

Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict in Tivland 2000-2024: A Resource Dimension

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Abstract

Herdsmen and farmers clashes have become a recurring decimal in Tivland in recent times. This resource-use conflict has permeated the socio-economic milieu of Tivland in all facets of its existence. The methodology used for this work is content analysis. The paper has also used the political economy theory in general and the frustration-aggression theory in particular as its frameworks of analysis. Upon critical analysis, the paper has shown that this resource conflict has negatively affected agricultural activities in Tivland. It has also led to destruction of farmlands and even harvested crops leading to loss of revenue, hunger, malnutrition and general impoverishment. The paper has therefore suggested *inter alia* that there should be ranching of cattle, military operations should be strengthened and there should be a cultural reorientation to educate different ethnic groups about the culture and tradition of other ethnic groups.

Keywords: Farmers, Herdsmen, Resource Conflict, frustration and aggression.

Introduction

Tivland is an agrarian area in Benue State in the North-Central region of Nigeria which has in recent times been in the grip of insecurity in the form of farmers/herdsman clashes that have defied any workable solution up to the present. According to Okla (2024) a lot of reasons have been advanced by scholars in trying to explain the intermittent violent clashes between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers in North Central Nigeria. The argument has been put forward that it is the desire of the pastoralists to take over the rich arable land of the middle belt region leading to violent clashes between the indigenes and the herders. Others argue that it is climate change that is pushing the pastoralists from the arid north in search of 'pasturable' space in the middle belt and south of Nigeria while others contend that it is activities of bandits, Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP) that have prompted herders to migrate south. This has therefore heightened pressure on farmlands and water bodies and increased the frequency of violent disputes.

Generally, the relationship between herders and farmers prior to the 21st century was not a conflictual one. The herders would come at the beginning of the dry season and leave at the start of the rainy season. Also they would seek permission from the elders who would allocate a portion of land to them for their temporary stay. There was no permanent state of warfare as witnessed in recent times especially during this 4th republic. Isah (2009) has contended that farmers - pastoralists conflict are essentially economic in nature, irrespective of the religious, cultural and political colourations that might be diluted to advance certain objectives. Adebajo (1995) posits that, in Nigeria, migrant pastoralists are made up of many groups, the largest being the Fulbe or Fulani constituting 90%.

A lot of efforts have gone into trying to resolve this crisis. This includes peace meetings held between the Benue State Government and Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, farmers and security agencies to try and find a lasting solution to this problem. One of the first peace meetings was held in Makurdi in October 2016 and since then, other peace efforts have been

made. Also in 2017, the Benue State House of Assembly passed an open-anti grazing law to prevent cattle owners from openly grazing on peoples' farms.

Moreover, between February and March 2018, the Federal Government of Nigeria inaugurated a military exercise code name Exercise Ayem Akpatema. This exercise was intended to bring an end to incessant killings in Benue State and Tivland occasioned by herdsmen/farmers clashes. Presently also, there is a military exercise covering Benue and Nasarawa States known as Operation Whirl Stroke which is also on the case of herdsmen/farmers crises. Fundamentally, it is against this backdrop that the paper intends to investigate and unravel whether herdsmen/farmers clashes are due to resource competition or other cultural or political factors or a combination of all these factors.

Conceptualizing Farmers/Herdsmen Clashes and Resource Conflict

In Tivland in recent times, farmers/herdsmen crisis seems to be the most insidious and intractable. It has been asserted by Dennen (1990) that "conflict on all levels of organic existence is pervasive, persistent, ubiquitous... the universal experience of all life forms". Generally, the term conflict is often associated with dysfunctional issues such as quarrelling, discord, fighting and dispute.

Stanger (1967, p41) defines conflict as:

A situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not both. Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal.

Also Berger and Luckman in Dennen (1990) contend that conflict is "incompatibility of interests, goals, values, needs, expectations and/or social cosmologies or ideologies. To Sandole (1998), conflict is "a situation in which at least two parties, or their representatives, attempt to pursue their perceptions of mutually incompatible goals by physically damaging or destroying the property and high-value symbols of one another (e.g religious shrines, national monuments); and or psychologically or physically injuring, destroying or otherwise forcibly eliminating one another".

