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Interrogating the Nexus between Climate Change and Farmer-Herders Conflicts in Nigeria

Efetobor Stephanie Effeovottu and Chinonso Ihuoma

Abstract

The Nigerian society has witnessed chains of ferocious communal conflicts arising from the actions of the herdsmen and the farmers in several host communities where they move about with their cattle in their quest for water and greener pastures. The frosty relationship between these two groups of people have become the topic of most contemporary discourse especially due to its implications on peace, security and development and the environment in general especially in light of the era of climate variation. This chapter examines the nexus between climate change and conflict amongst farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. Adopting the historical research methods, the chapter draws its data largely from secondary sources such as books, journal articles and internet sources. The findings from the study reveal that climate change and its underlying implications are the root cause of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. It also shows that scarcity of resources has an unequal influence on those susceptible as the struggle for source of living and increasing food insecurity often fuels migration and inter-communal violence, which is further strengthened by the presence of a weak institutional mechanism to avert or resolve these conflicts. The paper concludes that climate change brings to the forefront other factors such as land pressure, poverty, weak governance structure, environmental degradation, ethnic marginalisation, all of which boils up till it escalates into full-blown conflicts. It recommends among other things, that government should put in place climate adaptation and mitigation mechanisms especially in northern Nigeria that is most likely to suffer the effects of climate change. Hence, the efforts towards a lasting peace in the region should not be seen solely as the responsibility of the government and civil societies or non-governmental organisations, rather the individuals also need to be involved in a collective peace restoration action.

Key Words: Climate Change, Conflict, Farmers, Herdsmen, Development

Introduction

Climate change is a major issue of concern for both local and international institutions given its introduction of manifold challenges such as food and water scarcity, insecurity on livelihood, interruption on agricultural and energy structure, conflict and displacement (Peters, Mayhew, and Borodyna et al, 2019). Climate-induced challenges often drive high rates of migration, thereby mounting pressure on coastal and forage-rich areas, cities, and host communities, which may witness the possibility of intensified instability and social tensions. This was depicted by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2007, which identified food security, floods, desertification and heat-waves as top amongst the effects of climate change (IPCC, 2014).

Conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have become a recurring decimal in contemporary West African and Nigerian society (Tonah, 2006; McGregor, 2014). While these conflicts are not unusual or strange, dating as far back as the pre-colonial period, these conflicts have taken a new and more worrisome dimension. Evidence is seen in the use of armed weapons and ammunitions such as AK47 by the Fulani herdsmen who were previously known for the use of sticks. This has led to what Dembele (2015) tagged ethnic cleansing which has resulted to a thousand deaths, many thousands of people evicted and many properties destroyed. In the last two decades, conflicts between herdsmen from northern Nigeria and

farmers in the north-central and southern region over issues of resource scarcity have escalated and have become worrisome especially as it often brings with it massive death, devastation, and misery; thereby threatening the security, peace, and stability of Nigeria and making it difficult for development to occur. With an estimation of over 3000 deaths between 2016 and 2018, clashes between these two groups are becoming as precarious as and even more dangerous than the Boko Haram whose activities are largely restricted to the North-eastern part of Nigeria (Ajibo, Onuoha, and Obi-Keguna et.al, 2018). In spite of the explosive nature of these attacks, efforts by the Nigerian government to respond to these attacks have proved ineffective especially as the root causes of these attacks still remain largely shroud in mystery.

The essence of this chapter is to establish a nexus between climate change and conflict in Nigeria using the frequency of violent conflicts between herdsmen and farmers as a case study. The chapter offers an understanding of the role of climate change in most of the conflicts involving herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria.

