Solutions to Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria: The Academic Perspectives and Business Implications

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ABSTRACT

The solution to herders-farmers violent clashes in Nigeria has remained elusive due to lack of consensus, especially between the Federal Government of Nigeria and affected north-central and southern states’ Governments, regarding the right methodology for curbing the menace. This lingering lack of consensus is attributable to the sentimentalization of this sensitive national issue given the wide ethnic and religious differences between two warring groups – the ‘herders’ who are predominantly Muslims and Fulani, and the crop farmers who are predominantly Christians from the middle-belt. The quest of this paper, therefore, is to identify any key stakeholder group that uses scientific methods devoid of sentiments to study any phenomenon before concluding fact-based findings. It is against this backdrop that this study strives to examine academics’ recommendations on the sustainable panacea to Herders-Farmers conflict in Nigeria. The paper is empirical in nature to the extent that it employed library-and-desk research methods for data collection. The population of the study constitutes journal articles on Herders-Farmers clashes in Nigeria. Twenty-eight papers were sourced and analyzed using content analysis. The study found that the majority of the academics recommended conflict resolution mechanisms, mass orientation, and ranches as the sustainable panaceas to the constant herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The study, therefore, recommends that the ranches proposed by the Federal Government of Nigeria should be piloted in some affected states to be able to appraise its real potentials rather than totally rejecting it without subjecting it to any form of experimentation.

Keywords: Fear, Peace, Ranching, Sustainable Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Competition for common, limited and declining natural resources often trigger violent conflict across the world which is counter-productive (Adenkunle and Adisa, 2010; Moore, 2005). Thus, the clashes between herders and farmers can be traced to time immemorial. However, the volatility and intensity of resource-based conflict are usually heightened when the conflicting groups or users of the resources belong to different ethnic nationalities with differing faiths and socio-cultural values as in the case with cattle herders and crop farmers in Nigeria, and vice versa. Arguably, this explains why the reported herders-farmers’ conflicts in the centre of northern Nigeria are fewer compared to other parts of Nigeria, notably North-Central and Southern Nigeria. In essence, the capacity, tolerance, readiness and willingness of community, tribal, and political leaders to manage the frequent herders-farmers’ clashes in collaborative ways can minimize the escalation of crisis whenever they occur.

Several factors that cause incessant herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria are water scarcity, desertification, unchecked population expansion, increasing unemployment rate, porous
national borders, encroachment into grazing routes and reserves, nomadism, ignorance about the grazing routes and laws, soil compartment and loss of soil fertility, crop damage by cattle, indiscriminate bush burning, fake news and media propaganda, politicization, rural banditry and cattle rustling, insecurity in the Sahel region, proliferation of small harms, reprisals, deficient government responses, and phobia and hate speeches (Blench and Dendo, 2003; Fasona and Omojola, 2005; Adenkunle and Adisa, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2017; Umoh, 2017; and Chukwuemeka, Aloysius and Enah, 2018). Scholars are agreed that as long as the root causes of herders-farmers conflicts are not overcome or eliminated by the government(s) and key stakeholders, the desired peace necessitating sustainable socio-economic development of rural and national economies will remain elusive and a mirage (Okeke, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2017).

The search for peace has made federal, state and local governments as well as key stakeholders (academics, religious bodies, ethnic groups, statesmen, political parties, civil society groups, media, and the international community) to proffer several solutions to mitigate or ending the crisis. Two recommendations that have been made are ranching and anti-open grazing bill. While the federal government led by President Muhammadu Buhari has demonstrated a preference for ranching, some state governments in the middle-belt and south have prioritized no-open grazing act. The federal government’s justifications for ranching are that it would constrain cattle movement, encourage sedentary settlements for herders, enhance cultural integration, create a cattle-feed market for farmers, create a cattle-manure market for herders, and attract livestock support services (veterinary hospitals, research centres, abattoirs, leather and dairy factories). In contrast, the state’s anti-open grazing bill is premised on the need to protect the lives, crops and properties of indigenous farmers and to forestall the perceived Islamization of the Middles-Belt and South-Eastern states of Nigeria by the Fulani tribes through herding. Both sides (i.e. the Federal Government of Nigeria and affected states) have since commenced implementation of ranching (if consented-to by any state government) and no-open grazing law. This apparent lack of consensus solution tends to have escalated the confusion, mistrust, tension, and fear in the land.

