



A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Usman Ahmad Karofi

Department of Sociology, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Abstract

Fulani herdsmen and farmers' conflicts have remained the most predominately resource-use conflict in Northern Nigeria. The necessity to provide food and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever-growing demands, has led to extensive use of land. The competition between these two agricultural land user-groups, however, has often times turned into serious concealed and unconcealed manifestation of hostilities and social friction in the northern part of Nigeria. The conflicts have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized, with reverberating repercussions nationwide. This study describes the traditional relationship between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in the incessant resource conflicts witnessed in northern Nigeria State and how it affects livelihood security of those involved and resource sustainability for the local communities. The study concluded that there is the need to identify the causes, repercussions and proffered resolution of the critical issues that are at the roots of the conflict.

Keywords: Conflict, Pastoralist, Farmers, Northern Nigeria and Remedies

Introduction

Fulani indisputably represent a significant component of the Nigerian economy. They constitute the major breeders of cattle, the main source of meat, the most available and cheap source of animal proteins consumed by Nigerians. The Fulani own over 90% of the nation's livestock population which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP and 3.2% of the nation's GDP (Eniola, 2007). Furthermore, the contribution of the Fulani to the local food chain and national food security cannot be over stressed.

The Fulani, with their dominance in the Sahel region, are the best known and most numerous of all the pastoral groups in Nigeria. The traditional and unique Fulani encampment (ruga) consisting of temporary structures made of stalks, closely knit family members and livestock is the natural habitat of the orthodox Fulde settlement (Eniola, 2007).

As the state cannot regulate the mutual coexistence of its citizens in the harmonious sharing of the competed resources, the parties may have to resolve to struggle among themselves with no retreat, no surrender and for

the survival of the fittest. The failure of the state, for example to resolve the 'settler/ 'indigene' identity and the inherent struggles over resources can be adduced to have brought dangerous dimensions of economic and political elements in the Fulani pastoralists and farmers' conflicts (Fiki and Lee, 2004: 24-48).

Issues bordering on local community security, safety and development are paramount in the enhancement of governance and increase or decrease in agitation for control of resources as well as encroachment of the rights of others. All these have implications for survival and struggles between or amongst communities. Again, local resistance to state policies is central in resource-use through strengthening of community capacity to manage resources and deal with conflicts.

Since insecurity gives ways to conspiracy, conflicts are inevitable. The object of security is to primarily advance the well-being and possessions of the persons involved; while the survival of the state is secondary. In other words, when the character and nature of the state do not seem to protect the security of the citizens, their freedom and choices completely shift away from the state to individuals or groups as the foci of security. The



expansion of Fulde pastoralism into Nigeria is unknown. It is suggested that Fulde began to settle on the plains of Bauchi Emirate transcending onto the grassland of the Jos Plateau (Morrison, 1982, cited in Blench, 2010:4). Conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have existed since the beginnings of agriculture and increased or decreased in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental and other factors. For example, increases in the herd sizes, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compelled the pastoralists to seek for more pastures beyond their limited range.

Climate change has constituted a great threat by putting great pressures on the land and thus provoking conflicts between them. However, improvements in human health and population have enhanced a much greater pressure on land. Since the 1980s therefore, there has been a marked expansion of cultivation of the fadama (reverie and valley-bottom) areas. This means that both the farmers and pastoralists have engaged in fierce struggles for access to such valuable lands which, more often than not, result in increased conflicts and violence.

Conceptualizing conflict

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Michael defines conflict as an activity which takes place when individuals or groups wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations. It may also be defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.

Manifestations of conflict behavior starts with disagreement, and followed by verbal abuse and interference. Conflicts can occur between individuals, groups and organizations. Examples are quarrels between friends or family members, labor strikes, competitive sports, or war. Conflict is the most vigorous form of social interaction and evokes the deepest passions and strongest

emotions which can disrupt social unity. It is a costly way of settling disputes. Conflict causes social disorder, chaos and confusion.

