

HERDSMEN AND CONFLICT IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA: A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to put in perspective some current issues regarding the farmers/herdsmen conflict such as decimation of lives and properties, the issues of Government's attitude towards the crises etc. Some clarifications on the concepts of restructuring, as well as the concept of herdsmen as it applies to specific groups rather than generalizations we are given. The paper zooms in on whether or not restructuring-especially as it will impact on security and curb the conflict- is a plausible way out given the claims that the conflicts have political, economic, religious and ethnic undertones and claims towards it. Being descriptive in nature, this research has drawn most contemporary documents in the field of politics both local and international communities and used secondary data as its main source. For the purpose of this study, the conflict theory is adopted to explain herders-farmers conflicts in South-west Nigeria. The submissions and review for restructuring was given. The paper concludes with recommendations of what type of restructuring is needed, where necessary.

KEYWORDS: Crop-farmers, Herdsmen, Conflict, Tribal Conflict, Restructuring

INTRODUCTION

The conflict between farmers and herders is one of the social problems that bestow serious security challenges with severe threat to entrepreneurship practice and the unity of the Nigerian State, particularly in Southwestern states. Since the outbreak of farmers and herders' deadly clashes, the relationship that had existed with cordiality and report seems to be suffering with untold setback with several attending apprehensions that beckons for address. Therefore, the unity of the South Western states can only be enjoyed by all when the peaceful coexistence of the sub regions and their means of livelihood, upkeep and sustainability become a success with the presence and existence of reasonable security of lives and property. This is the phenomenological expectation of every sound -minded citizens of South Western Nigeria (Mufutau, Brimah, and Shittu, 2020).

In the Nigerian State, burgeoning security challenges in the six geopolitical zones of the country have in time past and in recent years left tens of thousands of unarmed civilians dead and property worth millions of naira, destroyed. Beginning from 2009, North East Nigeria has been the epicenter of Boko Haram insurgency and the attendant humanitarian crisis in the region. In North Central, herders and farmers clash were occasionally reported in Benue and Plateau State. North West of the country is not any better, as armed banditry is well pronounced in Zamfara State while infrequent clashes with tribal and religious coloration, do rear its ugly head in Kaduna State where the Muslims are the majority in Northern Kaduna and in Southern Kaduna, a preponderant Christian population. In the oil-rich South South region, militancy is still very much alive, while kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery, secessionist movement, and farmer-herdsmen clash are common incidents in South East Nigeria (Olubade and Ogunnoiki, 2020).

In the face of the abovementioned insecurity situations in parts of the country, and kidnappings, armed robbery, farmers-herders clash, and ritual killings in the South West region, is the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) which is underfunded, understaffed and overstretched in the discharge of their core mandate of maintaining law and order, and

protecting lives and property. Thus, state governors and groups within the Nigerian Federation began to float regional security initiatives to complement the efforts of the police and other conventional security agencies (Olubade and Ogunnoiki, 2020). The violent conflicts since 2000 caused thousands of deaths, the total number of casualties is unknown as often many bodies were not found in bushes after violent clashes. According to George A. Genyi (2007), herdsmen started their attacks on villages with weapons in the beginning of 2000s. This is also one of the main reasons that the traditional negotiations mechanism would not work anymore. The armed attacks leave no room for peaceful talks and agreements (Genyi, 2017) cited in (Gülşah, 2019).

Amnesty International researched the situation in Nigeria and created an extensive report with the information they have collected directly from the field. The interviews that the Amnesty have conducted with the victims of the attacks reveal the level of escalation in violent conflict. The farmer communities started retaliatory attacks against herdsmen as well. Both sides suffer from the attacks and the government response is just not enough. The report states: “Amnesty International has documented 312 incidents of attacks and reprisal attacks in 22 states and Abuja between January 2016 and October 2018. As a result of these attacks Amnesty International estimates that at least 3,641 people may have been killed, 406 injured, 5,000 houses burnt down and 182,530 people displaced.” (Amnesty International, 2018) cited in (Gülşah, 2019: 14) The conflict between herders and farmers killed more people than the attacks of the terrorist group Boko Haram in recent years (International Crisis Group, 2017 cited in (Gülşah, 2019). Also, 57% of people died in year 2018 in clashes between January 2016 and October 2018, 21% in 2017 and 22 % in 2016 (Amnesty International, 2018 cited (Gülşah, 2019). A very striking side of this conflict is several witnesses reported in the interviews that some attacks were heard by villagers a few hours or days before they happened, and villagers called the security forces and asked for help. However, the police and military forces did not prevent the attacks. The reluctance and inefficiency of the state mechanism to prevent and step in on time caused the deadly clashes. The common impunity is also among