Inquest for unbiased and objective solutions to the herders-farmers conflict, this study focused on the submission of the academic scholars which are generally regarded as the fountain of truth devoid of sentiments and emotion with a view to determine their recommendations on this national issue.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Group of scholars have conceptualized conflict differently as a phenomenon (something that exists), behavioural outcome (something that is caused), and activity or process (something that is systematic or sequential). As a phenomenon, De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) defined conflict as a social phenomenon that occurs across species, time periods, and cultures. That is a fight or quarrel that occurs between or among individuals and ethnic-racial groups from time to time. This suggests that conflict is ineliminable but manageable. In the same vein, Brauch and Scheffran (2012) recognized conflict as a contest between two or more actors (individuals, societal groups, states, or groups of states) over scarce and sought-after material and immaterial goods, where the parties pursue contradictory aims or means. Similarly, Adetoye and Omilusi (2015) described conflict as a form of struggle and rivalry for material and non-material objects to which individuals and groups attach importance.

As a behavioural outcome, “conflict is manifested through adversarial social action, involving two or more actors with the expression of differences often accompanied by intense hostilities” (Jeong, 2010:3). Here, conflict connotes the action of one party (rightly or wrongly) that arouse the reaction of another party (rightly or wrongly) as a way of communicating dissatisfaction,
disagreement, or unacceptance which often degenerate into violence. According to Rahim (2010), conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social activities. In essence, conflict arises during human interactions in the workplaces, homes, occasions, and places of worship.

From a process perspective, De Dreu, Harinck, and Van Vianen (1999) stated that conflict is a process that commences when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them. Nicholson (1992) perceived conflict as an activity which takes place when conscious beings (individuals and groups) wish to carryout mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations. Gillin and Gillin (1949) clarified that conflict is a social process in which individuals or groups seek their ends by directly challenging the antagonist by violence or threat of violence.

In this study, conflict is regarded as the outcome of mismanaged disagreement between two or more parties (individuals, groups, communities or nations) over differences in personal, social, cultural, political and economic goals, aspirations or pursuits. Besides that, conflict also can be caused by personal factors such as envy and mistrust, economic factors such as struggle for limited resources and high unemployment rate, social factor such as income inequality and poverty, cultural factors such as differences in value and religious faith, and political factors such as flawed election and greedy attitude to stay in power until death.

Several theories have explained the causes of conflict (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2017). First, the state-centric state or classical theory of conflict states that the right of a state to preserve and protect its sovereignty and autonomous entity often lead to conflicts especially with external aggressors or internal secessionists. In addition, the concentration of political power and positions in the hands of one or a few ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic society can trigger conflict. However, Waltz (1979) observed that the balance of power among different ethnic groups can serve as a deterrent to conflict. In the Nigerian context, the encroachment of foreign nomadic Fulani herders into farmlands owned by other ethnic nationalities in North-Central and Southern Nigeria and the glaring government failure to forestall the encroachments as well as the insecurity of lives and properties that ensued has made self-protection by ethnic nationalities is inevitable. Such encroachment (offence or attack) and defence stance of both parties caused the recurrent conflict between Fulani herders and sedentary farmers in most parts of Nigeria and beyond.

Second, classical liberalism theory of conflict maintains that countries that have institutionalized liberal democracy (where political powers are obtained through elections and popular votes) and capitalism (where ownership of means of production resides with private individuals) experience sustainable peace as against conflict if the reverse were to be the case. Thus, attempts to block participation in the political or economic process can degenerate into a conflict between the oppressor (government) and the oppressed (citizens).

Third, the social-conflict theory advanced by Karl Marx postulates that the excesses and limitations of capitalism (private property, wage labour, capital accumulation, competition, externalities, and unequal opportunities) create a class struggle between the capitalists and proletarians. It is typical of the capitalist to exploit workers through unfair remuneration and poor work environment thereby creating two social classes: the rich and richer capitalist and the poor and poorer workers. On the other hand, it is typical of workers to unite and protest and demand salary raise and better work condition. This parallel stance can be a source of conflict.

Fourth, the feminist theory of conflict posits that gender inequality as empowered men over women in most societies of the world. It posits that women are supposed to enjoy equal rights
and privileges as men in all societies, however, the reality is that women rights and privileges are often relegated leading to conflicts in homes, marriages, workplace, and politics.