War as a form of conflict often destroys the lives and properties of countless individuals, it brings incalculable damage and immeasurable suffering to a number of people. Conflict does a lot of psychological and moral damage also. It spoils the mental peace of man which can result in stress related illness. Conflict in conflict resolution is therefore not only the presence of violence but a necessary evil. Conflict is thus a fundamental human and social trait. A completely conflict free harmonious society is impossible. The working definition of conflict in this paper is that conflict means as a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties (opponents/rivals) are not only to desire values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

Conflict between Farmers and Pastoral Fulani in Northern Nigeria.

The types of conflicts for survival between the Fulani pastoralists and farmers in North-eastern Nigeria vary in form and intensity from one community to another. Social and economic factors continue to provoke violent conflicts among the Fulani pastoralists and farmers. The intensity and variations of the conflicts largely depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the herdsman graze.

These conflicts have constituted serious threats to the means of survival and livelihoods of both the farmers and pastoralists and what both groups are tenaciously protecting and projecting. The conflicts, through provocative claims over access rights to farmland and cattle routes have become ubiquitous and seem to have defied solutions (Abbas, 2010).

An instance in Northern Nigeria can be Yobe State. The state which shares common boundaries with Borno State to the East and South East, Jigawa state to the North-west, Bauchi and Gombe State to the South West. It also shares an international border with the Republic of Niger



stretching to over 323 kilometers to the North. Major towns in the state include Damaturu (state capital), Potiskum, Bade, Gaidam and Nguru (PEFA, 2010). Yobe State is located in the tropic with definite wet and dry seasons. The wet and dry seasons are characterized with frequent dry continental Northeast trade wind which originated from Sahara Desert, and the moist maritime South-westerly monsoon which originated from the Atlantic Ocean (Mshelia, 1986). The rainy season which spans between May and October with peak of rainfall in August, and the dry season between November and April. The mean annual rainfall is about 500mm with highest ambient temperature hovering over 40°C in the hotter Month of April and May. The average daily temperature ranges between 27-31°C. The vegetation of the State is characterized by sparse shrubs, grasses and trees such as *Acacia albida* (Gum Arabic shrub), *Acacia nilotica* (Gum Arabic shrub), *Pennisetum maximum* (Guinea grass), *Cenchrus ciliaris* (Buffel grass), *Cynodon dactylon* (Star grass), *Pennisetum purpureum* (Elephant grass), *Andropogon gayanus* (gamba grass), *Adansonia digitata* (baobab tree), *Butyrospermum parkii* (Shea tree, Kadanya), and *Azadirachta indica* (Neem tree). The nature of seasonal grasses of this area dry up completely during the dry season.

Agriculture is the main economy of the people of Yobe State, even though there are other mineral resources present. The sustainability of agriculture in Yobe economy requires a strategic balance in the ecological and socio-economic activities as well as political considerations. In this region, rainfall occurs seasonally with a pronounced dry season. The seasonal rainfall and prolonged dry season bring about dynamics in the ecosystem and sour relationships resulting in a sharp division between the Fulani herders and farmers. The implications of the conflicts have brought about high degrees of loss of human, animal and material resources.

North-east Pastoral corridors are replete with conflicts of survival between farmers and Fulani herders. In November, 2012 as harvest season

approaches, Yobe State government organized an interactive stakeholders' forum between the leadership of Fulani herders and farmers in the State in order to prevent the repeated annual conflicts between the two parties. The meeting, according to report, was necessitated by the looming conflict between herders and farmers over complaints that some migrant Fulani herders were going into farms with their cattle thereby destroying the crops (Nigerian Pilot, 22 November, 2012). In 2009, hundreds of herders were expelled from Demboa local government area of Borno State.

