tensions grew, manifesting in violent confrontations (Ibrahim, 2018). The herder-farmers conflict in Nigeria stems from a combination of remote and immediate causes that have evolved over time. Some of the remote causes are; climate change and environmental degradation, population growth, government policies etc. some of the immediate causes are; resource competition, crop damage, retaliatory attacks etc.

Climate change significantly influences the activities of both herders and farmers. The shifting climatic patterns

attributed to global warming have exacerbated challenges for both groups, particularly as herders increasingly move southward in search of viable grazing areas, bringing them into conflict with farmers and local communities (Egbuta, 2018).

Nigeria's growing population has increased the demand for agricultural land. Farmers have expanded their cultivation areas into regions that were previously designated as grazing routes or reserves, leaving herders with fewer options (Egbuta, 2018).

The genesis of conflicts over access, use and management of land resources between cattle herders and crop farmers is as diverse as the nature of the conflicts themselves. In general terms, however, the expansion of population throughout northern Nigeria has led to the purpose of farming activities into areas utilized by cattle herders for the purpose of livestock production. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in Hausa land where the traditional pastoralists grazing area (*hurumai*), stock routes, and water points have been turned into farming areas over years. In Nigeria, the most frequent causes of conflicts between the nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers are illegal invasion of farms and destruction of crops by cattle, particularly during the planting season and immediately after the harvesting period (Abubakar 2012). Conflicts between cattle herders and farmers have existed since the beginning of agriculture and increased or decreased in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental and other factors. For example, increases in the herd sizes, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compelled the cattle herders to seek for more pastures beyond their limited range. Climate change has constituted a great threat by putting great pressures on the land and thus provoking conflicts between them. However, improvements in human health and population have enhanced a much greater pressure on land. Since the 1980s therefore, there has been a marked expansion of cultivation of the *fadama* (riverine and valley-bottom) areas. This means that both the farmers and cattle herders have engaged in fierce struggles for access to such valuable lands which, more often than not, result in

increased conflicts and violence (Abbas, 2009 cited in Johnson, 2022).

According to Osimen, et al (2019) herdsman and farmers conflict in Nigeria for a long time, the seasonal movements has made many States in Nigeria to not only grapple with the increasing presence and the activities of herdsman in the name of promoting their nomadic culture of pasturing but more worrisome is the new dimension of bearing sophisticated weapons of war to terrorize farmers, and either as a result of lack of attention or they deliberately allow their cattle to stray, trample on the crops and forcefully eat up farm crops of farmers, they also contaminate streams which serves as source of water for human consumption. Hence this leads to outbreak of disease in the community. The pastoralists engage in raping women, abducting and killing farmers. Their tactics for large scale violent attacks on villages and towns is to come in 100s to attack at night when people are asleep and carting away valuables. It is also discovered that they have taken kidnapping, and arm robbery activities on the highways (Osimen, et al 2019).

Tonah (2006) opined that the causes of farmers/herders conflicts include the southward movement of pastoral herds into the humid and sub-humid zones, promoted by the successful control of the menace posted by disease, the wide spread and availability of veterinary medicine and the expansion of farming activities into areas that hitherto served as pasture land. As a result, the herdsman destroy crops of the farmers on their farmland.

These conflicts have increased in its intensity in the recent years, many lives and properties worth billions of naira have been lost to this protracted conflict, which constitute threats to the means of survival and livelihoods of both the cattle herders and farmers. The conflicts, through provocative claimed over access rights to farmland and cattle routes have become a serious danger to the harmonious relationship that existed between both parties hitherto and appear to have defied every possible resolution mechanism.

The Effects of Herder-Farmer Conflicts on Female Gender in Benue State.

The perennial clashes between herdsmen and farmers over usage of land and non-compliance with State and community laws on security and revenue payments. At the end of violent confrontations lots more life, properties and settlements were destroyed. The population of farmers is reduced; population of widows, widowers and orphans increase, more money is expended on arms and security provision services. These among other effects are responsible for low acceptance of Fulani in their host communities. Open grazing has been roundly condemned and blamed as the reason why cattle herders clash with local farming communities over the control of land all over the country, with such clashes leading to the death of hundreds over many years (Osimen, et al 2019).

Women and girls tend to suffer more and in various ways during and after the period of conflict. Economic disenfranchisement, they are informally and formally displaced from their homes, markets where they buy and sell to support or cater for their family. High casualty are women and girls who are also subjected to domestic abuse, such as rape, sexual assault which pave the way for early pregnancy, early marriages, and aborted education for girls as a result of conflict in mostly affected areas in Benue state. Because of their social vulnerability women and girls are faced with high level of abduction for sexual exploits, ransoms and in some extreme cases been killed in Benue state as a result of the protracted herder-farmer conflict and several other communal conflicts in the state.

Benue state has experienced and continues to experience high level of ethnic and religious conflicts. Women and girls in conflict situation suffer greater vulnerabilities and inequalities and this is becoming a threat to their identity and their security. Women are the most affected in the protracted conflicts of any kind in their communities, with many of them killed, raped, displaced, widowed, and generally suffering economic, social and psychological violence in several communities.

Conclusion

It was discovered that farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State had significant negative effects on female gender. These effects include, the killing, rape, their livelihoods are destroyed (crops, animals and other items). more so, the female gender and other vulnerable groups experience post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSDs) and are also socially dislocation and separation from their children, husbands and other relations and their economic activities such as farming, trading are destroyed among others. Women and girls are the most affected in the protracted conflicts of any kind in their communities, with many of them killed, raped, displaced, widowed, and generally suffering economic, social and psychological violence in several communities as shown in Benue State.

Recommendations

To achieve lasting peace, a combination of proactive and inclusive strategies is needed. The government and its security agencies should as a matter of urgency be more proactive and develop a multi-dimensional approach in mediating the herders-farmers conflict in order to tame rampaging herders who are bent on causing crises. The Federal government should find a way of mediating and reconciling the issues igniting conflicts between herders and farmers through the introduction of cattle ranches. Ranching system can reduce the need for migration and avoid free grazing of farm land which will create room for more conflicts in Benue State to minimize conflicts over land and water resources.

The government should provide free education and make it compulsory for all children especially the girls to enable them compete favourably with their male counterpart in Benue State. The community leaders, Fulani leaders in the affected areas, and parents should be conscientized on the importance of education to every child and the need to enroll their wards in school. This would afford the female gender equal opportunity with the male, and in turn discourages early marriages which make them more vulnerable in conflict situations.

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