The fifth theory of conflict is post-colonialism theory. Colonialism is about domination, oppression, and slavery of the weak group usually by a stronger group. In contrast, post-colonialism (political independence) is usually preceded by decolonization in the disobedience, resistance, treaties, protests and armed struggle against colonial authorities. Lumumba-Kasongo (2017) asserted that the relationship between oppression (colonialism) and freedom (independence) is permanently conflicting.

3. METHODS

This paper is empirical in nature to the extent that it employed library-and-desk research methods for data collection. The population of the study constitutes journal articles on herders-farmers clashes in Nigeria. Twenty-eight papers (Adebayo and Olaniyi, 2008; Adekunle and Adisa, 2010; Abbas, 2011; Gefu and Kolawole, n.d.; Chukwuuma and Atehe, 2014; Okeke, 2014; Aliyu, 2015; Dimelu et al. 2016; Bala, n.d.; Johnson et. al. 2017; Roseline and Amusain, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2017; Shehu, 2017; Amusan et. al. 2017; Idowu, 2017; Ogbeide, 2017; Ukamaka et al. 2017; Ogo-Oluwa, 2017; Eje et.al. 2017; Umoh, 2017; Chukwuemeka et’ al. 2018; Ajibefun, 2018; Njoku, 2018; Nwobi, 2018; Udemezue, et’ al. 2018; Oli et al. 2018; Omohoa and Okuchukwu, 2018) were sourced and analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1968:601). It is frequently applied in describing the attributes of the message (Frankfort-Nachtmias and Nachmias, 2009).

Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize the recording units (words and phrases such as ranch, grazing reserves, grazing routes, policing, conflict resolution, anti-grazing law, etc.) and context units. Frankfort-Nachtmias and Nachmias (2009:239) affirmed that "most content analysis research is quantitative in one form or the other".

3.1 Findings and Business Implications

Recommendations from past studies on herders-farmers conflict were collated and analyzed with the intent of determining the proffered solutions to the crisis. The finding and corresponding business implications are presented under the following sub-headings:

3.2 Dialogue for Conflict Resolution

The most recommended remedy for the resolution of the herders-farmers conflict is the 'dialogue and conflict resolution' approaches at community levels. Specifically, 17 studies amounting to 60.7 per cent recommended this approach. Indeed, conflict is totally unavoidable in every human setting, however, its early detection and proper management could forestall conflict escalation from individual to group levels, and from group to communal levels, and beyond as witnessed in the case of herder-farmer clashes in Nigeria. Violent conflicts between herders and farmers in the past had not only led to the depletion of the most important business and economic asset – the human capital – but has equally led to the destruction of valuable tangible farming assets such as crops, cattle, and produce stores as well as intangible farming business assets such as the eroding of mutual trusts and business relationships. This development negates the hallmark of business - the accumulation and preservation of business assets for productive and commercial activities with many attendant benefits, namely labour employment, profit maximization, revenue generation, apprentice training opportunities, and poverty reduction. In fact, the alternative to the well established traditional approach to conflict resolution between herders and farmers is reprisal, chaos, war and anarchy in the land which
are antithetical to a conducive business environment. Okeke (2014) cautioned that conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria can only be resolved when the consequences of not doing so can no longer be ignored; that is when the conflict threaten national peace, stability, and unity.

3.3 Orientation and Education of the Herders and Farmers

Table 1 shows that orientation and education of the herders as well as farmers’ is the second leading recommendation with a frequency of 14, amounting to 50%. This suggests that the majority of the herdsmen and rural farmers are uneducated and uninformed about government laws, policies and programmes which impede peaceful coexistence. This is one point that the critics of the ranching system and fulaniphobia propagandists needs to factor in their analysis, predictions, and judgment. An average herder is illiterate with neither Islamic nor western education. Aliyu (2015) reported that 75 per cent of cattle herdsmen had no formal education. Now, the question is how the illiterate pastoralists propagate Islam in the North-central and southern Nigeria when they lack the capacity to do so? Besides, the demands and rigour of cattle grazing occupation make it difficult for the Fulani herdsmen to spare time for the propagation of Islamic faith. One wonders whether the rapid spread of Islam in Europe and the USA is also orchestrated by Fulani pastoralists. The business implication of this phobia propaganda is that it scares away husbandry and pastoral investors thereby stifling the growth and development of rural economies where more than 70 per cent of Nigerian population lives. Lots of value chain support for both crop and cattle farming are unharnessed due to this stance.