The Relationship between Climate Change and Conflict

Climate change has become one of the major issues that have gained vigorous scholarly discourse and arguments in contemporary times. While much is known about its causes,

consequences, and implications, what is virtually unknown and has been an issue of debate among scholars and policymakers is its propensity to lead to violent conflict. There is no single universal definition on the conceptualisation of the term “conflict”. Chaplin (1979) termed conflict as the concurrent manifestation of two or more equally incompatible instincts or desires. According to Ekong (2003), a conflict is a form of social interaction whereby actors try to eliminate or weaken their competitors in their bid to obtain scarce rewards. Francis (2006) defined conflict as the quest of incompatible goals and interests by a diverse group of people. Gyong (2007) asserts that conflict entails a struggle for supremacy or control of one person or group by another person or group in such a way as to overpower or even eradicate the opponent. Despite the different conceptualisation of conflict, some common characteristics of these differing viewpoints are the fact that conflict is an inherent, permanent and inevitable part of human social existence and is bound to occur whenever and wherever there are human interactions. This is largely due to the fact that in a bid to pursue their own security and human needs, individuals often have different opinions and beliefs which may sometimes clash with the beliefs and opinions of others.

The connection between climate change and conflicts has created intense debates and arguments among scholars. While some scholars are of the view that there is a link between

climate change and conflict, other scholars believe that scientific research on the relationship between climate change and conflicts have proved to be inconclusive. There is also the belief that there are other socio-political factors that have a more direct impact on conflicts and so it will be too deterministic to link climate change to an increase in violent conflict. In a bid to ascertain the linkage between climate change and conflict, scholars are usually faced with the task of deciding whether the conflict is as a result of the effect of climate variability or whether there are other variables such as historical neglect or continuing war that helps to escalate the effect of climate change.

Since the end of the cold war, scholars have developed theoretical frameworks such as “environmental security”, “environmental conflicts” and “eco-violence” or “ecoviolence” to explain the relationship between climate change and violent conflicts, arguing that environmental scarcity, desertification and demographic changes play a role in breeding violent conflicts (Bassett, 1986; Bennett, 1991; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Cohen, 2009). The environmental security/scarcity theory, of which Homer-Dixon is one of the earliest proponents, uses an environmental lens in debating the effects of climate change on conflict. According to the theory of environmental security, the obliteration of natural habitats, reduction of water resources and land, amongst other environmental-related deprivation act as

foundations of insufficiency and water and food insecurity. According to Homer-Dixon (1999), severe environmental scarcity can limit indigenous food production, exacerbate the poverty of marginalised groups, spur enormous migrations, and enhance the riches of the elites who seize resources, worsen divisions among social groups and challenges the capacity of a state to govern its people. According to him, the consequences of environmental scarcity are long-lasting and could lead to violence especially when people viciously act on their grievances (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Scholars like de Soysa (2002) however contended that there is miniature or no support for ecoviolence theories.

Farmers and Herders Conflicts in Nigeria; A Historical Analysis

Conflicts between farmers and herders are not a new phenomenon and neither are they alien to the Nigerian society. Sometimes, these conflicts are seen as inter-religious conflict (Christian Today, 12 March 2019, Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2012), inter-communal conflict (Dembele, 2015) or ethnoreligious conflicts, (usually between the Muslim Fulani [who are regarded as settlers], and other predominantly Christian indigenous ethnic groups in the community). The Nomadic Fulani herders (usually Muslims) often migrate in search of greener pastures into non-Muslim communities and in most cases create a settlement. Most of these communities where they settle are predominantly agrarian (crop

farmers) communities. These indigenes already have an established means of livelihood which is often altered by the herders' activities.

According to Aluko (2017), the Fulani, also known as Fulbe are people of unclear ancestries but are dominant in the West African region especially in Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Cameroon, and Niger. The Fulani are mainly a pastoral people, whose life and organisation is centred on the needs of their herds. These Fulani pastoralists have a long history of confinement to the northern part of Nigeria, towards the edge of the desert. However, from the 20th century onwards, Fulani herders/pastoralists began to migrate southwards; this brought them into contact with farmers and their different modes of production systems (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012). While interactions between the Fulani pastoralists and farmers were not always volatile, increased competition in recent times over scarce natural resources especially grazing lands for the cattle have intensified conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers.