It is the contention of Wright (1999) that conflict is opposition among social entities directed against one another which centers on two mutually exclusive social forces of pursuing incompatible goals. Conflict is therefore much about needs, interests, positions and goals which are not only scarce but also often fiercely competed for by citizens in a society. Due to the scarce nature of these tangible and/or intangible resources, competition becomes inevitable and tense. This tense competition usually degenerates into violent conflict especially when the competitors brazenly abuse the prescribed rules.

According to Coser (1965,p65)" conflict arises as a result of the struggle over values and claims to some status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rival". Also Yecho (2006) defines conflict as deriving from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or groups in a defined socio-economic and geopolitical environment. Conflict therefore can be contextualized in the unit of resources and their control.

From the foregoing therefore, it can be seen that conflict takes place at the individual, societal, state and international levels. Generally, at the centre of these conflictual situations, are values, resources and issues that the contesting parties are usually very reluctant to let go.

Thus conflict arises from the fact that the needs and desires of the parties are not met making them to feel deprived and thus engage in conflictual disagreement.

Theoretical Framework

This paper contends that in general terms, the political economy theory is the most suitable analytical framework for this study. Mimiko (1999) posits that, without denying the meta-economic factors facilitating the outbreak of insurgencies in Africa in the post-cold-war era, the political economy approach allows us to perceive all the major security crises bedeviling the continent as simply manifestations of underlying economic crisis. He argues further that, it is always a case of lack and/or loss of economic opportunities. This in turn breeds alienation, frustration, rebellion and ultimately violence and instability. This theory makes bold to state that social conflicts between competing interests or status groups are ubiquitous social processes. An example is given of capitalist societies that, due to exploitation and inequality, these societies would definitely produce internal tensions that would lead to conflict.

In specific terms however, the paper will adopt the frustration-aggression theory formulated by Dollard J, Doob L, Miller N, Maorer O and Sears R (1939) and popularized by Feirabends and Nevoid (1971). This theory argues that aggression is always the end result of frustration; that when people feel that the political system is short-changing them and denying their legitimate aspirations and expectations, they may then direct their collective frustration in different forms towards the political system. Agreeing with the above, Anifowose (2003) states that:

... given the requisite conditions, individuals or groups who feel frustrated in the attainment of their desires and demands often react by directing aggressive behaviour at what is perceived as being responsible for depriving or thwarting those desires, as a substitute. Moreover, it is not utter lack but unfulfilled hopes and expectations that engender conflict.

This study thus sees the emergence and continued existence of this phenomenon of farmers-herders crisis in Tivland as emanating from frustration that has given rise to aggression.

Methodology

The data for this paper includes secondary sources. These are journals, newspapers, magazines, books, reports, budgets and the internet.

Farmers and Herders Clashes as a Resource Conflict in Tivland

It is an arguable fact that the herdsmen/farmers crisis in Tivland is one of the most insidious and intractable in recent times. According to Hagher (2013), in Benue State, this conflict is ten years old. However, the escalation into a full-blown war is a recent phenomenon as the combatants are armed with sophisticated assault weapons and are determined to wreak maximum havoc. Also Ajuwon (2004) contends that the conflict arises due to the necessity to provide food and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to

meet ever-growing need and this has led to competition between these two user groups. This competition in most cases has turned into serious manifestation of hostility and violence.

In Tivland, communities that have come under attack by Fulani herdsmen are found mainly in Guma, Gwer West, Buruku, Logo, Ukum, Kwande and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas. Isah (2012) argues that resource use conflict between farmers and pastoralists in Benue State is not a recent phenomenon as it goes back to the earliest period of contact. However, what is recent is the present escalation into a full-blown war. Hagher (2013) again asserts that, during the last decade, the conflict started on 23rd June 2001, when Mr. Iortim Unande, an unarmed Tiv farmer found Fulani cattle eating up his crops. When he tried to drive them out of his farm, the Fulani took out his sword and killed him. Since then, the killing of men, women, children, livestock and destruction of farms and other properties are a regular feature of the conflict. It has been argued by Ishakun (2015, p93) that the targets of the Fulani militia always appear to be well chosen. Usually, they target communities with high pasture and proximity to water sources. This approach “is one strong confirmation that their attacks are strategically aimed at acquiring grazing land for pastoral herdsmen”.