the factors that encourages the attackers (Amnesty International, 2018). The conflict only lost some density in 2012 thanks to the peace initiatives and then efforts of military observations, however, the attempts were not sustainable and the conflict arose again (Genyi, 2017 cited in (Gülşah, 2019: 15).

Conceptual Analysis

Conflict Theory

The contemporary society is characterized by different schools of thought, each analyzing social phenomenon from its own orientation. For the purpose of this study, the conflict theory is adopted to explain herders-farmers conflicts in South-west Nigeria. In its general application, the word or term conflict connotes view of difference and disagreement, strife and struggle. In essence, conflict theory was derived from the ideas of Karl Marx (1818-1883) the great German sociologist, theorist and political activist who believed that society is a dynamic entity constantly undergoing change driven by inter- conflicting principles and phenomena. According to Marx, men, in the social production of their existence, inevitably enter into definite relations which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production the totality of which constitutes the economic structure of society. The fact that the dominant or ruling class (the bourgeoisie) controls the social relations of production, the dominant ideology in capitalist society is that of the ruling class. Ideology and social institutions, in turn, serve to reproduce and perpetuate the economic class structure. According to Marx, the real foundation upon which the superstructure of social, political and intellectual consciousness was built, has been the exploitative economic arrangements of capitalism. Marx believes that any social setting based on exploitative economic arrangement generated within it the seed of its own destruction (Marx, 1971).

In general, conflict perspective view Society as made up of individuals competing for limited resources. Competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships. Competition, rather than consensus, is characteristic of human relationships. Broader social

structures and organizations reflect the competition for resources and the inherent inequality competition entails, some people and organizations have more resources (i.e., power and influence), and use those resources to maintain their positions of power in the society (Marx, 1971), in conflict over resources, and that conflict drives social change. For example, conflict theorists might explain the civil rights movements of the 1960s by studying how activists challenged the racially unequal distribution of political power and economic resources. As in this example, conflict theorists generally see social change as abrupt, even revolutionary, rather than incremental. In the conflict perspective, change comes about through conflict between competing interests, not consensus or adaptation. Conflict theory, therefore, gives sociologists a framework for explaining social change. All conflicts share common qualities. The first is that there is a kind of contact between the parties that are involved, secondly, the parties in conflict perceive conflicting views and finally, one of the parties always wants to redress existing contradictions (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009) cited in (Mufutau, Brimah, and Shittu, 2020).

Tribal Conflict is a social division of people, especially of the preliterate people defined in terms of common descent, territory, culture, and so on. It refers to a group or groups who are divided or conflicted as a result of tribal, cultural, or sentiments brought about by differences in descent.

Crop-Farmers are farmers and managers responsible for all steps of plant growth, which include planting, fertilizing, watering and harvesting crops. These farmers can grow grain, fruits, vegetables and other crops. (<https://www.raiseme/career/management>).

Herdsmen/Herders. Herdsmen or pastoralists are nomadic or semi-nomadic people by nature. They are people whose primary occupation is raising livestock in Nigeria (Africa) and it is prevalent among a particular tribe called the “Fulani”.

Restructuring. According to Investopedia, restructuring is a type of corporate action taken that involves significantly modifying the debt, operations or structure of a company as a way of limiting financial harm and improving the business. (<https://www.investopedia.com>).

An Overview of the Insecurity Situation in South West Nigeria

The South West region of Nigeria comprises of six states – Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo State which are geographically contiguous and share similar culture, beliefs, values and language. From 2015 to date, the insecurity in South West Nigeria has gone from bad to worse. Operating on several major highways in the region are suspected herdsmen, armed robbers, kidnappers and ritualists. The Akure-Owo-Oba Akoko-Akungba, Ondo-Ore, Ilesha-Oshogbo, IpeleIdo Ani, Ife-Ibadan, Ilaro-Owode-Idi-Iroko, Ijebu Igbo-Oru-Awa, Abeokuta-Lagos roads to mention a few have become unsafe for commuters to ply on owing to the rising criminal activities that take place there on a regular basis (Amaize et al., 2019) cited in (Olubade and Ogunnoiki, 2020). On Monday, 21st of September, 2015, Chief Olu Falae, a former Finance Minister and presidential aspirant, farmland in Ilado village, Akure, Ondo State, was not only attacked but he was abducted, on his 77th birthday.

