



POLAC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ECON & MGT SCIENCE (PIJEMS)
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE
NIGERIA POLICE ACADEMY, WUDIL-KANO



EXAMINATION OF THE REMOTE AND IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF HERDER-FARMER' CONFLICT IN OMALA LGA, KOGI STATE.

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Abstract

The herders-farmers conflict in Omala LGA, Kogi State is a complex and persistent issue rooted in historical, economic, political, social, and environmental factors. This conflict has escalated into one of the most significant security challenges in the country. This study examines the root (remote) and direct (immediate) causes of the herder-farmer's conflict, it also evaluate the effectiveness of current conflict resolution strategies and propose sustainable solutions. Relative Deprivation Theory is adopted as theoretical framework of analysis. Therefore, secondary sources of data collection were mainly used. The study employs qualitative analysis of existing literature, government reports, and periodicals, and other documentary materials, especially internet materials, which provide an in-depth understanding of the issue. The study reveals that a combination of historical grievances, climate change, population pressure, as well as resource competition (land-use competition), crop damage, government policies, ethnic and religious tensions etc have contributed to the persistence of the crisis. Despite various conflict resolution strategies, such as the establishment of the vigilante groups and peace dialogues, their effectiveness remains limited due to weak implementation and lack of inclusivity. This study advocates for sustainable solutions, including promoting ranching, integrated land-use planning, climate adaptation programs, and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. These measures aim to address root causes, foster harmony, and ensure food security, paving the way for a peaceful coexistence between herding and farming communities in Omala LGA. Kogi State.

Keywords: Farmer, Header, Conflict, Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, Sustainable Solutions.

1. Introduction

The herder-farmer's conflict in Nigeria is a long-standing issue rooted in competition over scarce resources such as land and water. Historically, herders migrated seasonally in search of grazing land, but climate change, population growth, and urbanization have disrupted traditional migration routes. This has led to frequent clashes between predominantly Fulani herders and farming communities, especially in the Middle Belt region. The conflict has escalated in recent

years, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and economic instability. The herder-farmer's conflict in Nigeria is a deeply rooted and increasingly severe issue that reflects a convergence of environmental, economic, and sociopolitical challenges. Traditionally, Nigeria's Fulani herders practiced transhumance, a system of seasonal migration to find grazing land for their livestock. However, environmental changes such as desertification in northern Nigeria and erratic rainfall patterns have significantly altered this age-old practice, compelling herders to move southward into farming

regions in search of pasture and water (International Crisis Group, 2017).

This southward migration coincides with Nigeria's rapid population growth, which has intensified the demand for arable land. Farming communities, reliant on stable agricultural land for their livelihoods, have expanded their cultivation areas, often encroaching on traditional grazing routes and reserves. This land-use overlap has triggered frequent disputes over territory and resources, fostering tensions between farmers and herders (Netchy & Sylvester, 2018).

Adding to these challenges are ethnic and religious dimensions, as herders are predominantly Fulani Muslims, while many farming communities in the Middle Belt are Christians from diverse ethnic groups. Historical grievances and mutual mistrust have deepened the divide, with conflicts often framed along ethnic and religious lines. Furthermore, the failure of successive governments to establish effective land-use policies and enforce grazing reserves has exacerbated the situation, leaving both communities feeling marginalized (CITAD, 2022).

The escalation of this conflict in recent years is marked by increasing violence, including the use of firearms and organized reprisals. The insecurity has had profound implications, from loss of lives and property to displacement, disruption of agricultural activities, and a decline in food production, thereby threatening Nigeria's economy and social fabric (Global Terrorism Index 2023).

Another immediate cause of the conflict is the rise in armed banditry and criminal activities. The proliferation of small arms, weak law enforcement, and ineffective judicial processes have enabled criminal elements to exploit the situation (Amnesty International, 2020). Cattle rustling, kidnappings, and retaliatory attacks have become common, turning the conflict into a broader security challenge beyond herder-farmer relations. This lawlessness further deepens mistrust and hinders peaceful coexistence.

Addressing the herder-farmer's conflict requires an in-depth understanding of its underlying causes and dynamics. Without sustainable solutions, the cycle of violence is likely to continue, hindering Nigeria's progress toward achieving food security, social harmony, and national development. This study seeks to examine and analyze the underlying factors driving the herder-farmer's conflict and propose viable and sustainable solutions for lasting peace in Omala LGA Kogi State.