The origin of conflict in most of these communities is over the 'material' needed for 'existence'. The struggle between the two groups is because each is struggling to survive or exist and each group depends on the same material called the 'green of the land' (WEP, 2012). Consequently, there have been features of clash of interests in the north-central region of Nigeria as a result of the presence of the herdsmen and these clashes have been bloody

and also resulting in the destruction of properties. The herders are often of the opinion that their traditional nomadic routes in their host communities are being converted for agricultural purposes; while the farmers lament that their farmlands are being destroyed by the activities of the herdsmen. This is because of the type of grass and the soil type that encourages and supports vegetation cover, creates an enabling environment suitable for the herdsmen to desire to pasture in this valley. The interrelatedness of these two agricultural sectors made it necessary for them to mingle with one another and in such situations, conflicts are bound to occur. Blench (2003) traced the roots of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen to the 20th century and stated that these conflicts were as a result of two key events: an upsurge in the number of herders due to the introduction of modern-day veterinary services and the growing population pressure which also led to an increase in farming activities. Also, according to Blench (2010), the intensification of conflicts between herdsmen and agriculturalists were as a result of an increase in agricultural activities especially in riverine areas, the lessening significance of dairy production in Nigeria due to importation, the fall of the traditional system of cattle rearing and the advent of disease and migration. Kegnku, Alom, and Fanafa (2019) attributed the cause of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen to resource control especially over farming and grazing land; encroachment and

destruction of farming land by herdsmen due to the migration of these Fulani pastoralists to the middle belt and other regions in Nigeria in search of greener pasture for their livestock as a result of drought and the desertification of grazing lands in northern Nigeria. The herdsmen on their own part accuse the farmers of blocking their well-established grazing routes and of stealing, poisoning and stealing their cattle (Kegnku, Alom and Fanafa, 2019).

This heated misunderstanding between the farmers and herders in north-central Nigeria was preminent during the green revolution that swept Nigeria around the 1980s, which necessitated the need to go back to agriculture. The Fulani Herdsmen needed the green grass for pasturing the cattle, this green grass was on land; while farmers needed the land containing the green grass. This period was when the demand on the rich alluvial soils of the flood plains was increasing making it difficult for the mutual coexistence which had existed to continue (WEP, 2012). The outcome of this development was that since farmlands are greenish, they usually attract cattle and the herdsmen in most cases encourage the influx of cattle into farmlands, thereby leading to the destruction of farm products.

There are accounts of how the cattle rearing Fulani lived and coexisted with the indigenes of north-central Nigeria (the Tiv farmers especially in these three districts of TongovSengev and Tyoughatee). A study showed that indigenes of Benue state gave their lands freely to migrant

herdsmen. This was reflected in a report of the district Head of Sengeev who had this to say:

Our Father gave land to the Fulanis who stayed in our district, their wives used our grinding stones to grind guinea corn and interacted with us freely. The relationship was so cordial that when that Fulani man gave birth to his son he named him after our Father” (WEP, 2012).

Conversely, the situation in contemporary times is extremely different as the relationship between farmers and herders in north-central Nigeria has taken a new and dangerous dimension. Characterised by violent conflict and the use of armed ammunitions like AK-47 and other deadly weapons of armed destruction, many communities in the north-central region has become highly volatile. Between 2004 and 2018, over 3000 people were killed as a result of violent conflicts between herdsmen and various host communities (Keghku, Alom, and Fanafa, 2019, WEP, 2012). The vicious and brutal nature of these attacks have made the Fulani herdsmen/pastoralists to be tagged by the 2015 Global Terrorism Index as the fourth most deadly terrorist group in the world after Taliban, ISIL, and Boko Haram (Keghku, Alom, and Fanafa, 2019).

