

Farmers Versus Herders Conflict and its Implications on Nation-Building in Nigeria: A Contribution to the Discourse

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Abstract— Farmers-herders conflict is another dimension of insecurity, as well as socioeconomic and political problem in Nigeria for many decades. The conflict has been in existence for many years but, it has manifested more in recent years especially from 2001 to 2018. One of the problems is the way in which the conflict is affecting nation building in addition to economic problems and security issues. This work is an investigation of the nature of the farmers-herders conflict, causes, manifestations and its effects on nation building as a contribution to intellectual discourse in the area of development studies. The work relied on descriptive qualitative research in data collection and analysis. Secondary sources such as books, journals, reports and internet sources were consulted for data collection. The data obtained were discussed using content analysis where the existing literature were interpreted for further creation of meanings and contribution. The research discovered that farmers-herders conflict has many implications on nation building including insecurity, food security, ethnicity, politicisation of national interest, creation of national disunity, economic sabotage and mutual suspicion among many others. The research as part of its contribution to the discourse discovered that the conflict compounded the Nigerian insecurity through the fueling of banditry in other parts of the country. The research recommends that for a plausible solution towards addressing the issue of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, there is a need for sound agricultural, economic and social policies that will target both the farmers and herders to ameliorate their sufferings and this can be done through improved modernisation of farming and livestock rearing.

Keywords— Conflict; Farmers; Herders; Nation-Building; National Integration; Security.

INTRODUCTION

Farmers-herders conflict is one of the security challenges that Nigeria is facing contemporarily which has implications on nation-building and national integration (Kwaghga, 2018). Nigeria is an agrarian

state with an estimated majority population living in rural areas surviving on peasant farming for sustenance. Besides, Nigeria has a significant population of nomadic and herders spread across the various parts of the country. Some of these nomads are indigenous cattle herders who move from one state or region of the country to another in search of pastoral and grazing land for their animals (Amnesty International, 2018). Farmers-herders conflict is not a new security threat or phenomenon in Nigerian history. Indeed, the root of the conflict was believed to have been spread since 1970s when the Nigerian government discovered oil in commercial quantity leading to the gradual and persistent neglect of agriculture in the country. The farmers were provided with about 417 grazing lands in 1965 by the Northern Region government to contain the expected conflict between the farmers and the herders (Egbuta, 2018).

The farmers-herders conflict took a new dimension with the resurgence of democracy because of the politicisation of the conflict by some politicians to score cheap political goals or to secure power through the use of the conflict to sale their ideas to the electorates (Nwosu, 2017). The conflict became even more pronounced and complicated from 2015 after a successive transfer of power from the ruling party to the opposition (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2017). There are numerous factors that are attributed to the emergence of farmers-herders conflict including ineffective agricultural policies, low level of infrastructure, politics, socio-economic condition in the country, climatic changes, misutilisation of resources and media sentiments (Kwaja & Adelehin, 2017). Other factors include the nature of Nigerian borders which are porous, overconcentration of infrastructure in urban centres, ineffective security response and lack of political will to address the issue (Ajibo, Onuoha, Obi-Keguna, Christy & Oluwole, 2018).

The farmers-herders conflict has many implications on national security and national development. Fundamental among the effects are, it prevents proper nation-building, it escalates the fragile security situation

in the country, it creates food insecurity which by extension is affecting food supply across the nation, it leads to destruction of thousands of lives and properties worth millions of Naira, it creates mutual suspicion and disunity among the public and it affects the economic performance of the agricultural sector and livestock production leading to declining revenue generation for the government and an impediment to diversification of the economy (Kenneth & Ananti, 2018). Going by the above background, this study is an investigation of the implications of farmers-herders conflict on nation-building and national integration as a contribution to the discourses in the field of study. In doing so, the research will focus on reviewing the nature and dimension of the conflict, causes of the conflict and the effects of the conflict on Nigeria at large.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Secondary sources were relied in data gathering which consist of books, journals, reports and internet sources. The data obtained were presented and discussed using a thematic analytical interpretation where issues were developed and discussed together with the theoretical framework adopted in the study as supported by the previous works in the subject matter of study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, some relevant literature on the subject matter of study are reviewed critically based on some selected themes including understanding the nature and dimension of farmers-herders conflict, the overview of farmers-herders conflict, causes and effects of farmers-herders conflict and analysis of the concepts of nation-building.

Understanding the Nature and Dimension of Farmers-Herders Conflict

The farmers-herders conflict is one of the deadliest conflicts that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and properties worth billions of Naira in Nigeria for many decades. For instance, a BBC Report claimed that over 50, 000 deaths were caused by the crisis between 2001 and 2004 alone. Of these deaths, women and children accounted for over 35, 000. The economic cost of farmers-herders conflict in only four states of Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa and Plateau was estimated at about \$14 billion annually (Nwosu, 2017). The above estimates considered a short-term period. If the time length of 2004 to 2019 is taken into consideration where the crisis reached its peak, this study can claim an estimate of over one million lives and an economic cost worth \$150 billion from these four states alone. This estimate did not consider the geographical spread of the

crisis into Northwestern States of Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto. The estimated number of deaths from the conflict since 1999 is 1.2 million and over 200, 000 people were displaced (Nwosu, 2017).