However, the invasion of Tipto, Kisa, Samne, Bangi, Wurke and Gure communities in Lamurde local government area of Adamawa State by cattle rearers with guns left unconfirmed number of dead and injured persons with over 2,000 rendered homeless due to the destruction of villages (New Nigerian, February 1, 2010). The political economy of land use in Nigeria is inherently biased against pastoral Fulani interest within the system of resource use.

The cattle herding system in Nigeria Cattle herding is dominated almost entirely by the Fulani tribe in Nigeria. Iro (1994) gave a vivid documentation of the herding system of the Fulani in Nigeria, and most of what is presented here under was derived from his account. According to him, herding is a daunting task, and contrary to widespread belief, it is not the delight of the Fulani- they herd not as a matter of choice but as a necessity. Iro (1994) found that about 75% of the sampled nomadic pastoralists maintained that cattle herding is not only toilsome, but also becoming increasingly strenuous. The optimum Fulani cattle herd size lies between 80 and 100. With a preponderance of female over male at ratio 4:1, the Fulani maintains a balanced functional species composition that is made up of 'beefers, milkers, breeders, carriers, and stock beautifiers'. Iro (1994) also stated that the slow-maturing Sokoto Red cow and the lyre-horned White Fulani cattle are the mainstay of the pastoral Fulani holdings. White and Wickens (1976, cited by Iro, 1994) disclosed that the White Fulani, though less hardy, has higher milk and beef yield compared with the Sokoto Red. Cattle belonging to



individual family members are usually herded together, with male family members assuming automatic rights to all cattle, making it difficult to determine cattle ownership by female family members.

Fulani men possessing less than twenty cows are seen as poor, while women having six cows are considered as rich (Iro, 1994). Women, however, own most of the small ruminants and all of the poultry (Swinton, 1987 in Iro, 1994). Though most Fulani men herd cattle well pass the middle age, herding is dominated by the youths, while decisions about grazing are mainly made by the elderly family members. The Fulani herdsman makes excellent use of sign language, the cane and verbal command to drive the animals, with faster animals occupying the front rows. During migration, a typical herd consisting of several family units move in a column of up to five meters wide and two kilometers long. And by the time it passes any given point, 'everything that stands at that point is destroyed' (Fricke, 1979; and Vengroff, 1980 as cited in Iro, 1994).

Describing the annual herding cycle of the Fulani, Iro (1994) stated that the herding season begins with southward movement of the herd and along rivers and stream valleys from October to December – marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season. January to February is the hamattan season is characterized by longer grazing hours, herd splitting, and more frequent visits to stable water sources.

These thus increase southward movement of the herds. The months of March and April are usually the toughest for the herdsman and his cattle, as it is the hottest period in the grazing calendar. Indeed, he now herds his cattle only in the evenings and nights (Riesman, 1977, as cited in Iro, 1994). May and June signify the end of dry season and vegetation begins to appear. This also marks the beginning of northward movement of cattle herds. From this period up till September, which is the peak of rainy season, though characterized by cattle-breeding, more milk production and shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production.

Farmer-herdsmen conflict therefore becomes prevalent during this period. Arable cropping System in Nigeria According to Lambrecht and Ladan (2004), 75 percent of today's food comes from 12 arable crops and five animal species, with just three arable crops (rice, maize and wheat) accounting for about 60 percent of the calories and proteins obtained from plants. Worldwide, arable crops enjoy remarkable dominance, playing significant roles in the socio-economic lives of both rural and urban peoples. Arable crops include a wide range of annual crops of primary importance such as maize, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava, cowpea, wheat, soybeans, melon, groundnut, yam, vegetables and so on.