Clashes between farmers and herders have manifested as inter-religious conflict, inter-

communal conflict or ethno-religious conflicts (though some of them have political underpins), and is still a serious threat to security in north-central. Most of the clashes in Plateau State, for example, have been portrayed as being between Christian and Muslim communities, but have often assumed an ethnic dimension (Omotosho, 2014). In Plateau state, the predominantly Christian Tarok farmers consider the mostly Muslim Hausa cattle herders as outsiders and accuse them of stealing land and trying to usurp political power (Ahmed, 2007). In Benue state, there have been incessant clashes between Fulani Pastoralist and Tiv Farmers in Benue State (WEP, 2012).

Several attempts have been made by the Nigerian government to try and settle the disputes and conflicts between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian Grazing Reserve Act of 1964 was passed as an early effort to improve Fulani access to grazing land for their cattle and to address prevailing conflicts between farming and grazing communities at the time. It was followed by the National Agricultural Policy of 1988 which affirmed that a minimum of 10% of the national territory would be allotted for the development of grazing reserves in an effort to safeguard pastoralism. In 1989, the federal government of Nigeria, under Decree 41 established the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) as a way of economically and socially integrating nomadic pastoralists into domestic life (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin,

2018). Between 2002 and 2010, the federal government selected four commissions to examine the ferocious clashes, largely between herdsmen and farmers in northern Nigeria. In 2013, the federal government initiated the Great Green Wall Programme to address issues of land degradation and desertification and to support communities towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. Also, the Federal Government's Comprehensive Livestock Development Plan was formulated in 2015 by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to address the persistent clashes between herdsmen and farmers across the country and to also develop cattle routes and grazing reserves (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). Furthermore, in a bid to address and settle the conflict between herdsmen and farmers, the federal government lawmakers in 2016 proposed to introduce a National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) bill which was meant to provide for the establishment, preservation and control of the national grazing reserve commission. If enacted, the bill permits the commission to take away any land it considers fit for the purpose of grazing reserve or stock routes (Aluko, 2017). Following this announcement, the Pan-Yoruba socio-political group (Afenifere) rejected the bill, describing it as offensive, anti-people and a violation of the Land Use Act and traditional means of landholding (Aluko, 2017). In 2019, the federal government proposed the establishment of a Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) in all the states in

Nigeria in a bid to curb open grazing of animals that continually pose security threats to farmers and herdsmen. This decision was however rejected by most states in Nigeria and was regarded as a ploy by the president to support his Fulani and Muslim brothers because the herdsmen are mainly Fulani and Muslim while the farmers are mostly from the Christian population. The federal government have also deployed security agencies to respond to these recurrent farmer-herdsmen conflict (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). Yet, these efforts by the federal government have failed to completely address the issues causing conflicts between these two groups of people thus conflicts between these groups have become a continual affair and practice.

Climate Change and Farmer/Herdsman Conflicts in Nigeria: Any Connection?

Climate is one of the most imperative aspects of man's natural environs (Aluko, 2006). This, therefore, means that any alteration in climatic conditions will have repercussions on the way man intermingles with other persons and with his environment. Climate change is one of the major challenges facing countries all over the world. Unfortunately, as a part and parcel of the world, Nigeria is not immune to the negative implications of climate variability. According to Parenti (2011), over-dependence on land and subsistence farming as a source of its sustenance has made most parts of Saharan Africa, including Nigeria susceptible to climate changeability which is demonstrated in diverse

ways across the continent. Also, anthropogenic climate variation in Nigeria has upset the usual functioning of the environment, affecting how humans access certain resources that are required for their survival. Some of the consequences of climate change vulnerabilities include erratic weather seasons, droughts and famine and, in some areas like northern Nigeria with its arid land, protracted dry spells follow, leading to environmental degradation, migration, and food shortage, natural resource scarcity, etc (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012).

