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FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON FOOD SECURITY IN BENUE STATE, NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the implications of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Food Security in Benue State, North Central Nigeria spanning the period 2010-2022. Benue State was regarded as a core in terms of agricultural production; the government always provides sufficient modern equipment, fertilizer, and herbicide etc. It was on this note that Benue State was tag the “Food Basket of the Nation” but regrettably, crop production continues to decline which automatically became a threat to food security in the State. Frustration-Aggression Theory was adopted to guide the investigation because of its relevance which helps us to understand issues the study focuses on. The study uses stratified random sampling method while descriptive statistics was used for the analysis of data generated from questionnaire. The study uses primary and secondary data which was collected from 183 respondents that included the leaders of farmers, and herders associations and some state holders who are also in the category of farmers and herders in the various local government areas. The study found that, 87 Farmers who represent (95.6%) and 66 herdsman stand at 80.5% acknowledge the facts that, they have been experiencing crisis in their area. While 51 of the herdsman which stand at (62%) agreed that Tiv people use to kill them and take away their farm produce. Another question was asked whether they use to kill the famers as well but they replied no. The conclusion drawn from the findings shows that, farmers herders’ conflict is a strong threat to food security in Benue State with serious implications of food insufficiency leading to abject hunger and starvation in the state. The study recommends that the government should recognize the herdsman with stringent laws and warning to both the herders and farmer in the uses of arms and ammunition for any reason.

Key words: Benue State, Conflict, Food Security, Farmers and Herdsmen

1. Introduction

There exists a multi-dimensional relationship between human security, national insecurity, and food security, as unemployment is both a contributing factor and an effect of insecurity. The low level of agricultural production, due to attacks from herdsman, for example, coupled with a rising population growth rate in Nigeria, is likely to lead to a food crisis and a higher unemployment level. The unemployed population becomes prime targets for recruitment into these insurgency groups whose actions further dampen food insecurity (Bello, 2015).

In Benue State, the frequent clashes between farmers and herdsman in the farming areas of the state have resulted in the destruction of lives and farmlands. According to

Apenda (2016), nine out of the 23 local governments in Benue state, namely Guma, Gwer West, Agatu, Logo, Kwande, Ukum, Tarka and the Northern part of Makurdi are mostly affected by the violent herdsman. Adetula (2016) as cited in International Crisis Group (2017) says that Benue State seems to be the hardest hit in recent times. Barely 5 days before the end of Governor Gabriel Suswam's administration in May 2015, over 100 farmers and their family members were reportedly massacred in villages and refugee camps located in the Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa areas of the state. In December 2015, 6 persons were killed at Idele village in the Oju Local Government Area of Benue State. A reprisal attack by youths in the community saw 3 Fulani herdsman killed

and beheaded. Recently, more than 92 Nigerians were massacred by suspected Fulani herdsmen in Benue.

The Fulani ethnic group comprise of mostly shepherds and cattle herders. They are rural dwellers or pastoralist, and they migrate from one area to another. They are mostly Muslims who speak the Hausa (Fulfulde) language. Over 30 million Fulani people are living in the northern states of Nigeria (Gordon, 2000).

The Fulani group has a long history of migrating, and they have built relationships with various farming populations in Nigeria (Moritz, 2016) The Herder-Farmer crisis in Nigeria can be understood as a problem of access to land for economic survival, which as a result has caused economic, political and environmental tensions in the country, especially in the Middle Belt and South of Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999 (Udosen, 2021)

The clashes are occasioned by the destruction of farmlands by the herds of cattle belonging to the herdsmen. Naturally, herdsmen are migrants who leave their traditional residence in search of greener pasture for their flocks or livestock (Gordon, 2000).

However, farmer-herders conflicts are often considered local, endemic, low-intensity conflicts and not wars; they have been largely ignored in the burgeoning literature on violent conflicts in Africa and elsewhere (Lind & Sturman, 2002). According to Richards (2005a), ignoring these clashes is unwise because local conflicts may escalate into real wars that may lead to ethnic violence along the occupational boundary of farming and herding. Farmer-herders conflict disrupts not only the lives and livelihoods of those involved; they also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production.