Many of his workers including the farm manager were macheted while others were reportedly wounded and admitted in different hospitals (Johnson, 2015) cited in (Olubade and Ogunnoiki, 2020). He (Chief Falae) was released three days after a 5-million-naira ransom was paid (Johnson, 2017a). Again, his farm was attacked in April 2016. This time around, his security guard, Ayodele Ige, was killed in the process (Baiyewu and Akinloye, 2016). It was not until April 2017, that the Ondo State High Court sentenced seven of the apprehended herdsmen who abducted the elder statesman in 2015, to life imprisonment (Johnson, 2017a) cited in (Olubade and Ogunnoiki, 2020) Ningxin, (2018) cited in Mufutau, Brimah and Shittu (2020, 75), assessed the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria and gave explanations for the causes of the conflict by using the Wehr's Conflict Model, and provided alternative resolutions for sustainable development. According to Popoola, (2019) cited in Mufutau, Brimah and Shittu (2020, 75), viewed that "the strength of a tendency to act in a certain way depends on the strength of expectancy that the act will be followed by a given consequence or output", meaning that if the issue of the factors that caused conflicts between farmers and herders was addressed previously might have resolute the conflicts.

Ningxin, (2018) cited in Mufutau, Brimah and Shittu (2020, 75), in his paper and explained that herders-farmer conflict was caused by different factors, such as ideological, history and cultural influences. For example, the usages of land and water resources caused enormous pressure, prior to existence of farmers and herders in South western Nigeria, in the far north, the impact of desertification has resulted in deforestation and migration of herders. A major stakeholder in this effort, the umbrella body in the cattle rearing business, the Mayetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), agreed that the effect of climate change and desertification was a major causal factor leading to trans-human movement from Northern part to the South annually Ugwumba,(2018) cited in Mufutau, Brimah and Shittu (2020, 75), asserted. For instance, Christopher, (2018) cited in Mufutau, Brimah and Shittu (2020, 75), observes that in January 2013, it was reported that herders attacked some villages, killed 10 people, and displacing over 4000 people, therefore, researcher considered the under-listed causative factors that led to farmers and herders' conflict in Ondo and Oyo state, South Western Nigeria. The above explanation has serious negative effect on income generation and employment creation among people in selected state.

Causes of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

Sa'adu, (2016) outlined seven likely causes of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria as identified below;

- i. The fight for the capacity of land and the wealth accessible.
- ii. Disagreement over leadership of definite customary rulers and chiefs, where a King of one ethnic or Sub-ethnic group processes power over people owned to another ethnic group.
- iii. Establishment of new local government councils and the site of their headquarters
- iv. Economic wealth and politically insufficient entrance from subdivisions, competition or ethnic and individual.
- v. The small and large social formations in Nigeria.
- vi. Population increases and economic expansion, propensity to maintain ethnic leap, profession of a kind of clashes famous within the users of land wealth.

- vii. The awareness or over look of cultural symbol and the contamination of cultural application.
- viii. A major dominant and perhaps most powerful cause of conflict is poverty, which is manifested in unemployment and deterioration of infrastructure. Both unemployment and deterioration of infrastructure provide the bedrock for ethnic conflicts Sa'adu, (2016) cited (Osakwe, 2017).

