

Panacea for herdsman–farmers conflicts in Nigeria

Abstract

Nigeria is the most populous black man inhabited country in Gulf of Guinea; Western coast of Africa with estimated population of over two hundred million people, Nigeria has diverse climatic changing condition ranging from more arid northern part to humid climatic rainforest weather in southern Nigeria. Over three hundred and fifty ethnic groups are found within Nigeria each with different languages and cultures, the country share boundary with Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Guinea on its southern border, Republic of Benin on its western side, Republic of the Niger on the northern side and Republic of Cameroun and Republic of Chad on the eastern side.

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Funmilayo Doherty-Odueko

Fellowship student, college of veterinary surgeon, Nigeria

Correspondence: Funmilayo Doherty-Odueko,
Fellowship student, college of veterinary surgeon, Nigeria,
+2348023747533, Email funmilaydueko@yahoo.com

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Introduction

Agriculture is very important in Nigeria economic employing about seventy percent of Nigeria workforce and providing forty one percent of her total gross domestic product [GDP] in 1999. Food crops and cash crop farmers and Fulani herdsman [livestock farmers] are two important group of people in Nigeria agriculture sectors, they are important in producing food crops, cash crops and livestock for Nigeria teeming population and some of their products are export outside the country to earn foreign exchange.

According to FAO IN 1987 Nigeria has total livestock population of;

Cattles 12.2million,

Sheep 13.2millions,

Goat 26million,

Pig 1.3million,

Donkey 700,000,

Horse 250,000,

Camel 18,000,

Fisheries 700,000 tons,

Poultry too.

Since 1987 when these data were first collected, man and animal population had both increased greatly but Nigeria geographical landmark remain the same. Herdsmen and farmers are two important group of people in Nigeria agricultural sector their activities are so interwoven, interrelated and they are co-dependent on each and both depends on the country limited land mass as fixed asset for their productions. They are the bedrock of the society and human economic needs and activities, they provide over 75% of food supply and other basic needs for Nigeria population and employed about 65% to 70% of able body men and women in Nigeria so that frequency misunderstanding and conflicts are inevitable. Incessant herdsman and farmer conflicts had been a serious impediment to progress of Nigeria agriculture industry and other agricultural products, by- products and services related or dependent industrial economic activities that relies on agricultural products and by- products for their final products and services. These herdsman are made up of mainly Fulani pastoralist whom are majorly nomadic livestock agriculturalist they reared cattle, sheep and goat majorly, they are found predominantly in the northern Nigeria and most are Muslim with few Islamic militias extremist

among them but majority of pastoral Fulani are peaceful nomads co-existing peacefully with their host community and The farmers are majorly food crops and cash crops farmers found all over the country but predominantly in the southern Nigeria with lustrous evergreen vegetation and more humid rainforest that supports the growth of abundance food crops and cash crops farming. They consist of mixed population of Christians, Muslims and Traditional worshippers. Their conflicts had been a recurrence evil menace in livestock, food and cash crop agricultural industry with attendant loss of lives and properties, therefore Nigeria government can no longer afford not to look critically at foundational principal problems causing these perennial conflicts.^{1,2}