Benue state is the nation's acclaimed food basket because of its rich agricultural production which includes Maize, Sesame, Cocoyam, Yam, Rice, Beans, Cassava, Sweet-potato, Millet etc. Most of the Benue population is predominantly farmers and hunters as well and that makes life interesting in the area. Unfortunately, the frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the

predominant farming areas of the state have resulted in the destruction of lives and farmlands Emmanuel, Yahaya and Mohammed (2019). In tandem to the forgoing, Governor Samuel Ortom also reported that more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016 and that attacks by herders coming from more northern states, and possibly also from Cameroon and Niger, had cost his state N95 billion (about \$634 million at that time) between 2012 and 2014. More so, this implies that over 1,800 killed in herdsmen, farmer's clashes in Benue in three years (International Crises Group, 2017). This resulted to a decline in the number of farmers in the study area and the displacement of sedentary farmers has drastically affected the availability of agricultural products in the markets which also resulted to hike in prices of such products and make life difficult for an average citizen in Benue State (Duru, 2016). That is why this study analyses the effect of Farmers Herders Conflict and its Implication on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Issues

Benue State: On the 5th of May, 1967, the structure of the federation of Nigeria was divided into twelve administrative states by (then) General Yakubu Gowon military administration. Benue was merged together as Benue-Plateau State. In another restructure on the 3rd of February, 1976; Benue State was created out of the defunct Benue-Plateau as an administrative unit among the Seven States created by the Military Administration headed by Late General Murtala Mohammed which increases the number of Nigeria States from Twelve to Nineteen. The state derives its name from the Benue River which is the second largest river in Nigeria (Tonah, 2006)

Agriculture forms the backbone of the Benue State economy, engaging more than 70 per cent of the working population. This has made Benue the major source of food production in the Nation. Mechanization and plantation agriculture/agro-forestry are still at its infancy. Farm inputs such as fertilizers, improved seed,

insecticides and other foreign methods are being increasingly used. Important cash crops include soybeans, rice, peanuts, mango varieties, citrus, etc. Other cash crops include palm oil, melon, African pear, chili pepper, tomatoes etc. Food crops include Yam, Cassava, Sweet potato, Beans, Maize, Millet, Guinea corn, Vegetables etc. There is very little irrigation agriculture and techniques. Animal production includes: Cattle, Pork, Poultry, and Goat (Apenda, 2016).

Conflict: conflict is a violent stage which manifest in the form of aggression, struggle or war which is also an inevitable fact of life as long as people live together with different views, idea and thoughts which are opposed to one another. According to Action Aid (1994) a conflict situation is termed to be a condition of lack of cooperation between social entities or clashes between people who have incompatible ideas or thoughts. Karl Max (1910) in Lewis Coser (1962) assert that conflict leads to ever changing relations within existing social structure, but a total structure undergoes change through conflict. Conflict is also a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and sometimes perception which result in heated argument, physical abuses and definitely loss of lives, peace and harmony.

Food Security: “Food security is basically a situation that exists when most people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to adequate, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” Chinenye (2019) food security is also a measure and availability of food to individuals who can easily access it without much difficulty.

Farmer: Farmer is a person whose main occupation or livelihood is the cultivation of land and planting of crops for both domestic and commercial purposes. Farmers also raise living organisms for food, commerce or raw materials (Akande, 2006). The term farmer in this work is directly associated to people who do some combination of raising poultry, livestock and above all crops. A farmer may not necessarily have his own farm but may have the

strength to carry his labour round as a commodity looking for a market, to enable him get some money and meet the basic needs of his family. Though in most developed societies, famers usually have their own farms using modern machines for cultivation or using employees of the farm who are called farm labourers or workers.

Herders: herders who are also called Fulani pastoralists are nomads whose primary occupation is raising livestock like cows and sheep basically for commercial purposes. They move from one place to another in search of green grasses and water for their animals without a fixed pattern of movement (Tonah, 2006).

2.2 Empirical Review

Tanko (2021) examine the effect of security management strategies on farmer herdsmen conflicts in Benue State, North Central Nigeria. The study looks at the background of farmer-herdsmen conflicts in general and Nigeria in particular, which has attracted considerable local and international issues. This study emphasises that Nigeria has failed to take into consideration the security management strategies but rather concentrate on other aspects of farmers-herder’s conflicts. The study was undertaken to determine the effect of security management strategies on farmer-herdsmen conflicts in Benue State. It is highpoint the challenges of political authorities and security apparatuses in addressing the implications of farmer-herdsmen conflicts. These competitions often lead to conflict especially between farmers and herders whose culture, livelihood and sustenance centred on the availability of these resources. Eco-violence, Frustration aggression, Relative deprivation, Democratic peace building and Defensive structural realism theories were adopted. The research in its findings revealed that the major cause of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Benue State is land. The research also revealed that there is hatred between farmers and herdsmen in Benue state, which makes it difficult to resolve the conflict. The research shows that farmers and herdsmen do not trust their leaders when it comes to conflict management or resolution of the conflict. The research revealed that farmers and herdsmen share similar experiences on the impact of the conflict

where both suffer losses. The research also shows that there was destruction of crops, cattle rustling, farm encroachment, shortage of water for irrigation farming and grazing in Benue state. The researcher has demonstrated high level of intelligence in addressing herder's farmers' conflict in Benue State. He adopted five theories which seem confusing, the better way to do it, is to review the five theories and adopt one which will be used to explain the relevance of the work.