2. Literature Review

Ibrahim and Chaminda (2017) examined the effective strategies for resolution and management of farmers-herders conflict in the north central region of Nigeria. A total of 60 respondents were systematically selected from the six states in the North Central Region of Nigeria. The research was conducted with the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The study showed that clear demarcation of farming sites and grazing routes across the region will serve as an eye-opener to both land users who often complain that there are no signs to show where farming sites are and where grazing routes follow. Also, the policing system is not available in several communities across the North Central Region of Nigeria. This has continued to make such communities vulnerable to attacks by armed men and Herdsmen. Although in places where frictions between Farmers and Herdsmen have occurred, security personnel were deployed and shortly withdrawn after the conflict had subsided, leading to a fresh wave of attacks more severe than the initial ones.

The authors (Ibrahim and Chaminda (2017)) concluded that the promotion of religious tolerance as well as the establishment of effective mechanisms for conflict resolution and management in the region was found to be part of the effective strategies for the resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria. The research recommended that existing traditional institutions across the region should be empowered to effectively resolve and manage conflict between Farmers and Herders.

Sylvester (2017) conducted a study on anti-grazing policy and conflict resolution between Fulani herders and farmers in Ekiti State. Primary and secondary data sources were used to generate data for the study. A purposive sample was used to draw the 22 interview respondents. Both data from the interview and secondary sources were analysed qualitatively. The study revealed that the Ekiti State Government passed into Law Anti Grazing Bill 2016 to resolve various conflicts between Fulani herders and Farmers in Ekiti State. It also revealed that the Government set up Ekiti Anti-Grazing Enforcement Marshal who implements the Law. The State government partners with the 16 Local Governments in the allocation of land to herders for cattle grazing. It was established that the government also collaborates with the herdsmen association in Ekiti to maintain the peaceful implementation of the law. The study concluded that it is evident that this Anti-grazing policy has succeeded in resolving conflict between Fulani herdsmen and Farmers in Ekiti State. It recommended the creation of grazing zone; private ownership of ranch; border should be secured; training of Ekiti State Grazing Marshal and proper monitoring of their operations.

Although this study by Sylvester claimed that the anti-grazing policy has succeeded in resolving the conflict between herders and farmers in Ekiti state, news reports have proven otherwise. For example the daily post on the 22nd of January 2018, released a report on the burning of Olu Falae's farm by Fulani herdsmen (Olowolagba, 2018).

Ofuoku and Isife (2010) conducted a study in Delta state to investigate the farmers-nomadic herders' conflict that is very common in many parts of Nigeria. Using simple random and positive sampling techniques, 80 farmers and 20 nomadic cattle herders were selected respectively from 8 randomly selected communities, the study unveils the factors behind the conflict and gives ideas on the way to prevent and solve such in the future. Data were collected using structured interview schedule. The study found out that the causes of the conflict include destruction of crops, contamination of streams by cattle, zero grazing of land, disregard for

local traditional authorities, female harassment, harassment of nomads by host communities' youths, indiscriminate bush burning, defecation of cattle on roads, cattle theft, and straying of cattle. Also, it lists the effect of the conflict to include a reduction in crop yield and income of farmers/nomads, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties and loss of products in the storage. They suggested in their study that the mechanism of local development plans should be established to reduce such conflicts. Also the extent of damage and compensation should be agreed upon by both parties at the community level with the extension agents as facilitators.

Chinwokwu (2017) conducted a study on glamorization of Fulani herders' criminality and its implications on national security in Nigeria. Using secondary method as the source of data collection, the study revealed that government inaction to caution, arrest, prosecute or punish the criminal activities of the Fulani herders is evidence that government is behind their activities. It also viewed government silence as shrouded in inert motive which is not far from expansionist ideology. Therefore, the study suggested that efforts of government must ensure that the activities of Fulani herders are checked to ensure peace and security across the country.