The struggle over grazing land and scarce resources have for many years led to violent clashes in frequency, intensity and geography to the extent that Amnesty International reported that in January 2018 alone, 168 people were killed from the conflict. The conflict took the nature of displacement of people from their enclave in the Northcentral states of Nigeria (Egbuta, 2018). The farmers-herders conflict escalated because the Federal and State governments failed to enact and enforce legislation to boost security in the affected areas. The conflict is politicised with some media houses and section of the country taking the matter as an attempt by one ethnic group; the Fulani to dominate and oppress the other ethnic groups. Incidentally, because the President himself is a Fulani man by tribe, he also belongs to the Miyetti Allah, an Association of cattle rearers groups in Nigeria. The conflict has been perceived as a disguise affair because there are allegations or perception that Boko Haram and other criminals masquerade in the name of Fulani herdsmen, attack the local farming communities (Kwaghga, 2018). The position that Fulani herdsmen attack farmers cannot be true because the conflict has existed since 1980s as observed by Nwosu (2017) and it has escalated particularly from 1999 with the resurgence of democratic rule. The issue of farmers-herders conflict has become a matter of concern for the Nigerian government, and it is threatening to deprive the country from achieving its target of sustainable development goals in the near future particularly ending of hunger and food security for all (Kingsley, 2017). A Report by Amnesty International in 2018 revealed that there were violent clashes between the farmers and herdsmen over access to resources, water and pasture. The Report attributed the crisis to the failure of the Nigerian government to discharge its responsibility of the protection of lives and properties of its citizens (Amnesty International, 2018).

Farmers lost their lives and farm produce worth billions of Naira across many states that were affected by the conflict annually since 2001 when the problem became more pronounced. On the other hand, cattle rearers lost their livestock worth billions of Naira in the process and their lives too (Kenneth & Ananti, 2018 and Ajibo et al. 2018). Farmers-herders conflict is one of the types of land conflict in existence. The first land conflict is the claim for the right to use the land while depriving or denying the recognition of the second party involved to have access for the same use. The second conflict is the struggle to secure the land for a different purpose

(Antwi, 2018). The farmers and herders clash in Nigeria fall within the second category of land conflict. The renewed conflict between farmers and herders has created an additional issue over land in West Africa apart from the already existing conflict over land tenure and land allocation (Baidoo, 2014). The farmers-herders conflict has many dimensions and implications on Nigeria which consist of economic implications, identity implication, socio-cultural implications, legal implications and security implications (Kwaja & Adelehin, 2017).

The Overview of Farmers-Herders Conflict

The overall source and nature of the farmers-herders conflict is competition over scarce resources which is land for farming by the farmers and grazing land for pasture by the herders. The genesis of this conflict can be traced back to as far as 1970s when the Nigerian government discovered oil in commercial quantity and started to neglect the agricultural sector.

The Northern government created grazing reserve system in 1965 with over 417 fields separated for that purpose. Under the grazing reserve system, government provided space, water and vaccinations for livestock while the herdsman paid taxes in return to the government. The emergence of oil as the major means of revenue for the government led to the eventual neglect of agriculture as the means of survival and consequently, grazing reserve land could not be maintained because of urbanisation, expansion and encroachment into the grazing lands in cities. The consequence of this development was that farmers resorted to their traditional routes of grazing which involved farmlands and hence, the emergence of farmers-herders conflict (Egbuta, 2018).

In another different view, Nwosu (2017) traced the origin of the farmers-herders conflict to the negative effects of colonialism. According to him, the colonial government established tin mines in Jos and other parts of North Central Nigeria. People were encouraged to come and work in the mines and many have settled there because of the development. The indigenes of the area objected to the cattle rearers settlement and grazing in their land because they claimed that the herders destroyed their local farm produces. The allegations of the destruction of crops led to reprisal attacks which metamorphosed into full-blown confrontations between the farmers and the herders. The above position by Nwosu (2017) has been supported by another research conducted by Asylum Research Consultancy (2017) and Amusan et al. (2017).