In Nigeria, production of arable crops is essentially the prominent feature of agricultural activities. Indeed, almost all farmers in Nigeria cultivate one or more arable crops for food and income. According to Fayinka (2004), Nigerian agricultural production is dominated by rural-based small scale arable crop producers, who account for about 80% of total food requirement. In a study on production of some major arable crops in Nigeria, revealed that the average farm size in arable crop production was 4.58 ha. Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, (2005) reported that 36.25 and 82.41 million hectares of arable crops were cultivated in 2004 and 2005 respectively. The CBN report further stated that production of arable crops increased from 88.3million tones in 2001 to 111.8 million tons in 2005. By far the most widely grown arable crop in Nigeria is maize, accounting for 6.6 and 7.5 million hectares in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Maize is grown almost in every part of the country. Most arable crop farmers rely on rainfall to produce, with farming activities normally beginning as soon as the onset of rains. Apart from being veritable sources of income for farmers; arable crops are processed into other useful items at industrial and household levels.

Areas that have good grazing fields as they are located on the plain land of fertile soils of the tropic. The natural and physical endowment in terms of semi-arid vegetation and water resources is most responsible for the choice of the areas for grazing. These villages where grazing occurred



follow by fights, the damages by both the herdsman and farmers reported. over-grazing and unsustainable land for farming; theft of cattle and goats; destruction of crops; hardening of soils rendering them infertile and difficult when tilling for crop growing; physical fight with machetes and sticks; pollution of drinkable water; destruction of reservoirs and source of drinkable water; burning of rangelands, fadama and houses; and damages to irrigational facilities. The destruction has direct impact on the peoples' livelihood as their economic activities are tied to these environmental resources like water, land (soil), and vegetation (herbs and food crops).

In some of the villages, sources of water for domestic purposes have either been destroyed or polluted. The resultant effect of this is poverty. This therefore, informs the reaction of the affected communities to the invasion of the herdsman. The Fulani herdsman saw these resources as common resources, to which they could be either lay claim or possessed and therefore refused to be restrained. This reaction generated into conflicts, with its effects on economic and human activities, as well as the sustainability of environment in terms of socio-political and economic development.

Causes of Conflicts between Farmer and Pastoral Fulanis

The major causes of herdsman-farmers' conflicts are enumerated as follows from the above incidences

1. Destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructure) by the herdsman themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers
2. Burning of rangelands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herdsman.
3. Increasing rate of cattle theft which, is often accompanied by violence.
4. Antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsman could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for

resources.

In support of above claim, Ingawa, Ega, and Erhabor (1999) reported that the key underlying causes of farmer-herdsman conflict in Nigeria are:

1. Decline in internal discipline and social cohesion, as the adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods, and the authority of the traditional rulers is breaking down. This is exacerbated by increased rent seeking of the formal and traditional authorities in managing resource access.
2. Particularly severe on the traditional trek routes, which become favorite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas? Within the fadama areas, this is exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the crop plots, which makes prevention of animals straying in the crop plots difficult
3. Inadequacy of grazing resources, as increasing crop cultivation (and increasing commercialization of the crop-residues) and poor management of the existing grazing reserves have resulted in a significant reduction in available livestock feed resources, in particular in the Northern States.
4. Moreover the high value crops introduced by NFDLP (tomatoes and onions) produce almost no crop-residues for livestock feeding.
5. Finally, the regulation that twenty percent of the fadama would need to be set aside for grazing (National Agricultural Policy, 1988) has not been adhered to.

Repercussions of the Conflicts

The repercussions on both sides ranged from physical, economic, to socio-psychological. the socio-psychological repercussions of conflict on the quality of family lives of both farmers and herdsman are as Adekunle and Adisa (2010), Johnson and Johnson (2002) and Daniels (2006) stated in their separate studies that family instability and intense frustration are negative



consequences of job related conflicts. According to Potter (1995), it is hardly possible to find a frustrated person at work that is energized at home. These effects were, however, found to be more pronounced among the farmers than herdsman, probably due to the fact that farmers suffered more losses than herdsman.

Socio-economic repercussions go with the fact that reduction in quality and quantity of family food intake was found to be a consequence of herdsman- farmer conflict, particularly among farmers, might be an indication of food insecurity in rural communities. Although farmers had greater rating than herdsman in all items, there is no significant differences in the effects of conflict on family life. Other aspects are: sleepless nights, reduced interest in family affairs, anger, job abandonment, and staying more away from home.