Efforts by researchers to discover the link between climate change and the farmers and herdsmen clashes have been mainly inconclusive, thus generating three outcomes: rejection, assertions, and correlations (Adigun, 2019). This paper however posits that there is a connection between climate change and conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria, identifying evidence that supports the claim. Climate change is one of the main reasons for conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. Almost all of the issues leading to conflicts are tied to natural resource scarcity resulting from the desertification of the northern result due to climate variation. Aluko and Sayuti (2016) posit that the migration of the Fulani herdsmen to the south in search of grazing land is largely as a result of the impact of climate change on their previously established grazing routes. This is because when the weather condition of a place is no longer favourable for habitation, dwellers will be

forced to move to other areas in search of greener pastures. This view is supported by Dembele (2015) who posits that the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, in addition to the issues of contestation over environmental resources in the context of environmental degradation, had to migrate to other parts of the country.

Nte (2016) asserts that most Nigerian communities are dependent on natural resources for their survival and wellbeing and so when climate change occurs, it usually has negative implications on land causing water-related hazards, food scarcity and energy reduction thereby affecting their sources of livelihood. The resultant effect of this change is that they will be forced to migrate into areas that can offer them sustenance. In the case of the Fulani herdsmen who are completely reliant on their natural environment, desert encroachment in the Sahel region due to climate change has forced them to move into other regions in search for greener pasture which has often resulted in clashes with the host communities. Additionally, ecological and demographic pressure caused by climate change also helps to exacerbate livelihood constraints and struggles among individuals and groups, which may accelerate into full-scale violence or lead to the intensification of existing conflicts (Akinyemi and Olaniyan, 2017). The International Crisis Group Report (2017) attributes the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria to unfavourable climatic condition. According to their report,

desertification and drought have inflicted havoc on human livelihood in the northern region, pushing nomadic herders to migrate southwards in search for greener pastures. Due to climate change, herders' migration to the south has become more frequent and permanent, thereby provoking clash on land resources exploitation between herders and farmers in the north-central and southern zones (Idakwoji, Ojomah, Usman and Orokpo, 2018).

In other words, while climate change does not directly result in violent conflicts, in countries like Nigeria that lack proper political and economic governance and the structure to effectively respond to the outcome of climate change, violent conflicts are bound to occur as a social response to climate change consequences such as the scarcity of natural resources (Detges, 2017). Cattle theft/rustling, crop damage, attacks on cattle has become common conflict triggers between these two groups, leading to revenge attacks and killings, all of which pose a great threat to security.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Human migration is not a new phenomenon as it is a regular occurrence among human beings. The movement of people from one place to another with the intentions of a permanent or temporary settlement at a new location, has been the major survival tactics exhibited by humans. Hence, people move from one geographic region to another in search of greener pasture or in search of better security

from harsh living conditions. Often, migration takes the form of invasion, conquest, or immigration/settlement, and the herders' migration has been argued to be an invasive migration given the tension and perceived motives seen in the fears of the farmers. However, many of the migrants (herders) have actually displayed settlement motives, without any form of aggressive appropriation of host communities' resources. Nevertheless, the fact still remains that the immigration of herders into other communities and the trend of the subsequent engagements of most of them (herders) with their host communities have posed serious security challenges in Nigeria leading to a series of blood baths and the destruction of properties. This situation has created a huge number of refugees (in neighbouring countries) and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in affected communities, with a good number of them who are hopeless when it comes to having a place (home) to go back to. This large and ever-increasing number of IDPs has presented Nigeria with a very intense socio-economic and security challenge across the middle belt region. Conflicts and clashes between Nigeria's Fulani pastoralist and settled indigenous farmers have roots in history but has deepened in recent years, with deteriorating natural resources and land availability contributing significantly to the continuing, mounting conflict and insecurity in the country. The proposition of this paper is that climate change intensifies the

probability of the occurrence of violent conflicts in regions and countries such as Nigeria with a history of grievance/marginalisation, government neglects and inadequate climate adaptation structures as against countries with effective government structure and climate adaptation mechanisms. The paper posits that the linkage between climate change and conflict is that it brings to the forefront other factors such as land pressure, poverty, weak governance structure, environmental degradation, ethnic marginalisation, all of which boils up till it escalates into full-blown conflicts.