Causes and Effects of Farmers-Herders Conflict

The main cause of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria is environmental resource-scarcity which compelled for

the movement of herders southwards from the northern part of the country. The widespread encroachment into farmlands, destruction of farm produce followed by retaliation attacks are the major effects of the conflict (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2016). Egbuta (2018) identified some of the major causes of the conflict and traced it to climate change, depleting farmlands, lack of political will and inadequacy of governmental response to the crisis. The Asylum Research Consultancy (2017) and Kwaghga (2018) attributed the causes of the farmers-herders conflict to the unending and unsettled issue of indigene-settler in northcentral Nigeria. It is observed also that the causes of the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria consist of global climate change, desertification and aridity which is gradually reducing the arable farming and grazing land, migration of the pastoralists towards the southern parts of the country and other related factors. The implications of the conflict are; it leads to invasion of the arable farming land and farm produce, food scarcity, insecurity, destruction of lives and properties, creation of national gap, disunity and economic sabotage (Kingsley, 2017). Conflict and scramble for control over resources especially land for farming and grazing is the major causes of the farmers-herders clashes in Nigeria and it has many costly implications (Amnesty International, 2018). The Report further observed that spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) coupled with failure of security and corrupt practices from the security personnel contributed in causing the clash and escalating it beyond expectation.

The Concept of Nation-Building

Nation building is a great task of every leader and policy makers. For, it is the onerous task of putting in place the desired and favourable conditions for the governed to have a better means of livelihood and sense of national patriotism. According to Gambari (2008), nations do not just happen like this but they are built by tasks and leaders with vision and desire to establish the best means of livelihood for the society. Gambari (2008) added that, nation building consists of many aspects.

This includes building a political entity which corresponds to a given geographical territory. It is an effort to reach national greatness which is attainable through skills, hard work, productivity and competitiveness. But this is a difficult task in Nigeria for many decades as a result of many factors. Gambari (2008) identified three major factors as the main challenges of nation building in Nigeria. The first challenge is colonial legacy which created lots of problems for Nigerian state. The second challenge is the socioeconomic inequalities. The third challenge according to Gambari (2008) is the constitutional

challenge. The Nigerian state failed to come up with a viable constitution that will be acceptable by all.

Akinnimi (2015) identifies nation building as the “processes of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state”. The process has the sole aim of national unity and development. An important element identified by Akinnimi (2015) for nation building in Nigeria being a diverse multicultural nation is national unity and harmonisation of national values and symbols. Nation building has also been seen as a means in which national leaders work hard to achieve national unity and identity for their nations through developmental programmes. These should also involve actions, behaviours, and thoughts or feeling aimed at sustaining the attributes of a nation (Jekayinfa, 2002:2). The challenges of nation building is more critical in developing world countries especially in Nigeria with people having diverse cultures, languages, religion and a diverse political and ethnic affiliations and who have been forced into one geographical entity by colonialism (Jekayinfa, 2002:3). In addition to the above pre-requisites, the task of nation building requires economic prosperity, political maturity, social cohesion, infrastructural development and harmonisation of national diversities to reach national consensus.

Another explanation of the challenge of nation building is the one given by Chidume, Chukwu, Ukaegbu & Agudiegwu (2014) who traced the challenges of nation building in Nigeria to have included ethnicity and party politics. Another challenge presented by Chidume et al. (2014) is electoral violence and sectarian political behaviour. Nation building has been affected in Nigeria by ethnic rivalry and contest for scarce resources (Metumara, 2010). Ethnic rivalry has been seen as the major obstacle towards building a viable nation-state in Nigeria since colonial period to date. The three major groups; Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba are always in mutual suspicion and hostility leading to national disharmony according to Metumara (2010). Another approach on the challenges of nation building in Nigeria is that of Onifade and David (2013) which identifies that there were various policies geared towards nation building by successive governments in Nigeria such as National Youth Service Corps, Federal Character, and Quota System. The policies are however threatened by socio-cultural, religious and political settings of the Nigerian state. The authors further argued that, the problem of nation building in Nigeria is owing to the question of whether Nigeria is “Accident of history or historical accident”.

Nigeria is a divided country which has the urgent need for national integration in order to avoid the crisis of identity and division. National integration requires

ethnic cooperation, economic development, sense or spirit of nationalism and nationhood, patriotism and political balance (Enaruna, 2014). Lack of national integration threatened the co-existence of Nigeria including the 1967-1970 Civil War. It has been caused by the challenges of national development and the inability to tolerate the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society by the component entities (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2010).

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

In this section, an attempt was made in presenting the discussion and findings based on some formed themes drawing from the existing literature to contribute to the discourse of the issue of study in this work.

The Implications of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Nation-Building

There are many implications of the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria from various perspective and many dimensions but, this study focuses on the aspect of nation-building and national integration which is one of the major problems that impede national unity, progress, prosperity and national development. Some of these implications are as follows:

Insecurity

The incessant and protracted clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria are fueling the already fragile security situation in the country. Nigeria is bedeviled with the problem of insecurity in different ramifications ranging from Niger-Delta militants, armed bandits, political thuggery, ethno-religious conflict, Boko Haram insurgency and many other ones. The farmers-herders conflict increases the insecurity situation in the country because it is leading to destruction of lives and properties. The above position has been supported by many works and reports including the Amnesty International (2018), Asylum Research Consultancy (2017) and Amusan et al. (2017) that the clash or the conflict between the farmers and herders is creating another dimension of insecurity in Nigeria.