Oli and Ibekwe (2018) examined the prevalence of herders and farmers conflict in Nigeria. The study is anchored on the frustration-aggression and conflict theories. Data were extracted and used from secondary sources like journals, textbooks, newspapers and online organizational publications. Findings from the study showed that some of the factors that usually led to clashes were limited or unavailability of sufficient resources like grazing fields, farm lands, destruction or grazing on crops, long-standing disagreements, lack of access to farm or grazing fields and scarcity of fresh water. Consequently, loss of human and animal lives, destruction of crops and properties, displacement of persons and animals, distrust between herders and farmers, rising anti-Fulani sentiment and breakdown of peaceful relationship with many communities in some parts of the country were amongst the gross effects of

the conflict. The study recommended that government should establish cattle grazing fields in the six geopolitical zones of the country and out-law open grazing of cattle. This must be done through due consultation, dialogue or appeal to some aggrieved regions of the country which may oppose or resist the move. Also, poor water management practice in the country should be improved by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources. This is in view of the fact that climate change cum water shortage and drought are the major reasons herders are migrating southward in search of fresh water and grass for their cattle. Herders should be properly educated or re-oriented on the sanctity of human lives, and taught how to use better channels of communication to convey their grievances than resorting to conflict. And lastly, any form of aggression as a result of past issue(s) should be discouraged and anyone found wanting in that respect be prosecuted.

Alhassan (2013) conducted a study on the herders and farmers conflicts in North-Eastern Nigeria examining its causes, repercussions and resolutions. The study was conducted in Yobe State, Nigeria. Four-stage cluster random sampling procedure was used to select respondents for the research. Relevant data were collected with the aid structured questionnaire. The study described the traditional relationship between Fulani herders and farmers in the incessant resource conflicts witnessed in Yobe State and how it affected livelihood security of those involved and resource sustainability for the local communities. The author averred that the necessity to provide food of crops and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever-growing demands, has led to extensive use of land. Also, he argued that conflicts have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the disputes are localized, with repercussions nationwide.

Theoretical Framework (The Relative Deprivation Theory)

The study adopts Relative Deprivation Theory as the appropriate theoretical framework which provides a

useful lens for explaining and analyzing the herder-farmer's conflict in Omala LGA, Kogi State - Nigeria. Robert Ted Gurr (1970), in his book titled *'Why Men Rebel'* demonstrated the importance of 'Relative Deprivation' in explaining the tendency for people responses to violence situation. Robert Ted Gurr a sociologist, is probably one of the leading exponents of the theory; he uses the idea of Relative Deprivation to explain violent behavior among individual and group. According to Gurr, individual and group resort to violence where there is discrepancy between what people seek and what they attained (i.e. their expected and actual economic, social, or political conditions), and when this happened, a sense of deprivation is established, particularly when comparing their situation to other groups, can lead to collective frustration, resentment, and ultimately violence.

Gurr explains this hypothesis with his term "relative deprivation," which is the discrepancy between what people think they deserve, and what they actually think they can get. Gurr's hypothesis, which forms the foundation of the book, is that: "The potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members of a collectivity."(1970:24), this gap between an individual's expected and achieved welfare results in collective discontent and the tendency is to strike at the source of their frustration when they cannot fight their source of frustration they turn against themselves.

In the context of the herders-farmers conflict, herders often feel marginalized due to dwindling access to grazing land, restrictive government policies, and growing hostility from farming communities. Historically, pastoralists had access to vast grazing reserves and designated migratory routes, but rapid population growth, urbanization, and climate change have drastically reduced these resources (Blench, 2017). The perception that their traditional livelihoods are under threat has contributed to increased aggression and resistance to state policies aimed at regulating pastoral activities (Ibrahim, 2018).

Similarly, farmers also experience relative deprivation, particularly as they struggle with land encroachment by migrating herders. The destruction of farmlands by cattle, coupled with weak law enforcement and inadequate government intervention, has heightened farmers' frustration (Adetula, 2019). This perception of being neglected by the state has fueled retaliatory attacks and violent clashes, further exacerbating the cycle of conflict.

The application of Relative Deprivation Theory in this study highlights how structural inequalities, poor governance, and environmental challenges contribute to the conflict. By addressing the perceived and actual deprivation of both herders and farmers through inclusive policies, equitable land reforms, and conflict resolution mechanisms, sustainable peace can be achieved (Eze, 2022).

