

DESERTIFICATION IS A MAJOR CAUSE OF HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT:

While previous studies has focused on how political and economic factors fuel herder-farmer conflicts, there little knowledge on how desertification induced migration amidst ungoverned spaces affect herder farmer conflicts in Nigeria. This paper looked at the impact of desertification and strategies adopted to combat herder's farmer's conflicts. The paper concluded that there is need for herders to focus on sustainability in cattle keeping and agricultural production.

Keywords: Herder; farmer; conflict; desertification

INTRODUCTION:

Nigeria has been contending with various security challenges, the major among them include kidnapping, election violence, insurgency, and recently, the herders-farmers conflicts. The Nasarawa, Plateau, and the central states of Benue have experienced conflicts that resulted in thousands of displacements and deaths due to clashes between the local farmers and pastoralists in various communities. The clashes between farmers and nomadic herders from the sedentary agrarian communities in the southern and central zones and northern Nigeria have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the stability

and security of the country (Edward & Olaniyan, 2017). These conflicts are becoming potentially critical with an approximated death toll of about 2,500 people in 2016.

The struggle for scarce resources and grazing land have over the years caused growing and perennial conflict in regards to geographic, intensity, and frequency scope. The major factors contributing to the conflicts in Nigeria are the effects of demographic and environmental forces, particularly desertification caused by population explosion and climate change (Girei, Ugwuanyi, & Turai, 2019). This research assesses the desertification as the major cause of conflicts between nomadic herders, and the farmers.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The major factor contributing to the escalating herders-farmers conflicts is desertification which is caused by the explosion of population and climate change. There is escalated conflict between farmers and herdsman due to the depletion of arable land for subsistence farmed greatly caused by the adverse effects of climate change, particularly along the Lake Chad Basin. These herders-farmers conflicts have resulted in the destruction of livestock and agriculture, forced displacement, deaths, and violent conflicts and confrontations. The constant attacks in Benue state have has a spill-over impact on the state of Nasarawa that is neighboring(Ningxin,

2019). The New Agency of Nigeria indicated that in 2018 January, over 18,000 internally displaced persons were in 11 camps in Nasarawa state.

ARABLE CROPPING SYSTEM IN NIGERIA:

75% of the present food is acquired from three arable crops (wheat, maize, and rice), five animal species, and 12 arable crops contributing to about 60% of the proteins and calories attained from plants. Globally, arable crops have significant dominance, playing an essential role in the socio-economic lives of both urban and rural people. Arable crops include various annual crops of key significance such as vegetables, groundnut yam, melon, soybeans, wheat, cowpea, cassava, millet, sorghum, rice, and maize (Idakwoji, Ojomah, & Usman, 2018). The cultivation of arable crops in Nigeria is beneficial for the prominent factor agricultural activities. The agricultural production in Nigeria is dominated by small-scale rural-based arable crop producers, which account for approximately 80% of the total requirement of food.

Research shows that the average size of farms in the production of arable crops is about 4.58 ha. It is reported that between 82.41 and 36.25 million hectares of arable crops are under cultivation depending on the season. The most widely cultivated arable crop in Nigeria is maize, estimated to be occupied between 7.5 and 6.6 million hectares depending on the season. Maize is cultivated in almost every part of Nigeria (Hyelladzira, 2016). The majority of arable crops depend on rainfall during farming.

CATTLE HERDING SYSTEM IN NIGERIA:

The herding of cattle in Nigeria is entirely dominated by the Fulani tribe. The maximum size of Fulani cattle is between 100 and 80. The number of female cattle is majorly preferred over male cattle. The ratio of male to female cattle generally is about 1:4, and this

ratio is maintained by the herders to ensure the balanced functional composition of species that is composed of stock beautifiers, carriers, breeders, milkers, and beefers (Iheoma & Nwakanma, 2018). The lyre-horned White Fulani cattle and slow-maturing Sokoto Red cow are the mainstays of the pastoral Fulani herds. The White Fulani cattle, has higher beef and milk yield through less hardy, compared with the Sokoto Red.

During the annual cycle of herding of the Fulani, the season of herding start with southward herd movement and along the valleys and rivers of the streams between October and December which mark the beginning of the dry season and the end of the rainy season. The harmattan season is between January and February which involves more frequent visits to stable sources of water, herd splitting, and longer hours of grazing (Gouvea, 2016). Therefore, it increases the movement of herds southward to avoid desertification promoted by the dry seasons between October and December.

