

Local Authority Institutions and Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict Management in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The study made an assessment of the role of local authority institutions on herdsmen-farmers land use conflict management in Nigeria. The population for the study was all registered farmers and Fulani tribe residents in Benue State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 500 respondents out of the population. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The instrument was validated by two experts in Test and Measurement. Data from 500 completed questionnaires was subjected to PPMC analysis. The findings showed that concluded that the roles and the strategies adopted by the local authority institutions on herders-farmers land use conflict management in Nigeria is significant. The study recommended that capacity building through education pertaining to laws and regulations guiding the sustainable land use are recommended to land tribunals, especially at ward and village levels to improve their performance in land conflict mitigation. This will contribute to reduce the number of cases related to land directed to the district level and minimize the possibility of occurrence of chaos in the earlier stage.

Keywords: Authority; Institutions; Herders; Farmers; Conflict

Introduction:

Crisis is inevitable as long as we live together, especially in a multi-ethnic, cultural and religious community like Nigeria. However, violence leaves us with various forms of retardation and underdevelopment resulting from the destruction of lives, farmland and properties worth millions of naira. The menaces of Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict have been on the increase in some Nigerian cities in recent years the last two decades Ilufoye, (2009). Akpan, Effiong, Otong and Nseobot, (2018) was right in their assertion that most of these conflicts are generally regarded as ethno-religious bigotry and antagonism and there is need for constant dialogue between government and the concerned groups involved in the crisis and exchange ideas. This

we know will foster unity and peace co-existence among the different users of land in Nigerian society.

In the words of Kassam (2014), conflicts in most part of Nigeria especially the Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash are largely uncalled for. Farmers can no longer farm peacefully because of Fulani herdsmen. These Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash have pitched Christians and Muslims against each other. The conflict has had devastating effects on inter-group relationships especially in North central and some part of North east of the geopolitical zone of the country to mention but few. Apart from the loss of lives, farmlands, food produce and properties, it has profound influence on residential relationships, leading to new trends in the polarization of communities. This is evident in a physical manifestation of mono religious areas in Nasarawa and Benue States, with Christians and Muslims living in dominant religious clusters Eyekpemi, (2016).

The fundamental cause of the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria lies in their competition for natural resources. Herders and farmers compete for land and water, with the former seeking these resources for the benefit of their cattle and the latter interested in using them for the cultivation of crops. This competition has turned aggressive in recent decades due to increasing scarcity of the resources, a phenomenon that has been alluded to as a direct effect of climate change, 45 per cent of the land mass in Africa is desertified, and as a result of reduced land mass available for farming and grazing, violent conflicts tend to erupt between farmers and herdsmen in their pursuit of space. Desertification and drought in Northern Nigeria, Abugu and Onuba (2015) point out, are the major reason why Fulani herders are forced to migrate down to other regions, especially the southern part, of the country. Abass (2012) adds that decrease in annual rainfall and shortening of the wet season are contributory factors to the itinerancy of Fulani herders toward the middle belt and southern region of the country. Odoh and Chigozie (2012) conclude that while resource scarcity may be the immediate cause of the conflict between herders and sedentary farmers in Nigeria, climate change constitutes the remote cause. Homer-Dixon (1998) in Akpan et. al. (2018) environmental scarcities contribute to violent conflict in many developing nations. In Nigeria, the conflict between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers is a leading resource-use conflict.

Farmland and grazing route encroachment readily incite clashes between herdsmen and farmers. Farmers confront herders when cattle stray into their farmlands and destroy their crops. Cases of such confrontations whereby herders react with violence are rife. Abass (2012) avers that over 60 per cent of reported cases of the herders-farmers conflict occur during the dry season. Meanwhile, Olayoku (2014) affirms that, resultant from the incursion of livestock on farmlands, clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria assume greater intensity during planting and harvest periods. Conversely, herdsmen also feel aggrieved when they discover that portions of land that had hitherto served them as grazing routes have been taken over by farmers for cultivation. By virtue of their nomadic movement, Fulani herdsmen are outsiders in any farming community they temporarily settle. Hence, they are considered the “landless group” by the community farmers (the “landed group”) who claim the right to land use and ownership (Shettima & Tar, 2008).