Relative deprivation theory provides useful explanation on the causes of violent conflict between the two occupational groups; to also recommend healthy relationships among divers' parts of the society. These problems stem both from the violent conflicts that occur between herders and farmers as pasturing animals intrude on farmlands and watering points for free pasture, as farmers encroach on cattle routes for more cultivable land. No community can expunge factors of war without agreement to dialogue. While some measure of social order has been reached in the warring States, the ethnic divisions that make up this crisis must agree to cooperate, negotiate and discuss their future and destiny in order to mitigate incessant loss of life and property.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, relying exclusively on secondary data sources to examine the remote and immediate causes of the herders-farmers conflict in Omala LGA, Kogi State. Secondary data were obtained from books, academic journal articles, government reports, policy documents, periodicals and credible online sources related to herder-farmer's

conflict in Omala LGA. The use of secondary data allows for a comprehensive understanding and analysis of existing research on the subject, providing historical context and diverse perspectives on the conflict.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, identifying recurring patterns and trends in existing literature. Thematic analysis enabled the classification of key drivers of the conflict into remote and immediate causes, facilitating a clearer understanding of their interconnections. Content analysis was also employed to examine policy documents and government interventions in addressing the conflict.

The limitations of using secondary data include potential biases in source materials and the inability to gather firsthand information from affected communities. However, the use of multiple sources helped to mitigate these limitations, ensuring a balanced and well-informed discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

Remote and Immediate Causes of the Herder-Farmer's Conflict in Omala LGA, Kogi State – Nigeria.

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. Here's a detailed breakdown:

Remote Causes

1. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:

Desertification and reduced rainfall in northern Nigeria have diminished traditional grazing lands, pushing herders further south into farming areas. This migration disrupts existing land-use patterns and intensifies competition for resources. Environmental degradation, desertification, and soil depletion have compelled Fulani herders from Northern Nigeria to alter their traditional migration routes. Access to pasture and water sources in the Middle Belt became imperative for herders traveling from the North. 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. This global trend is impacting various regions worldwide, contributing to the farmer-herder crisis (Egbuta, 2018).

2. Population Growth and Land Pressure: 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. The conflict between farmers and herders often stems from struggles over land access. In the early 21st century, there was a notable expansion of agricultural populations and cultivated land, encroaching upon pasturelands in the Middle Belt. In this politically volatile region, obtaining legal land titles for both farmers and herders has been challenging. Consequently, the transhumance routes traditionally used by herders became increasingly unavailable, particularly due to the effects of global

warming, forcing herders to migrate southward in search of land and pasture for their animals. This migration has frequently led to clashes with farmers, resulting in crises and property destruction. For instance, the fertile farming areas along the Benue River, which yield over 20,000 tons of grain annually, also serve as crucial grazing grounds for herders, leading to conflicts, especially along riverbanks (Egbuta, 2018).

3. Historical Ethnic and Cultural Grievances: Long-standing tensions between the predominantly Fulani herders and the diverse farming communities in the Middle Belt are exacerbated by ethnic and religious differences. These historical mistrusts have added layers of complexity to the conflict.

4. Government Policies and Lack of Infrastructure: Weak governance and the failure to enforce grazing routes and reserves have left herders feeling marginalized, while farmers resent the encroachment on their farmlands. Poor infrastructural development has also contributed to inadequate management of land resources. The government's response to the farmer-herder crisis has been marred by insincerity and a lack of timely action. The inadequate handling of the issue by all levels of government has led to a sharp increase in poverty rates in affected areas. Subsistence farmers, reliant on crop sales for survival, suffer significantly when their crops are destroyed, exacerbating frustration and poverty. The illegal possession of arms by herders, coupled with government inaction, has fueled retaliatory actions by farmers, escalating violence and conflict (Osumah, 2018).

Immediate Causes

1. Resource Competition: Herders and farmers directly compete over land, water, and pasture, leading to frequent disputes. In regions where these resources are scarce, tensions escalate quickly a key factor driving the herder-farmer's conflict is land tenure and access to grazing lands. As farmland has expanded to meet the growing demand for food production, traditional transhumance routes and communal grazing areas used by pastoralists have been encroached upon or

privatized, limiting the herders' access to these resources (Abbass, 2012; Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). This increased competition for land has intensified conflicts between the two groups as they vie for control over diminishing resources. Additionally, climate change effects, such as declining rainfall, desertification, and water scarcity, have worsened the resource scarcity, fueling the conflict (Mcgregor, 2014; Mercy Corps, 2015).