The months between March and April are generally the toughest for the cattle and the herders as it is the hottest duration in the calendar of grazing. It is during this period that most herders herds their cattle only in the nights and evenings. From May to June marks the ending of dry seasons and it is during this period that vegetation starts growing. It is also this period that signifies the beginning of the movement of cattle herds northward (Verlumun & Fidelis, 2017). From this duration up to September, which is the peak of heavy rains, characterized by shorter grazing hours, more production of milk, and cattle breeding, and also herding coincides substantially with the production of arable crops. It is during this period that the herders-farmers conflicts become prevalent.

METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology adopted in this research paper is the use of a case study that involves the analysis of specific issues within the boundaries of a specific organization, situation, environment, or communities. There are three different categories of case studies that can be adopted for this research include exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. This case study methodology seeks to provide the major cause of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria(Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). 14 out of 17 local government areas related to herders-farmers conflicts are considered for this methodology, namely Yusufari, Yunusari, Tarmuwa, Jakusko, Gujba, Gaidam, Fune, Damaturu, Bursari, and Bade. The collected data were analyzed with a view of the causes, how desertification enhances the conflicts, effects on the economic development of the communities and, strategies adopted to resolve the conflicts.

RESULTS:

According to the responses attained from the case study research methodology, the major factor causing herders-farmers conflicts is the desertification which directly affects herders and farmers in the following ways:

Effects of Desertification	Effects on Farmers	Effects on Herders	Conflicts
Inadequate rains	Loss of agricultural produce	Migration of in search of water	Conflict on water sources
Drying of Lake Chad Basin	Failure of crops	Herding in farmlands	Cattle rustling and rural banditry
Inadequate fertile land	Alternative agricultural practices such as irrigation(Kolawole, Amoge, & Eunice, 2018)	They seek an alternative source of vegetation of their cattle through the planting of cattle food	Competition and confrontation(Bamidele, 2019)
Economic loss	Reduced sales of agricultural crops	Reduced sales of cattle and their products such as milk	Cattle rustling and rural banditry
The threat to food security	Reduced agricultural production as their source of income	Reduced number of cattle as their source of income	Cattle rustling and rural banditry

The effects of herders-farmers conflicts are shown in the table below:

Damages	Repercussions
Theft of cattle and goats	Loss of animals
over grazing and unsustainable land for farming	Loss of fertile lands
Destruction of crops	Loss of crop yields
Hardening of soils, rendering them infertile and difficult when tilling for crop growing	Increased labour in pre-farming activities
Destruction of reservoirs and source of drinkable water	Loss of water and resources
Pollution of drinkable water	Pollution of water
Physical fight with machets and sticks	Injuries, loss of life and property
Burning of rangelands, fadama and houses	damage to animal feed, soil fertility and property
Damages irrigational facilities	infrastructural damages

Table 2: Effects of herders-farmers conflicts(Babagana, Yakubu, & Harris, 2019)

DISCUSSION:

IMPACTS OF DESERTIFICATION:

Drought:

The environmental changes caused by the desertification are responsible for the movement of herders in search of fertile grazing lands and rivers for their cattle. Desertification has significantly affected human livelihoods and agriculture, forcing millions of pastoralists and others to migrate southward in search of productive land. Initially, migration was seasonal, with herders spending between December and May in the central zone before resuming the northward. Recently, the herders have chosen to permanently graze within the central of Nigeria triggering herders-farmers conflicts over water and land use with the growing populations of Nigeria of sedentary farmers of crops(Ndubuisi, 2018).

Loss of Grazing Reserves:

Desertification in Nigeria has also significantly resulted in the loss of 415 grazing reserves which were initially established by the northern regional government, it extended the semi-arid and arid regions in the north of Nigeria with low rainfall (600 and 900mm) starting from June and September and a long dry season starting from October and May. According to the National Meteorological

Agency, the annual rainy season decreased to an average of 120 days from the initial 150 days (Usman, 2013). Over the last six years, desertification approximately 350,000 km² of already arid areas changed to desert-like conditions of the pure desert, a trend that the progressing south at 0.6km per year rate.

Change in Framing and Pastoralism Practices:

The changes in farming and pastoral practices among both pastoralists and farmers as a result of mitigation strategies of desertification have also strained the herders-farmers relations. There are those who feel discouraged to follow the food-steps of their fathers in herding and opted to practice agricultural production. The current herders have also diverted to agricultural production especially to produce animal feeds due to insufficient grazing lands caused by desertification (Mohammed, Hamisu, & Faruq, 2017). The farmers have also made significant steps to improve the drylands which initially belonged to the herders through irrigation to boost their incomes during the dry seasons.