The impact of climate change is experienced worldwide with profound political, socio-economic, and environmental consequences. This is particularly so for countries like Nigeria with a weak climate change mitigation mechanism. Climate change has led to an alteration in migration patterns as people are forced to move to escape desertification and in search of livelihood, greener pastures, and better opportunities. As a result of forced and involuntary climate-induced migration and relocation, herdsmen often clash with farmers and landowners in various parts of Nigeria, with the outcome posing a serious threat to the peace, security, and development of the nation. Conflicts between these herdsmen and farmers usually result in deaths and bring to the forefront issues and questions relating to land ownership, and ethnic, tribal, and religious sentiments especially as the protagonists of these conflicts are from two different ethnic and

religious affiliation. Newspaper headlines are filled with stories of immense killings rising from the incessant conflicts between herdsmen/farmers across various parts of Nigeria. These conflicts often act as an impediment to Nigeria's attempt at national integration and threaten the continuous survival as a corporate and sovereign state.

The efforts towards restoring peace between farmers and herdsmen in conflicting communities need to be intensified and rigorously pursued. Individuals need to be transformed for measurable peace to be obtained therein. Conflict management and conflict resolution efforts have been employed by the government, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). However, conflict transformation approach is necessary at this point which will employ the approaches of conflict resolution and conflict management while working on the individuals to transform their mind-set towards conflict. Hence, when the individuals are fully transformed, the long over-due conflict will no longer be a strong nut to crack as the conflicting parties will become willing to negotiate and co-exist peacefully.

In light of the discussion and findings of the study and to alleviate some of the negative effect of climate change on conflict especially between farmers and herdsmen, the chapter makes the following recommendations:

- The issue of conflict and climate change should be foremost in the agenda of the Nigerian government. The government

should develop and enunciate functional policies that would effectively address issues relating to climate change and could result in the proper management of scarce resources like land and water especially in the Northern region which is more prone to the outcome of climate change. There should also be effective government legislation to guide the relationship and activities of the farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria.

- Since climate change is an issue that is unlikely to disappear from the Nigerian landscape, the paper recommends that the government should put in place climate adaptation and mitigation mechanisms especially in northern Nigeria that support more than half of the nation's food crops and is also the region that is most likely to suffer the effects of climate change.
- The government should improve their knowledge on how climate change can aid in intensifying conflicts and generate policy through dialogue especially on how to manage migration. Furthermore, climatologic research should be improved upon to fight against the encroachment of the desert which in the long run will help to reduce conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers.

- Resolving conflicts and the challenges of climate change should not be seen solely as the responsibility of the federal or state government. Non-governmental organisations and other members of the civil society should include adaptation to climate change in their peacebuilding and development strategies.
- The Nigerian government should establish more cattle grazing reserves and ban open grazing. The government should learn from countries like South Africa, Brazil and other developed countries where cattle are domesticated. In these countries, there exist ranches where cattle and other animals are reared. Thus, people involved in animal husbandry don't need to travel miles in search of grazing land for their animals. If a responsive-grazing reserve policy can be made which frowns against moving cattle around the streets or into the farms, farmer-herder conflicts can be curtailed. Herdsmen should be enlightened on the modern methods of rearing cattle particularly in accordance to the global practices.
- One of the push factors that facilitate the migration of Fulani herdsmen to the south is the search for water because the northern part of the country is faced with the challenge of adequate water supply. If the Nigerian government can

construct more dams in far north especially cattle-producing states, the degree of migration would be reduced.

- Government should take solid measures to check the proliferation or influx of pastoralists or herdsmen from other neighbouring countries.
- Government, CSOs, and NGOs need to employ conflict transformation approach. This is a new angle in peace and conflict studies that transcends the management and resolution of conflicts. If efforts are made at engaging with and transforming the relationships and interests of the conflicting groups, and amending laws where necessary to correct unforeseen anomalies, the degree of conflicts between farmers and herders will be reduced. Hence, by transforming the relationships that sustain violence, the future relationship between conflicting can be easily ameliorated.

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