Udosen (2021) examines Farmers-Herders crisis and food security in Nigeria: Causes and Implications. It viewed that Farmers-Herders crisis in Nigeria threatens food security, peace and sustainable development of the nation, Nigeria. The work maintains that the unceasing crises by Herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria, has claimed so many lives and property, and displaced so many people, with attendant socio-economic consequences on sustainable development of the nation, Nigeria. Resource Access Theory was adopted, the work explains that the crisis between Herders and Farmers can be understood as the problem of access to land for economic survival, which as a result, has caused economic, political and environmental tensions in Nigeria, especially in the middle belt and southern parts of Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. This indeed is a brilliant submission as the researcher believed that the problem between the herders and farmers is majorly of access to land for economic survival, as a matter of fact is beyond access to land because water is life and therefore, it is very necessary to include it as a major factor for this conflict which is missing in this work.

Yakubu (2020) examined the effects of farmer-herder conflicts on rural households' food security in Gombe State, Nigeria. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaire and focus group discussion among 118 farmers and 112 herders. Percentage, tobit and logit regression models were used in analysing the data. The result showed that, household size and education, farm size and cattle route encroachment were the major causes of the conflict. In addition, killing of stray cattle, population growth, rape and sexual harassment were all responsible to farmer-herder conflict with different marginal effects. The study revealed 59.3%

of the farmers and 31.3% of the herders, had food insecure with moderate hunger, while 43.7% of the farmers and 66.1% of the 12 herders had food insecurity with severe hunger. Selling of grazing areas, corrupt practices by traditional rulers are some of the constraints that affects conflict management. In as much as, most of his submission are in line to reality, there is still need to create a platform that will bring all stakeholders together on a quarterly basis in order to have an interaction and to employ extension agents to serve as an intermediary between farmers and herders. This may help in reducing the intensity of the conflict.

Emmanuel, Yahaya and Mohammed (2019) wrote on the Impact of Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen Conflict on Socio-Economic Activities in Agatu LGA of Benue State, Nigeria. The researchers believed that violence between Farmers and Fulani herdsmen is one of Benue state's most persistent security scourges which have displaced thousands of persons, destroyed many properties and left thousands of people dead in recent decades. The study was anchored on three objectives which were aimed at ascertaining the causes of Farmers and Fulani herdsmen clashes; the social and economic impacts of Farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflict in Agatu LGA of Benue State. Malthusian Theory on Population by Thomas Malthus (1803) had been adopted as theoretical framework to underpin this study. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Sequel to this, the instruments used for the collection of primary data include structured questionnaire while relevant documents that contain secondary data such as journal publications, newspapers, textbooks & international crisis group publications were used to support it. The primary data were presented in tables of frequencies and percentages; mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data generated while T-Test analysis was used to test the hypotheses. A total of 101 questionnaires were purposively administered to respondents in the study area, out of which 89 questionnaire to include (68 Farmers and 21 Fulani Herdsmen) were returned with valid responses while 12 were not returned. Among other things, the study revealed that the destruction of crops was one of the causes of Farmers and Fulani herdsmen

conflict while the socio-economic impacts of the conflict was the destruction of lives/properties, reduction of outputs/income and the reduction of quality in social relationship between the Nomads and farmers. The study concluded that socio-economic activities would continue to be affected unless the root causes of the conflict is addressed.

Adeyinka and Victor (2019) equally researched on concentric approach to understanding herders farmer's clashes in Benue and Nasarawa States, Nigeria. The researchers adopts a qualitative approach in the application of "Burgees theory" in providing a clear cut explanation on encroachment by urban development, and how it has footed the escalated crises between herders and farmers in two north central states. The research is descriptive in design with a systematic review of relevant literature. They made use of secondary data such as high impact reports and journal publications. The research concludes that, change is constant and as such, every society must adapt to new innovations and technology.