Whatever the causes of Fulani herdsman-farmers' conflicts are, it is evident that the conflicts have been of great negative repercussion.

1. These range from economic repercussions such as loss of income/resources/yield.
2. Physical such as home/farm destruction, bodily injury or death of family member.
3. Socio-psychological repercussions such as emotional exhaustion
4. The social, economic and political tensions created as a result of numerous escalations of violent conflicts have raised fundamental national questions for the survival of the Nigerian state. The failure of the state to manage and resolve such conflicts has put a question mark on the suitability or relevance of the federal structure to the Nigerian reality.

Likely Remedies between Farmers and Pastoral Fulani in Northern Nigeria.

For the continuous harmonious coexistence and security between Fulani herdsman and farmers the following way out should be adhere to:

1. Government must make policies that are designed to enhance the Fulani herdsman by ensuring that they secure rights to land use in order to reduce insecurity and mitigate the spate of conflicts. This will, among other

things, bring about peaceful coexistence between the Fulani herdsman and host communities. This also enhances the security of the cattle, to access grazing space or resources without pouncing on farmers' crops.

2. Law on the grazing reserve should be amended and improve upon.
3. For a sustainable peace to reign there must be a deliberate design to enlighten and mobilize the parties in conflict to understand the ecology and the resources available in the localities. This opens a window for interdependence and complementary among groups in the optimal use of the resources for collective benefit and equitable access.
4. The State Government must make herdsman keep to agreed routes and farmers avoid farming across them with stern government policy and strict compliance.
5. Factors associated with the conflicts must be properly appreciated and managed by appropriate institutions involved in the conflict resolutions. Hence, local governance in the conflict must not be overlooked. Traditional strategies may be combined with the emerging ones. This relates on how communities create local structures and networks for the purposes of engagement, participation, inclusiveness, mutual partnership and transformation of the environment through equity in resource utilization.
6. Structures must be created for and by communities generate networks and feedback by ensuring that people relate to each other amicably for common use of resources and ensure a safety first principle in cattle grazing movements and pasture as well as crop production.

Conclusion

Periodical struggle for scarce ecosystem resources has degenerated into violent conflicts in Nigeria Northern State between Fulani herdsman and farmers. These conflicts have become more intense, widespread and destructive. Since most of the Fulani herdsman do not own or possess the



rights to land, they therefore depend absolutely on open land to feed their cattle, climax in intense pressure on land and incidence of conflicts.

Ecological, climate change and of course government policies on agriculture, especially the all-year fadama farming, are threats to herdsman access to pasture. However, additional farms acquired and encroachments of traditional cattle routes have drastically reduced the grazing space for the livestock to access pasture areas and water points. Furthermore, the use of police and courts to resolve conflicts between Fulani herdsman and farmers by government has been ineffective. This has contributed to the frequency of the clashes especially since early 1980s sequel to the democratic dispensation. All these have exacerbated chronic insecurity that have encouraged the conflicting parties to take responsibility for their own security and to defend themselves, which is a threat to the sustainability of the federation. The paper concludes that it is in the interest of the State to end the rhetoric on the demarcation of grazing land and take concrete steps to address the genuine needs of herdsman for availability of grazing land, resolve the re-occurring conflicts in the agricultural sector which currently provides employment. Indeed, this write concurred with Muhammad-Baba (1990:122) when he pointed out while writing on the sociological assessment of the impact of the 1804 Jihad of Pastoral Ful'be that...efforts to resolve problems confronting Ful'be today, attempt to stem the increasing tide of clashes between farmers and pastoralists, the desire to evolve viable livestock development strategies, etc., must be established on a sound conception and understanding of the dynamics of Ful'be pastoralism (including history) in Nigeria.

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