Reasons why herdsman–farmers conflicts cannot be allow to continue in Nigeria

Herdsmen – farmers conflicts leads to unnecessary loss of innocent lives affecting mostly innocent children, aged women and vulnerable pregnant women. Herdsmen–farmer conflicts normally leads to more deadly communal clashes and war sacking severally villages with attendant loss of lives and properties, early in year 2018 over 76 people are killed in one village in Benue state, Nigeria and shortly after that, another 50 villages were burnt down in reprisal attack with attendant loss of lives and properties in retaliation for first attacked in the same Benue state in 2018 reprisal attack of herdsman- farmer conflicts. Herdsmen –farmer conflicts leads to breakdown of peace and order in the society. Although most times Fulani herdsman –farmer conflicts start as misunderstanding between food crop farmer and nomadic herdsman animals destroying their crops, most end up been fought during reprisal attacks as religion conflicts between Christians and Muslims because the Fulani are predominantly Muslims, so you see innocent farmers been killed because they are perceived to be Muslim or Christian. Leads to serious economic loss, apart from economic losses due to direct effect of herdsman – farmers conflicts there are other indirect economic loss that can be attributed to herdsman farmer clashes, all commercial activities in surrounding villages where herdsman – farmers conflicts are affected because people will not be able to come out to buy or sell their wares in the open market because of insecurities and government imposed curfew restricting movement of people to curtail the spread of ongoing conflicts or prevent further reprisal attacks from taken places. Farmer cannot farm during crisis; this can leads to food shortage and famine during next season. Herdsmen cannot herds their livestock to look for food for this animal this can lead to malnutrition and make this animal easily prone to infections, diseases, starvation and death. 85% of food consumption by Nigeria over 200 million people are produced locally by this group

of people, incessant conflicts disrupt their production and distract them from their occupational activities. Herdsmen –farmer conflict leads to scarcity of food in the urban area and major cities because market women cannot travel to affected villages to procure and resell in the cities. Other industries relying on farms product or animal by-products for their production cannot produce because farmer cannot farm during crisis. Herdsmen –farmer crisis tears at the foundation of our humanity and society as a whole. As we can see the effects of herdsmen –farmers' conflicts transcend the primarily affected villages has multipliers effects in urban area and other economic activities. To be able to proffer effective solutions to herdsmen –farmer crisis let us look at what are the causes of these conflicts.

Factors that lead to herdsmen –farmers conflicts

Limited land resources

Land is a fixed asset that is crucial to any economic activities, Nigeria human and animal population has increased greatly from what they were in 1987 but Nigeria geographical land mass is fixed. Farmer needs more land to farm to meet the increasing food security challenge of increasing human and animal population, herdsmen animal population has greatly increase due to improve access to better veterinary medical facilities and animal health extension workers , this increased animal population need more grazing area to feed. Both animal and human population has increased greatly but available farm land has reduce drastically due to constant urbanization and increasing human encroachment on previously available land mass for farming and animal grazing. So there is increase pressure on the little available land for animal grazing and producing of food for human consumption, fallow land previous reserved for animal grazing has been sold for other human needs like industrialization and urban growth housing needs, since animal are living things too and they must feed, herdsmen are forced to graze need farmers farm in search of food for these animals this something leads to animal eating and destroying people farms.

Increase human population

Nigeria human and animal population has increased greatly from what it was in 1960 when she first got independent to what it is now. Nigeria land boundary has remained fixed and reduced drastically from what it was in 1960. So also land reserved for food farming and animal grazing reserved has reduce drastically.

Deforestation

Increased human population and industrialization leads to increase urbanization and continuous encroachment on forest reserve, reserved principally for animal grazing and food farming being use for housing and industries.

Also continuous cutting of trees leads to increase desertification and reduce animal grazing reserve

Language and culture barrier

Due to different climatic environmental condition between the northern more arid part of Nigeria with limited rainfall but more animal population and southern more humid lustrous vegetation more food and cash crop farmers with lesser animal population. There is a lot of trans- human movement of both man and animal been shepherd from north to south to look for food for these animals. Where there is a

total different in language spoken and a lot of cultural differences. So what is considered normal for host community is a taboo for herdsmen and vice versa, so there are frequent conflicts due to communication barriers as a result of differences in languages and culture.

Injustices

When nomadic Fulani herd their cattle to people food crop farm and destroy or ate it, when these infractions are reported to the police, the police are perceived to be biased and the destroyed farm land are not paid for and the farmer compensated adequately for their labor so farmer poisoned their farm with herbicides and other poisonous chemicals killing the live stocks whenever they graze on these plants, this has led to serious conflicts in the past too. Also when cattle are rustled by scoundrels in host villages, police don't ensure offenders are brought to book.