Victor, Godwin and Yange (2015) examined the Socio-Economic Effects of Farmers-Fulani Herdsmen's Conflict on Farmers Output in Benue, Nigeria. The study adopted the theory of dialectical materialism which insists on interpreting man's consciousness and activities in the society based on competitive balance and satisfaction of economic factors among different groups. The study adopted a survey design technique via a cross-sectional approach that involves field and sample surveys. The sample size of 340 farmers was chosen from the population of Benue farmers who were affected by Fulani Herdsmen attack. The study used regression to analyse the effect of the attack on farmers' output in Benue state. The study found out that, the number of Fulani Herdsmen attacks on farmers output in the study area and the socio-economic effect of the conflict resulting to reduction in crops yield and income of the Benue farmers, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties, loss of products in storage and destruction of public and private facilities. The study couldn't see grazing field and cattle routes accompanied with necessary infrastructural facilities such as water, nomadic schools, veterinary and human medical services as indices of reducing the crises

between farmers and herders in the state. etc. This will stop the herders from encroaching into people's farms and destroying their farm crops which will consequently reduce or prevent the frequent clashes between herders and farmers in the State.

Stella (2014) wrote on Bridging Peace between Herders and Farmers in Nigeria. A Study of Borderline on Radio Nigeria, Enugu. In the past decade, Nigeria; a nation state with a population of about one hundred and sixty million people and over two hundred and fifty ethno-linguistic, socio-cultural and religious groups, had suffered pervasive violent crises with devastating impacts on the peaceful co-existence of its citizens. These crises which were either fuelled by seemingly incompatible interests and values or mere hostilities, had resulted to major outcomes such as premature deaths, gruesome casualties and general stagnation in the socioeconomic growth of the communities affected and the nation at large. Several reconciliatory measures and mediation processes have been applied by the Nigerian government, as well as the international community but the results are yet not impressive. This research presents drama as an interventionist tool for conflict resolution and social reconstruction. Using qualitative methodology, the selected radio drama attempts using a dramatic approach to expose the various perspectives to the prevalent issues of conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria; and calls for a peaceful co-existence amongst the ethnic groups, hence, advocating for dialogue and negotiations rather than violence and aggression as effective ways of achieving lasting peace in the nation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Frustration-Aggression Theory

This theory was originally conceived by Dollard and Miller (1939) but later substantially refined by Berkowitz in 1969. The theory states that aggression is an outcome or result of blocking or frustrating a person's efforts towards a certain goal (Dollard, 1939; as cited in Myers, 2007). The theory further posits that frustration caused by interference in goal-directed activity produces a 'readiness' for aggression which if 'triggered' can result

in aggressive response. According to Rationis (2014), the trigger could be an insignificant element of behavior, such as a casual joke, gesture or mild criticism which would normally be overlooked, but to the frustrated individual who is already waiting for an opportunity to show his frustration it may provoke aggressive response or reprisal.

Furthermore, a clear readiness for aggression could be linked to the Fulanis' justification on why they attacked ten Agatu communities of Benue State on February 10th 2016 and massacred hundreds of persons. According to the leader of the Gan Allah Fulanis Association, the conflict was a reprisal attack against the killing of their prominent son by the people of Agatu who stole his cattle in April 2013 (Mayah, Tukur & Adebayo, 2016). This scenario depicts three years of frustration or grudge against the Agatus and perhaps repeated unsuccessful plots for attack, until the farmers' reaction on crops destruction by the herds triggered the aggression from the herdsmen. This theory have clearly explained the crisis between herders and farmers and how the crisis results to a declined in agricultural output and broadly led to food insecurity in Benue State, Nigeria which supposed to be the food basket of the nation.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Study Area

The study was conducted in five local government areas out of the 23 local governments in Benue State, which are Guma local government, Gwer West, Agatu, Logo and Kwande local government areas. The reason for the selection of these local government is because, those areas are the ones producing large tons of agricultural products and agricultural products used to be very cheap in does areas where people trooped in from different places to buy goods for commercial purposes, now it has toned to a sad story, prices of commodities in the area shot up, this is likely as a result of the dangerous effect of the farmers herders conflict in the area.

3.2 Data and Sources

For the purpose of achieving the objectives of this study, questionnaire was the major instrument used in this study, which was the major source of data gotten from the farmers and herdsmen in the study area. The questionnaire was title Farmer-Herders Conflict and Implications on Food Security in Benue State Nigeria. Section A was concerned with the personal information and characteristics of the respondents while section B was made up of open ended questions on the topic mentioned above.

3.3 Population and Sampling Method

The population of this study comprises of farmers and herdsmen in the study area, which include Guma Local Government Area, Gwer West, Agatu, Logo and Kwande Local Government of Benue State which are some of the areas majorly affected by the farmers herders conflict in the State. Stratify random sampling was used to select 20 leaders of the farmers' association in each of the local government and 20 leaders of the herdsmen were administered questionnaire to. The 200 questionnaire were administered but only 173 were returned. From the questionnaire returned 91 were from the farmers while 82 from herdsmen. The study area is Benue State with particular reference to five local government areas where the farmers' herders' conflict is predominant in the State.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected in the study areas were analysed using simple descriptive statistics, while the responses of various individual were analysed and conclusion was drawled.