According to Blench (2010), around the colonial era, there were mutual understanding and agreement between Fulani leaders and local community authorities on routes Fulani herdsmen could lead their cattle through for grazing, and local farmers distant themselves from farming on those routes. There were established committees, Blench confirms, that intervene and resolve issues before they degenerated into violence. But this system began to collapse when farmers started planting on those routes because they “increasingly felt they owned the land across which the cattle passed”, and as a result, “cattle migrating southward increasingly wandered into newly created farms”; consequently, leading to disputes and breakdown of trust between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers (Blench, 2010).

Land is probably the most important resource needed by people for their day-to-day existence. All human livelihoods and activities are directly or indirectly dependent on land at varying thresholds. But land connotes different meanings to the various user groups. For instance, builders, manufacturers, fishermen, miners, hunters and farmers have different specifications in their requirement for land for their production/services. Peasant-herdsmen land use conflict remains to be the most serious resource-use conflict in Nigeria (Hirschler, 2004). Land conflicts often have extensive negative effects on economic, social, spatial and ecological development. This is especially true in developing countries and countries in transition, where land market institutions are weak, opportunities for economic gain by illegal action are widespread and many poor people lack access to land. Land conflicts can have disastrous effects on individuals as well as on groups and even entire nation. Many conflicts that are perceived to be clashes between different cultures are actually conflicts over land and related natural resources (Wehrmann, 2008).

Farmer-herder conflicts in Africa are often presented as being driven by "environmental scarcity." The problem is fuelled by the fact that land does not expand while people and other living organisms relying on it for survival, keep on increasing, putting on an immense pressure on the limited available resources, resulting in land conflicts (Hirschler, 2004). In countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania just but to mention a few, the two groups have for a long time found themselves in deadly clashes, most of which resulted in the loss of lives, destruction of property and turning the areas into war zones, as they try to clinch the right to use the land (Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2009; Fasona and Omojola, 2005; Jones-Casey and Knox, 2011).

In Nigeria, farmer-herdsmen conflict has remained the most preponderant resource use conflict (Ajuwon, 2004; Fasona and Omojola, 2005). The necessity to provide food of crop and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever growing demands, has led to both “intensification and intensification” of land use (Nyong and Fiki, 2005). The competition between these two agricultural land user-groups, however, has often times turned into serious overt and covert manifestation of hostilities and social friction in many parts of Nigeria.

The roles and importance of local authority institutions can never be over emphasis seeing to the fact that, over the it has play a strategic and centre role conflict resolution of the land users in Nigeria, and there are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Orji, & Olali, 2010). The essence of these institutions is but not limited to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people

especially that which involve herdsmen and farmers Nigeria. The traditional institutions employed different strategies to conflict management as provided by the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, Edict of State which they are bounded and the bye-law of their community to management outcome of conflict. Traditional institutions in Nigeria employ different conflict management formations to solve the issues with herdsmen like, the adoption of mediation method, According to Gates, (2011), negotiation is a dialogue between two or more people or parties, intended to reach an understanding, resolve point of difference, or gain advantage in outcome of dialogue, to produce an agreement upon courses of action, to bargain for individual or collective advantage, to craft outcomes to satisfy various interests of two people/parties involved in negotiation process. Negotiation is a process where each party involved in negotiating tries to gain an advantage for themselves by the end of the process. Negotiation is intended to aim at compromise. Negotiation is a key approach to the peaceful resolution of dispute and conflicts that may arise between the parties. It is also within the reach and control of parties like communication and collaboration because there are no third parties involved. Thus, negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between at least two parties who are faced with a conflict situation or dispute. Both parties come to the realization that they have a problem, and both are aware that by talking to each other, they can find a solution to the problem. The benefits of compromised solution, it is believed to outweigh the losses arising from refusal to negotiate. In negotiation, there must be communication between two or more people intended to gain understanding, to produce agreement, to bargain between individual involved in a conflict or dispute. Negotiation typically takes place during the early stages of conflict when communication between parties is cordial and good or at the de-escalation point when communication has been restored (Chikwe, 2011).

Also, collaborative conflict resolution strategy is adopted by traditional institution in the management of herdsmen farmers' conflict in our society, this approach is often described and seen as win-win scenario. Both sides creatively work towards achieving the goals and desired outcomes of all parties involved. The collaboration style is appropriate when the concerns are complex and a creative or novel synthesis of ideas is required. Thompson (2009) was right in his assertion that the downside of this approach is that the process of collaborating mandates sincere efforts and synergy by all parties that (is herdsmen and their leaders and farmers and as well as their leaders) involved and it may require a lot of time to reach a consensus.