The Issue of a framework that 'seemingly' encourage and favour one of the conflicting parties over the other is also relevant. Another issue is the proposal and policy framework underway to establish grazing fields for the herdsmen. The purpose of which is to prevent clashes between the herdsmen and farmers and possibly, serve as a lasting solution. Two of these are the concept of Grazing reserves and the 'Ruga' Settlement (Aluwong and Alhamdu, 2019):

a. **Grazing Reserves:** The concept of grazing reserves has been endorsed both by the regime of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. These grazing reserves were to serve as short and mid-term plans until ranching is adopted. However, this move has been perceived as a tacit endorsement favoured towards the herders especially by the central and Southern states. However, establishing grazing reserves in consenting states will improve livestock production and management as well as minimize contacts and friction between herders and farmers.

b. **The RUGA Settlement:** In addition, the issue of the RUGA settlement policy recently surfaced and sparked controversy alongside. The Ruga Settlement is a proposed rural settlement scheme of federal government, intended to provide a designated place with basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, road networks, veterinary clinics, markets among others. The aim is to curb the incessant clashes between herdsmen and host communities. It was initiated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in preference for the National Economic Council (NEC)'s National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). The stiff resistance this policy met by its opponents was fueled by at least, the following factors:

a. Firstly, the term 'Ruga' is a tribal word, making it unsuitable for a national ranching policy.

b. Secondly, the policy was conceived and its legal framework drawn up in secrecy, which further aroused suspicions of ethno-regional groups already agitated by perceived imperialist inclinations.

c. Thirdly, since the cattle business is currently dominated by an ethnic group, those opposed to the Ruga settlement scheme naturally see it as nothing but a disguised attempt at expansionism.

d. This perception of expansionism has been reinforced by the fact that the President is alleged to be of the same ethnic group.

e. Also, the Ruga policy and the intense opposition to it is partly a function of the crisis of federalism in Nigeria. There is no reason why it should be a federal government project.

The state governments who legally control all the land within their jurisdiction should have been left alone to enact ranching laws if they so desire as a state like Benue has done (Ayobolu, 2019).

Implication of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict in South West Nigeria

Both farmers and herders involved in entrepreneurship practice and activities in Ondo and Oyo state, Western region and Nigeria at large. Factually, the two parties in conflict contribute significant percentage to the economic activities in the Nigerian states, but the hazardous conflict between the farmers and herders caused serious damages and continued destruction of lives and properties, a lot of economic activities were hindered. Tens of thousands of Nigerians also have been displaced. Women and girls were particularly affected, they experienced poverty and lack of access to resources, and their husbands were killed in series of violence between farmers and herders in the region. Violent conflicts between herders and farmers from Nigeria have escalated in recent years and swiftly spread to other parts of the country, which threatens the people's lives and the country's stability. According to Leme, (2017) cited in Mufutau, Brimah and Shittu (2020, p. 75), the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have resulted in a humanitarian crisis. Both groups are currently being provided with the basic necessities of life. However, the recurrent clashes pose hardship and jeopardizes

entrepreneurship practice (economic activities) in the region, particularly Ondo and Oyo state, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Protracted conflict between pastoralist herdsmen and sedentary farmers in Nigeria cost the country thousands of lives and incredible economic losses. The clashes between the groups do not stop, since the root causes are still there. The climate change which affects the whole world affects the Nigerian people badly as well and exacerbates the conflict. The different governance systems, which remained from colonial times, in the north and south started to create difficulties for the Nigerian state right after the independence. Political powers of local community leaders, religious leaders and power inequalities between northern and southern counties paved the way for an unstable and fragile state structure. An already existing problem, disagreements on sharing the land, got bigger by time under that ineffective state authority. It hinders the economic activities of the people and causes a lot of poverty among people in our dear country Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. There should be freedom of expression, especially with regards to issues of personal wellbeing. When there are conflicts in a particular area of the nation, the people involved in the conflicts should be allowed to come to a round table to discuss the issues before them. There should be a mediator that will mediate with understanding and neutrality in resolving the issues between the two parties involved. People should be ready to resolve conflicts, keeping in mind that peace is the only solution and as a result there must be give and take, because there is no win-win situation for a particular ethnic group.
- ii. Government should be responsible with the wealth of the nation, the manner by which the sharing of the resources of the country should be done fairly and transparently. Government should hold people responsible when there are conflicts, people who instigate the conflicts should be brought to justice irrespective of their social, religious

and traditional position the society. They should create an enabling environment for all the citizens of the country for people to operate properly with good code of conduct.

- iii. Nigeria should stop the practice of federalism and embrace confederation, which will give states and people the autonomy to rule and manage their resources competitively. Nigeria should decentralize the form of governance and allow people to govern themselves the way that will really help them to develop and actualize their full potential as a people. This will really solve the issue of poverty, under development, unemployment, ethnic conflicts and religious conflicts that lead to ethno-religious clashes.

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