3.4 Ranching

Table 1 shows that out of several recommendations made by the authors of the 28 selected papers, ranching has the third-highest frequency counts of 13, which represent 46.4 per cent. This is consistent with the federal government position that creation and management of ranches would provide a lasting solution to the herders-farmers conflict, provided that state governments consented the idea by leasing out lands for such purposes. If ranching policy receives the needed support of all key stakeholders for its successful implementation by the federal government and investors, the rural economies of the states that make up Nigeria will witness rapid growth along the value-chain of livestock farming business. First, investors can build ranches, rent them out to herdsmen and generate incomes on a sustainable basis. Second, crop-farmers would begin to enjoy smooth farming activities with abundant harvest due to stoppage of man-caused damages to the crops; this would increase annual income from sales of farm produce. Third, crop remnants would no longer be regarded as a free gift of nature awaiting free grazing by herdsmen’ cattle. The stationary nature of ranch farming stimulates demand for crop remnants (animal feeds) which further generates huge subsidiary income to the farmers. Fourth, ranching enables the accumulation and gathering of cattle waste which is a good source of organic manure that helps improve the quality of soil and crop yield. In fact, farmers can swap fodder with cattle wastes just to exploit the barter alternative. Fifth, ranching or cattle colonies could attract basic physical and socio-economic infrastructure ranging from tarred roads, water supply systems, veterinary hospitals, health centres, abattoirs, schools, research institutes, dairy and skin markets among others which can benefit members of the sedentary cattle migrants and indigenous farmers’ settlements. Sixth, the ranches across the nation may be dominated by the Fulani tribes which would foster cultural integration and national unity with the indigenous communities as enshrined and promoted by Section 15(3c) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended) which reads “for the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the duty of the state to encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties”. Seventh, another big potential of ranches is that they could grow to become the centre of a tourist attraction with its accumulated benefits, namely labour employment, the vibrancy of hotel, eatery and transportation services amongst others. Eight, it
could also checkmate the sprayed and transmission of diseases between cattle and humans especially through cross-country migration, nomadism and open-grazing. Ninth, ranching could reduce time committed to herding, thereby freeing labour hours for the acquisition of literacy and vocation skills in which a majority of the herders are chronically lacking. Afnokwu and Isife (2010) found that 70 per cent of Fulani herders in Niger Delta had no western education. Such extra labour hour could be channelled into crop production from which the farming herders will experience and appreciate the cost, suffering, sacrifice and risks involved in the manual or labour intensive crop farming. Tenth, security against cattle rustling can be enhanced through ranching and business loss resulted from the reduction of crimes prevented by the used of ranches.

3.5 Grazing Reserves

Table 1 also revealed that 10 sampled papers equivalent to 35.7 per cent recommended the creation and use of grazing reserves and cattle routes as an antidote to herders and farmers conflict in Nigeria. Though similar to ranching (confinement of livestock to a fenced area while feeds are sourced externally), grazing reserves is a gazetted and demarcated green field preserved for livestock rearing and production. It was first created in Nigeria in 1965 following enactment of “Grazing Reserve Law of Northern Nigeria” and subsequently incorporated in the second, third and fourth National Development Plans that lasted from 1970 to 1985 (Babalobi, 2016). However, the increased population of cattle to approximately 19.5 million in 2016 (Premium Times, 2016) calls for the introduction of new grazing reserves if the movement of cattle must be curtailed to reduce or eliminate constant violent clashes and loss of lives. The business implications of additional grazing reserves are similar to the ones already discussed under ranching.

3.6 Security Measures (Policing, Arrest and Prosecution)

Data analysis, as presented in Table 1, reveals that proactive and reactive security measures by the government represent the four-most recommended solution to the herder-farmers feud (8 or 28.6%). The proactive measures in corporate intelligence gathering, adequate training of policemen, adequate tooling and motivation of the security personnel. The reactive measures include the prompt response by the police and supportive security agencies to distress calls from either the cultivators or pastoralists, making arrests, and ensuring appropriate prosecution of the suspected attackers.

3.7 Aids for the Victim Farmers and Herders

Five (17.9%) out of all recommendations are in favour of providing relief to people displaced by herders-farmers conflict. This can reduce the tendency for reprisal attacks, check the outbreak of diseases and encourage resettlement for a new productive life.