Food Insecurity

The conflict between farmers and herders is causing a serious gap in food supply across the nation because both the farm produce and livestock are destroyed in the process. Farmers and herders are the two major sources of food for the country and any negative phenomenon that affects them will lead to scarcity in food supply. Nwosu (2017), Kwaghga (2018), Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017) and Egbuta (2018) all observed that the farmers-herders conflict is causing a serious food shortage in Nigeria which by extension, has effects on the economy and health wellbeing of the people arising from hunger and malnutrition.

Ethnicity

In Nigeria, the social cohesion is fragile emanating from the merging of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural groups to form one single entity by the British colonialists. Thus, emphasis and privilege is given to ethnic belonging more than the nation itself. There are in existence, ethno-religious conflicts for several decades in the country and the resurgence of the farmers-herders conflict recently consolidates ethnicity where campaign of calumny, blasphemy, hate speeches and assault are targeted against one ethnic group by the other especially the Fulani who are tagged as 'the herdsman' without considering the fact that all ethnic groups in Nigeria rear livestock and the Fulani are attack and they too also attack making the conflict a collateral damage. This view is held by many scholars such as Kingsley (2017), Kenneth et al. (2018) and Ajibo (2018).

Politicisation of the Conflict

One of the effects of the crisis of farmers and herders is the politicisation of the conflict by politicians and other opportunists. For instance, the Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom introduced an infamous law of prohibiting grazing reserve in Benue in 2017 which was condemned locally and internationally as one of the reasons that amplified the crisis in the state and the neighbouring states as noted by Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017). Additionally, in Plateau, the indigene-settler was emphasised by the state government which led to divisive conflicts again adding fuel to the fire of the conflict in the state as reported by Asylum Research Institute (2018). The above two examples indicate that the politicians in Benue and Plateau states did not seek for a reconciliatory alternative that will consider all the warring factions in the crisis instead, they favoured their ethnic group to score cheap political point in the process.

Economic Sabotage

The conflict between farmers and herders leads to economic sabotage and a great loss from both sides and the country at large. For instance, a Report by the BBC disclosed that over 50, 000 deaths were caused by the crisis between 2001 and 2004 alone. Of these deaths, women and children constituted over 35, 000. The economic cost of farmers-herders conflict in only four states of Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa and Plateau was estimated at about \$14 billion annually (Nwosu, 2017). Such a great leakage through destruction can provide a great fortune economically for any country no matter how rich it may be yet; Nigeria is losing it annually and is still not doing enough to contain the carnage.

Banditry

This is the major contribution to knowledge and research gap of this work in the discourse of the farmers-

herders conflict. Having scrutinised through the existing works, the researchers realised that most of the previous studies failed to account for the fact that the farmers-herders conflict spread into other dimensions such as banditry in the Northwest with the states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina now affected in which the displaced herders that lost their livestock in the conflict established a bandit groups that are terrorising people there killing, maiming, stealing and intimidating the people there. The spread of the conflict also affects Kaduna, Nassarawa and Abuja axis where a new set of bandits emerged that are kidnapping travelers for ransom. This new dimension of security situation was created because of the spillover effects of the farmers-herders conflict.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper concludes that farmers-herders conflict is one of the current dimensions of insecurity in Nigeria which emerged because of many factors such as climatic changes, migration, government' negligence and poor agricultural policies and other related factors. Therefore, the conflict is devastating to the farmers, herders and the country itself because every year, lives are loss in thousands and properties worth billions of Naira is destroyed in the process from both sides of the parties to the conflict.

The paper concludes that this conflict has many implications such as fueling insecurity, food insecurity and economic sabotage. In conclusion, the research concludes with a contribution to the discourse in the subject matter of study by making a contribution through identification of banditry as one of the main spillover effects of the clashes which spread to other parts of the country as a result of the conflict. The research concludes that the farmers-herders conflict has negative impact on nation-building and national integration in Nigeria.

To this end, the research realised the paramount importance of addressing the crisis urgently by recommending the following: the grazing reserve in the Northern parts of the country should be restored and modernised to prevent herders from encroaching in the lands of the farmers; nomadic education should be emphasised to educate the herders on the need for maintenance of peace and security through peaceful co-existence between them and the farmers; those who used politics and to fuel the crisis should be sanction accordingly to deter others from doing same in future; socioeconomic condition of the country must be improved to ensure equity, equality and a just distribution of national resources to appease the competing groups and modernised farming implements

should be encouraged with modern fencing and mechanisation for protection.

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