The changes in the income generation activities have further worsened the relationship between the herders and farmers since the young farmers feel that their economic activities are under threat due to stiff competition. The herders have progressively incorporated sedentary lifestyles especially the young boys and men who generally lack maturity and civility to amicably resolve disputes (Moritz, 2010). In this changing environment caused by desertification, the relationship between farmers and herders became more confrontational and competitive, particularly in the absence of negotiations between herders and farmers to ensure access to livestock routes and grazing ground.

Cattle Rustling and Rural Banditry:

The reduced agricultural production and the death of livestock as a result of desertification have resulted in rural banditry and cattle rustling which are also contributors to herders-farmers conflicts. Cattle rustling has increased in organization and scale in various northern states over the last decade where large groups of a bandit with high audacity are operating due to the inability to possess their cattle as a result of desertification (Henry, 2020). Cattle rustling generally occurs in the entire north, but the major theatres have been the Davin Rugu forest stretching in the entire Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna states, Dansadau forest in Zamfara, Falgore forest in Kano, and Kamuku forest in Kaduna. It is reported that cattle theft is the major source of income for Boko Haram in the northeast. Research shows that approximately 2,991 herders were killed and 64,750 cattle were stolen in 2013 in states across the north-central region (Famous, Ayadiuno, & Alphonsus, 2020). The inability to keep cattle or practice agricultural production resulted in the formation of cattle rustling groups that are the major cause of political instability in Nigeria.

STRATEGIES ADOPTED TO COMBAT HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICTS:

Establishment of Grazing Reserve in 1965:

The northern regional government started one of the first attempts in response to the herders-farmers conflicts in the country by allocating huge land portions to be used by the herders explosively in grazing. This strategy was not effective mitigating herders-farmers conflicts due to other factors such as migration, urbanization, and population growth.

National Commission for Nomadic Education:

This body was established in 1989 to integrate the herders into national and modern

life through skill acquisition and mobile basic education. This strategy was meant to integrate the pastoralists into society by educating them.

The Green Wall Agency:

Most scientists believe this strategy is the most effective of all since it seeks to tackle desertification which is the major cause of herders-farmers conflicts. This strategy was enacted in 2013 in response to the African Union Green Wall Initiative that aimed at promoting member states to grow 8,000 km of trees along Southern Sahel to mitigate the impacts of desertification that has encroached the region. The progressive desertification along the Sahel area because of climate change is a key factor responsible for herdsman migration seasonally from one area to another in search of vegetation and water for their livestock.

Armed Forces:

Engagement the Nigerian Armed Forces as stipulated in the constitution is one of the immediate measures adopted by the Federal governments to tackle the herders-farmers conflicts. The Operation Safe Haven a Special Task Force that has been deployed by the government in Plateau state to check for insecurity caused by herders-farmers conflicts.

Legislations Prohibiting Open Grazing:

Government at state levels started implementing laws preventing open grazing in their state as a strategy directed towards ending constant herders-farmers conflicts in various states. The objective of this legislation is to reduce the risk of herdsman destroying cultivated lands and the related herders-farmers conflicts.

Cattle Ranching System:

This strategy was proposed in 2018 in reaction to the mass killing and increasing

herders-farmers conflicts caused by the seasonal movement of pastoralists. This proposal seeks to develop 94 ranches in ten federation states and will cost about 179 billion naira(Adisa R. , 2011).

EFFECTIVENESS OF HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT MITIGATION STRATEGIES:

Despite establishment of various policies and strategies to stop herders-farmers conflicts, there are still no significant changes in terms of mitigating these conflicts. These strategies do not provide a lasting solution to the conflicting claims of herders and farmers in ongoing herders-farmers conflicts. The Federal government has made efforts to control and regulate pastoral activities but it appears that sufficient political will is required to enforce laws and also focusing on the sustainability of the region(Hamisu, Makinta, & Muhammed, 2017). There is a need for the government to focus on adopting climate change adaptations and mitigation to stop desertification in the region through sustainable agricultural production and cattle keeping.

CONCLUSION:

The constant struggle for scarce ecosystem resources in Nigeria caused by desertification has resulted in violent conflicts between farmers and herders. These conflicts have become more destructive, widespread, and intense despite various legislations and policies adopted to stop herders-farmers conflicts. These legislations and policies include establishment of Grazing Reserve in 1965, National Commission for Nomadic Education, Green Wall Agency, and the Armed Forces. Despite these strategies, herders-farmers conflicts are also periodical in Nigeria due to ineffectiveness on these strategies in mitigating conflict. There is a need of focusing on sustainability in cattle keeping and agricultural production.

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