2. Crop Damage by Cattle: Herders' livestock often stray into farmlands, destroying crops and causing significant economic loss to farmers. This triggers violent reactions from farming communities in Omala LGA. There is a consensus among scholars that the major cause of conflict between herders and farmers is the destruction of farmers' crops by the herders' cattle. In the study by Ofuoku (2009) on the role of community development committees in herder-farmer's conflicts in central agricultural zone of Delta State, Nigeria. Statistics from their field survey showed that destruction of crops consistently ranked highest as the major conflict source with a mean of 2.75 over the cut-off. Similarly, a more recent descriptive survey by Usman et al. (2017) revealed that 100% of famers in the study stated grazing of crops and crop residues as their major source of strife with herders. Similar findings are recorded by Kehinde (2014) in their study in Kogi state, Nzeh (2015) in Enugu state and Adelakun et al. (2015) in their study in Oyo state.

3. Retaliatory Attacks: When disputes arise, reprisals from both sides can quickly escalate into broader and more destructive conflicts.

4. Breakdown of Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Many local mechanisms for resolving disputes, such as community elders and traditional rulers, have weakened due to modernization and lack of support from formal institutions.

These causes combined have resulted in widespread violence, loss of lives, displacement of communities, and disruptions to agricultural production, which negatively affect food security and economic development in the affected areas.

Effectiveness of Current Conflict Resolution Strategies

The conflict resolution strategies employed in Omala LGA, to address the herders-farmers conflict have had mixed results. Some of the key approaches include:

1. Deployment of Security Forces: The government has often relied on military and police intervention to quell violence. While this provides temporary relief, it does not address the root causes of the conflict and sometimes exacerbates tensions.

2. Establishment of Grazing Reserves: Efforts to create designated grazing areas have been met with resistance from farming communities and have not been effectively implemented due to land disputes and inadequate infrastructure.

3. Peace Dialogues and Mediation: Community-based dialogues and mediation efforts have shown promise in fostering understanding between herders and farmers. However, these initiatives are often localized and lack widespread implementation.

4. Government Committees and Policies: Various committees have been set up to recommend solutions, but their impact has been limited due to poor implementation and lack of political will.

Sustainable Solutions

To achieve lasting peace, a combination of proactive and inclusive strategies is needed:

Promotion of Ranching: Transitioning herders to ranching systems can reduce the need for migration and minimize conflicts over land. This requires government support in terms of funding, training, and infrastructure development.

Integrated Land-Use Planning: Developing comprehensive land-use policies that balance the needs of farmers and herders can help prevent disputes. This includes mapping grazing routes and ensuring equitable access to resources.

Climate Adaptation Programs: Addressing the environmental factors driving migration, such as

desertification, through reforestation and water management projects can reduce pressure on land.

Community-Based Conflict Resolution: Strengthening traditional and local mechanisms for conflict resolution can foster trust and cooperation between communities.

Education and Awareness Campaigns: Promoting mutual understanding and dispelling stereotypes through education can help bridge the divide between herders and farmers.

Strengthening Governance: Ensuring transparent and effective implementation of policies, along with accountability, is crucial for building trust among stakeholders. These solutions require collaboration among government agencies, community leaders, and international organizations to ensure their success.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The herders-farmers conflict in Omala LGA, Kogi State underscores the complex interplay of environmental, social, and political factors. It is fueled by both remote

causes, such as climate change and population pressure, and immediate triggers, like resource competition and crop damage. While current conflict resolution strategies have achieved limited success, sustainable solutions demand a holistic and inclusive approach.

In other to break the cycle of violence, Nigeria must invest in proactive measures such as promoting ranching systems, developing integrated land-use policies, addressing climate change, and strengthening local governance and mediation mechanisms. By fostering dialogue and mutual understanding between farming and herding communities, alongside effective government interventions, Nigeria can pave the way for lasting peace, enhanced food security, and social cohesion.

Ultimately, resolving the herders-farmers conflict is not just a matter of managing resources but a step toward building trust and harmony in a diverse and dynamic society. The success of these efforts depends on collaboration, commitment, and innovative thinking from all stakeholders.

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