4. Result and Discussion

This section presented and analyses results generated from questionnaire administered with the aim of addressing the research objectives. The study uses only questionnaire to gather data for this study. In other to objectively address the objectives of the study, a balanced view of the parties involves were sought in both the farming and herding communities across the five local

government areas of the study in Benue State. Questionnaire was administered to leaders of cattle breeders association and farmers association; a number of questions were asked for both leaders of farmers and herders association respectively to find out the implications of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Food Crisis in Benue State, North Central Nigeria.

Question 1: Have you been experiencing conflict between farmers and herders in your area? 87 Farmers who represent (95.6%) said yes, they added that, the conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State is of varying degrees, as a matter of fact, it has become frequent in the state. This conflict has affected their normal way of living, now; they cannot sleep with their eyes all close, they cannot longer pray with their eyes close. While in their farms some community members well-armed must be there to protect them against any external aggression. This is the new normal, not a pleasant experience at all. The Fulani herders who were also asked the same question as 66 of the herders who represent (80.5%) acknowledged the fact that, they have been experiencing conflict with the famers which was basically as a result of Tiv farmers raping their wives and daughters, that's the major reason but this Tiv farmers will go to the media telling all kinds of liars against them for encroaching into their farm lands. Though sometimes they encroach into their farm lands as retaliation for raping their wife's and daughter.

Question 2: Were there people kill as a result of the crisis between farmers and herders in your area? 88 farmers put at (96.7%) replied of course, they have lost so many love ones in hundreds and thousands, friends, children women and adult men were lost. The strong and productive man power in the farming communities were targeted by the herders and killed. This has drastically affected the man power in terms of agricultural production. This is in line with the submission of Emmanuel, Yahaya and Mohammed (2019) in the empirical literature review. The same question was asked to Fulani herdsman in the areas and 51 of them which stand at (62%) replied that Tivpeople use to kill them and take away their farm produce. Another question was also asked whether they use to kill the famers as well but they replied no.

Questions 3 to Farmers: In your opinion, are the crises between the farmers and herders led to low production and shortage of food in the state? 89 farmers who represent (97.8%) Answered yes, and continue to say that most of their community members are farmers and Benue state is blessed with fertile land but unfortunately, they cannot longer use those lands as before, most of the fertile land are at the interior which are marked as dangerous areas or no go areas because of the frequent attacks by the herdsman. The herdsman now settled at the border between Benue and Nasarawa State, Benue and Taraba State and so on. They usually come to their farms and launch attacks and run to the border areas. These incidences affected them seriously and they cannot longer cultivate those fertile lands again and this led to the declined in the production of goods and services led to hunger and starvation in the state. Benue State which was the food baskets of the nation but the Fulani herdsman now have empty the baskets. The same question was asked to the herdsman, and 65 herders which represent (79%) attested the fact that they too don't have rest of mind in carrying out their activities; they cannot comfortably farm and rear their animals because of fear of attack from the farmers. That among other factors reduces agricultural production which led to scarcity of food in the market, consequently shot up the prices of agricultural product in the state. This is in line with the view of (Bello, 2015) cited in this work.

4.1 Summary of Major Findings

To ascertain the effect of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Food Security in Benue State, North Central Nigeria. The views of 200 respondents were requested for through the administering of a questionnaire but only 173 were returned. From the questionnaire returned 91 were from the farmers while 82 from herdsman. Descriptive statistics was used for the analysis of the data generated from questionnaire with the use of simple percentage. 87 Farmers who represent (95.6%) and 66 of the herders who represent (80.5%) acknowledged the fact that, they have been experiencing conflict with the famers. This alone has affected both of them in facing their economic activities, and that has affected food sufficiency and beef supply in their markets. In the same vein, 88 farmers put

at (96.7%) attested the fact that so many farmers were killed as a result of the farmer's herder's conflict which reduces the workforce in the agricultural sector and invariably lead to food insecurity in the State. Also, 89 farmers put at (97.8%) and 65 herders stand at (79%) attested that the crises between the farmers and herders led to low production and shortage of food in the state and the whole country at large.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion drawn from the findings shows that, farmers herders' conflict is a strong threat to food security in Benue State with serious implications of food insufficiency leading to abject hunger and starvation in the state.

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