Cattle rustling

Fulani herdsmen are so emotionally attached to their animal that they don't mind going to war to avenge perceived wrong done to one cattle. Cattle rustling had been one of the major causes of persistent herdsmen – farmer conflicts.

Free access to illegal arms

Due to ongoing war and insecurities in our neighboring surrounding countries nomadic Fulani during their international trans-boundary movement in search of food for their animals has access to acquire expensive and sophisticated firearms easily in surrounding countries black market cheaply, these illegal firearms are brought into Nigeria via our porous borders that are not manned by customs and immigration officers.

Porous border

Most of the herdsmen are nomadic Fulani from surrounding countries that enter Nigeria illegally due to our porous unmanned borders with Benin, Chad, Niger and Cameroun, with access to acquired illegal firearm freely, they come in and go out of the country easily with their activities unchecked, they have been accused of being the perpetrators of some of heinous crimes attributed to herdsmen, they can commit any atrocities because their activities are not properly monitored.

Slow respond of law enforcement officers to reported crisis

Most time law enforcement agencies are absent in the villages when crisis started and take weeks before they respond to reported crisis in remote villages, so farmers and herdsmen rather than makes official report takes law into their own hands and avenge themselves of any infractions because of slow response of law enforcement officers or agencies in getting to crisis riddance area.

Panacea to herdsmen–farmer's conflicts

Panacea means adaptable realistic workable solution to herdsmen –farmer conflicts.

Solutions to incessant herdsmen–farmer conflicts

Strict and prudent management of limited land resources to be able to provide food and housing for man and also provide enough grazing land for food for Nigeria large livestock population. Farmers can be encouraged to sell their harvested food plant as hay to herdsmen instead

of burning them to provide food for animal. Police and other law enforcement agencies should respond swiftly and rapidly to reported infractions whenever farmer or herdsman report any infraction on their farms or animals. There should be police post in all villages to report break down of law and order too. Full demilitarization of all armed herdsman, use don't need AK47 to shepherd cattle instead they can be encourage to use shepherd dogs likes German shepherd, Russian shepherd or Belgium Milionis dogs, these dog are readily available in Nigeria they have acclimatized to our environment, they are good and better guards for cattle and other livestock, they can provide better security for the herd because while the herdsman are sleeping with their family these dogs are with the herd twenty–four hours guarding ,them and providing better security and preventing these cattle from been stolen by cattle rustlers or defend them against wild predators. Prompt and immediate respond to any reported communal clashes or infraction before it escalates to further loss of lives and properties. Government should have zero tolerant to farmer –herdsman avenging perceived wrong. Encourage religion leaders to preach more uniting sermons among their congregation. Increase security at all our porous unmanned borders to check and monitor all incoming foreigners and outgoing one Government should make all foreign herdsman grazing within Nigeria border to register at their point of entry and monitor their activities within our border while they are grazing. Government can plant improve pasture in conquered unoccupied Sambisa forest for herdsman to graze their livestock, this will reduce the stress of these animals and their shepherds in travelling long distant to look for food, Provide better food and nutrition for these animals since the pasture are artificially planted they will consist of balance nutritious plants, improve the animals live and their welfare, save the animals

from all danger associated with bring the animals from north to south, improve their health and increase their productivity also the animal will not be expose to Tse-tse flies that transmit Trypanosomiasis and other vectors of ruminant diseases that are common in the southern Nigeria but absent in the north where this animals are coming from, reduce incident of cattle rustling by rustlers, these animals will not be exposed to predators and other wild carnivorous animals that are common in the southern Nigeria rainforest, this will also discourage Boko Haram insurgents from using the place as their based of operation. This will reduce pressure on land for foods and housing for man and animal in the south. That vast unoccupied forest will be put to all round human activities, leading to rapidly development of the area, encourage people to move into the area and occupy it, this will not allow bandits and terrorist to have access to it again.

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None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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