The two groups are competing over land resources including areas for grazing, water, and arable land for crop cultivation. The conflicts are the result of rapid population growth and use of poor practices in farming and livestock production. The situation becomes worse when there is higher impact led by climate change. The certain part of the country especially the northern region of the country has for so long been affected by severe drought which constantly leads to scramble for meager water bodies and animal feed.

In the traditional setting, conflicts were solved by traditional institutions like the counselors, chiefs, villages heads, elders, title men etc. whereas today, conflict management is as a result of increased interdependence among actors and complexity of issues that underlie the interests leading to conflict which under rates the role played by the traditional leaders in conflict management. Conflict management refers to the management of conflicts by which parties of a conflict come together to solve their conflict or differences Makumi, (2006). Traditional

institutions have long been involved in mediation by creating a balance in the process of mediation and tribal disputes and communal clash and in some cases led in restoring peace and reconciliation ventures. Conflict management practice is a part of well social system which has been proven over time to be efficient in reconciliation since it improves social relationships by restoring balance, settling disputes and managing conflict either inter intra conflict. Conflict management involves a healing process which should involve all stakeholders to rebuild the social harmony that was lost during the conflict. Traditional institutions conflict resolution mechanisms still prevail at the grass root level.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

THE ECO-VIOLENCE THEORY

The theory was developed in 1999 by Homer-Dixon. The theory is useful to understand the rising conflicts between farmers and herdsmen. Homer-Dixon focuses on population variables. He views population pressure as closely linked to the potential scarcity of renewable resources. While he argues that resource scarcities can cause violent intrastate conflict under unfavourable conditions. Homer-Dixon (1999) asserts that large populations in many developing countries are highly dependent on four key environmental resources that are fundamental to their livelihood: fresh water, cropland, forests. Scarcity or shrinking of these resources as a result of misuse, over-use or degradation, population growth, climate change and resource access lead to competition over the scarce ecological resources among groups, and may under certain circumstances trigger off conflicts.

The theory assumes that competition over scarce ecological resources engenders violent conflict. This trend has been aggravated in contemporary times owing to the impacts of climate change, which has exacerbated ecological scarcity across the world (Onuoha, 2007). The theory contends that conflict have been driven by the desperation of the affected groups to protect and advance their livelihood interests in the context of ever shrinking ecological space, characterized by resource-scarcity, a livelihood crisis, population explosion, and resource competition. The theorist argued that resource scarcity forces groups in society into resource capture or competition, which in turn causes ecological marginalization and violent conflicts among groups.

The theory believes that population growth, a decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, and resource access act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests etc. (Adeoye, 2017). The desperate quest for survival by groups in a competitive and resource-scarce ecological sphere is likely to precipitate violent conflict. The rising wave of militancy among the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria is principally driven by a dire struggle for survival in an environment that is competitive and hostile to their collective sustainable livelihood. Eco-violence theory is based on the assumption that competition over scarce ecological resources engenders violent conflicts.

In relation to this study, farmer-herdsmen conflicts have been driven by the scarcity of land, and competition between the farmers and herdsmen to ensure their viability in the area. The scarcity of land is due to the degradation and shrinking ecological space, human and cattle population explosion, and resource depletion. Therefore, the farmers need the land for cultivation, while the

herdsmen need the land for grazing and rearing of cattle. The ultimate cause of the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen lie in the general degradation of resources and the increased competition for access and resources capture. Critics have argued that though the fundamental theoretical assumption of the theory is that resource scarcity is the product of an insufficient supply that forces some sector of a society into a condition of deprivation, the nature of the farmer-herdsmen conflicts in the North Central. Despite the criticisms, the theory of eco-violence offers insights into the nature and dynamics of the herdsmen/farmers conflicts in Nigeria.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted which enabled the researchers to collect and analyze data from a sample of the entire population without any manipulations. The population for the study was all registered farmers and Fulani tribe residents in Benue State. The sample consisted of 250 farmers and 250 respondents from Fulani tribe selected from affected Local Government areas in Benue State, Nigeria via purposive sampling technique. A well-constructed and self-developed questionnaire titled “the role of local authority institutions on herders-farmers land use conflict management questionnaire” was used to gather the information needed in this study. The questionnaire was divided into three sections namely section A, B and C. Section A sought for the personal data of respondents, Section elicited information on the independent and dependent variables. Likert 4 – point rating scale was adopted to rate response options which are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The face and content validity was ascertained by giving the designed questionnaire to experts of Tests and Measurement for vetting before distributing it to the respondents. The data generated through the instrument were analyzed using the descriptive statistics to answer the research questions while the hypotheses was tested using inferential statistics of t-test analysis. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Objective of the Study

- To examine the conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict

Research Question

- What is the relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict

Hypothesis

- There is no significant relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict?

DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analyses and Results

Table 1: Analysis of respondents Demographic Variables

Sex	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents
Male	313	62.6
Female	187	37.4
Total	500	100
Age		
20 – 25	73	14.6
26 – 30	89	17.8
31 – 35	67	13.4
36 – 40	79	15.8
41 – Above	192	38.4
Total	500	100
Marital Status		
Single	78	15.6
Married	131	26.2
Divorced	89	17.8
Widow/Widowers	202	40.4
Total	500	100
Educational Attainment		
Primary education	278	55.6
Secondary education	134	26.8
Tertiary education	88	17.6
Total	500	100

Table 1 shows that three hundred and three (313) respondents representing 62.6% of the sample population were male while one hundred and eight seven (187) respondents representing 37.4% of the population were female. The age distribution of the respondents shows that seventy three (73) respondents representing 14.6% of the sample were between the age bracket of 20 – 25 years, eighty nine (89) respondents representing 17.8% were between the age bracket of 26 – 30 years, sixty seven of the respondents representing 13.4% were 31 – 35 years, also seventy nine (79)

respondents representing 15.8% of the sample were between the age limit of 36 – 40 years and one hundred and ninety two (192) respondents representing 38.4% were within the age limit of 41 and above years. The marital status of the respondents shows that seventy eight (78) respondents representing 15.6% of the sample were single, one hundred and thirty one (131) respondents representing 26.2% of the sample were married, only eighty nine (89) respondents representing 17.8% of the sample were divorced as well as only two hundred and two (202) respondents representing 40.4% were widow/widowers. Educational attainment of the respondents shows that two hundred and seventy eight (278) respondents representing 55.6% of the sample had primary education, one hundred and thirty-four (134) respondents representing 26.8% had secondary education while eighty eight (88) respondents representing 17.6% had tertiary education.

Research Question One

What is the relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict?

Table 2
Descriptive analysis of the relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict

Variable	N	Arithmetic mean	Expected mean	R	Remarks
herders-farmers conflict		16.02	12.50		
	500			*80	*strong to perfect Relationship
conflict resolution strategies		6.29	5.00		

Source: Field Survey, (2019)

Table 2 presents the result of the descriptive analysis of the relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict. The two variables were observed to have strong perfect relationship at 0.80%. The arithmetic mean for herder-farmers conflict (16.02) was also observed to be higher than the expected mean score of 12.50. In addition to that the arithmetic mean for conflict resolution strategies (6.29) was observed to be higher than the expected mean score of 5.00. The result therefore means that conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict. Pearson Product Moment

Correlation analysis was then used to analyze the data in order to determine the relationship between the two variables

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict.

Variable	Σx	Σx^2	Σxy	r
	Σy	Σy^2	25887	0.80*
conflict resolution strategies (x)	4054	65844		
herders-farmers conflict (y)	1591	10273		

***Significant at 0.025 level; df =498; N =500; critical r-value = 0.086**

Table 3 presents the obtained r-value as (0.80). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical r-value (0.086) at 0.025 levels with 498 degree of freedom. The obtained r-value (0.80) was greater than the critical r-value (0.086). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant conflict resolution strategies adopted by local authority institutions in the management of herders-farmers conflict

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis of the study, it was concluded that, the roles and the conflict management strategies like mediating, collaborating, etc. adopted by local traditional institutions in curbing and management the conflict menace of herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria is significant.

Recommendations

Enhancement of good governance in local authorities to ensure trustfulness and wise decision making in conflict management resolutions. Elimination of any form of corruption in the local tradition institutions will improve the performance of conflict management. Trustfulness of local authority institutions encourages the community members to use local authorities as their means of conflict resolution instead of taking illegal action against the conflicting side.

The government should implement land use planning. This is more useful in the allocation of agricultural land for farmers, grazing land for herders’, open spaces, and areas for institutions and land for other uses. And also Local traditional institution should to arrange regular joint meetings involving herdsmen and farmers to identify problems causing the conflict and agree on

possible strategic remedies. This we know will reduce the occurrence of conflicts among and between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria.

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