This paper makes bold to state that it is the war mongering posture of the Fulani militia that has brought about escalation of this conflict. Agreeing with the above assertion, Amough and Abughdyer (2015) state that:

*Our herd is our life because to every
nomad, life is worthless without his cattle.
What do you expect from us when our
source of existence is threatened. The
encroachment of grazing fields and routes
by farmers is a call to war (Riame Saidu,
a pastoralist, Wuse, 2009 IRIN 2009)*

The above statement is cemented by a Fulani leader. Bayeri (2016) states that 28 grazing reserves were earmarked for Benue State by the Sardauna, Sir Ahmadu Bello since 1965, but in the entire Tivland, none has been actualized. He continues that in the Middle Belt, the state that has the most abundant pasture for grazing is Benue State due to the presence of the River Benue. That the shoulder of the River Benue provides enough grass for cows during the dry season. This entails seasonal movement of cattle. He then emphatically states that “given this seasonal movement to Benue State, the natives have feared this and there has been resistance and the Fulani people also form a resistance and go out to survive through any means necessary”.

Generally, due to the fact that Tivland is an agrarian area that derives its income mainly from agricultural production, this herdsmen/farmers crisis which is a resource conflict has impeded crop production. Even the little that is produced is destroyed or not harvested at all. This leads to loss of revenue and food shortages leading to hunger, malnutrition and starvation. Schama (2023) has contended that crops, livestock, water resources and other vegetal resources play key roles in the development, maintenance and projection of the socio-economic strength of a society. This means that, once these resources are destroyed, then the economic prosperity of that particular society will be obliterated.

Also, the Tiv have been uprooted from their homesteads and have been made refugees in their own nation. Presently, many people can be seen living in churches, schools and abandoned buildings dotted across Tivland. Suemo Chia in Wang (2005) puts this in harsh perspective when he states that Tivland is “a land flowing with milk and honey while her people continue to suffer from economic malnutrition in spite of their strength and hard work”.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a critical look at farmers/herders clashes as a resource conflict in Tivland. It has concluded that the farmers/herders crisis in Tivland is a resource conflict which has negatively affected agricultural activities in the area under review. It has led to destruction of farmlands and even harvested crops which has in turn led to loss of revenue, hunger, malnutrition and general impoverishment. It has also uprooted the Tiv from their ancestral lands and made them internal refugees in their land.

Recommendation

Due to this destructive farmers/herders crisis in term of human and material losses, the paper suggests certain measures aimed at resolving the issue.

- i. The bill on the establishment of ranches right now before the National Assembly should be speedily passed. In the interim however, the Federal Government of Nigeria should work in tandem with the Benue State Government by supporting the open anti-grazing law passed by the Benue State House of Assembly in 2017.
- ii. The military exercises such as Operation Whirl Stroke should be strengthened in order for it to be more effective in serving as a buffer between the herdsman and the farmers.
- iii. There should be a cultural re-orientation by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to educate different ethnic groups about the culture and tradition of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This will help to sensitize our minds and show us that it is not only our culture that matters. For example in 2018 in Benue State, when the governor, Samuel Ortom called the leaders of the Tiv and Fulani to dialogue with them about the implementation of the open anti-grazing law in the state, the Fulani openly told him that they cannot obey the law because it is against their tradition to hold their cattle in ranches. However, the Tiv also hold their land as ancestral and spiritual and do not like it to be desecrated by foreigners.
- iv. Finally but not exhaustively, the Benue State Government in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria should work out modalities to rebuild the villages and towns destroyed during this crisis so that all farmers in Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps should be re-settled in their communities.

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