3.8 Creation of Cattle Routes

Table 1 reveals that four papers equivalent to 14.3 per cent supported the creation of new cattle routes. Grazing routes are gazetted and demarcated cattle road networks aimed at stopping trace-pass by land-users and reducing friction between farmers and herders. Cattle grazing routes may be de-emphasized in the long run if the ranches are eventually accepted by all and sundry. Meanwhile, preservation of the exiting grazing routes and creation of new ones will not only allow free flow of traffic on the highways but reduce the rate of accidents caused by cattle intruders. In business, time is money.
3.9 Other Remedies

Other unpopular but important recommendations in the sampled studies are the amendment of right to land use acts (10.7%) and encouragement of sedentary settlement for herdiers (10.7%). Furthermore, each of the following nine different recommendations (anti-open grazing law, regulated grazing and farming, cattle census and tracking, securing national borders, mitigating drought and desertification, creating grazing guards, providing water reservoir, total resistance to herdiers’ land use, and integrating herdiers-farmers in policymaking) have equal frequency count of two, which is equivalent to 7.4 per cent. The business implication of government proactive approach to security threats, securing national borders, registering cattle with trackers, and creating grazing guards is that the farming business environment, as well as investors’ confidence, will be greatly enhanced which can translate to greater livestock and crop production. The recommendations with one per cent in this group are unbiased media report, fodder bank, stock reserves, cattle rearing tax, and insurance cover for farmers and herdiers.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts of the federal and state governments towards finding a lasting solution to the herdiers-farmers conflict have not been generally accepted apparently for religious, ethnic and political differences. Thus, this study examined the recommendations of studies conducted by the academics for the purpose of identifying the objective-based solution to the seemingly unending crisis. Arising from the findings above, the study concludes that application of conflict resolution mechanism, mass orientation and education, and confinement of cattle rearing to ranches and grazing-reserves remain the viable solutions to the lingering problems associated with herdiers-farmers violent clashes.

This paper recommends that:

i. Both formal method (police/courts) and informal method (traditional leaders) of settling disputes between herdiers and farmers should be explored to restore normalcy in every crisis situation relating to herding and farming.

ii. Mass orientation and education for herdiers and farmers on the existing no-open grazing laws in some state, grazing routes, and grazing reserves across the country should be strengthened to encourage obedience to the law and discourage the habit of trespassing by either party, which is often the cause of the feud.

iii. Ranches should be created and leased to herdiers as a mark of non-ownership of land in order to address the fear of land usurpation in the long-run. In addition, the ranches proposed by the Federal Government of Nigeria should be piloted in some affected states to be able to appraise its real potentials rather than totally rejecting it without subjecting it to any form of experimentation. The paper also recommends that the opponents of ranches should fear nothing but fear itself, because “there is no compulsion in (Islam) religion” (Quran 2:256) – meaning that no Muslim is allowed to force anybody to accept the Islamic faith. Nwobi (2018) affirmed that ranching option and grazing reserves are rejected in the south-east zone because of “the fear of being colonized by the northerners”.

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REFERENCES


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Appendix

Frequency Distribution on the Recommended Solution to Herders-Farmers’ Conflict in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended solution to Herders-Farmers’ conflict</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist farmers with modern farming tools and techniques to restore soil fertility (resettlement interventions)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adeshina and Adisa (2010), Dimelu et al. (2016), Ukaeke et al. (2017), Nwobi (2018), Iwuowu (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary settlements for nomadic herders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aliyu (2015), Ogbeide (2017), Okeke (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-open grazing bill/law</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Umoh (2017), Iwuowu (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulating grazing and farming activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Okoli and Atele (2014), Omokhoa and Okuchukwu (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle census and tracking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nwobi (2018), Umoh (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herders-farmers integration in policymaking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Aliyu (2015), Ukaeke et al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total resistance to herders’ land acquisition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Umoh (2017), Nwobi (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating and training grazing guards and state police</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ogo-Oluwa (2017), Eje et al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing national boarders against</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>International Crisis Group (2017), Ogo-Oluwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign herders and Strengthening regional cooperation</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Shehu (2017)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbiased media report</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gefu and Kolawole (n.d.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fodder bank (stock reserve)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Idowu (2017)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle rearing tax</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance cover for farmers</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(Idowu 2017)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:** N= 28

**Source:** Content Survey, 2018