



CLIMATE CHANGE, MIGRATION AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA: PERSPECTIVES FROM FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICT IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

Climate change is characteristic weather of an area which includes temperature, rainfall, sunshine, wind, humidity et ce tera. Climate change is of global concern because of its impact on migration and security in different parts of the world. The effect of climate change is evident in Nigeria through increased flooding in the coastal parts of the country, continuous desertification and drought in the northern parts of the country, forcing herdsmen southward in search of permanent pasture to replace the pasture in the Sudan and Sahel Savanna. This is the reason for the series of clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the host communities. The paper is a theoretical discourse aimed at examining the nexus between climate change, migration and the attendant insecurity thereof. Using secondary data from the library, online resources, documentaries and case studies, it argues that migration of the herdsmen was triggered by the scourge of climate change, engendering conflicts in the receiving communities, thereby mounting pressure on the social system to develop new ideas to solve the attendant problems. These were explained through climate-migration theory, conflict theory and environmental-migration theory. The paper concludes that the call for ranches in the country in recent time was triggered by the escalation of farmers-herdsmen conflict in the country.

Keywords: Climate Change, Desertification, Migration, Security and Conflict.

Introduction

Human migration is the movement by humans from one place to another in search of better means of livelihood. This involves movement over long distances which could be voluntary or involuntary. Initially, nomadic movements were not regarded as migrations because the movement was seasonal. However, climate change with its effects such as drought, heat waves, storms and changing rainfall patterns result in population displacement as herdsmen clash with farming communities in a bid to find pastures and water for their cattle. Climate change refers to the gradual alteration in the pattern of the average weather condition of the earth as a result of the depletion of the Ozone layer and global warming. The phenomenon of climate change has been an issue of discourse among scholars and governments of different countries of the world. This is due to its environmental and social effects

on human existence, which the scientific community believe should be given serious attention. Based on this, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 developed a Framework for Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). The environmental and social effects of climate change were liable to stimulate social conflict of apocalyptic dimension in different parts of the world (Onyia, 2015).

Northwest Africa is characterized by climate change, migration, and security challenges. This region has long been known for labour migration, bringing workers from sub-Saharan Africa northward to the Mediterranean coastline and Europe. To make that land journey, migrants often cross the Sahel and Saharan region. The rising coastal sea level, desertification, drought, and the numerous other potential effects of climate



change have increased the number of migrants and make these routes more hazardous in the future. In addition to these challenges are ongoing security risks in the region, such as Nigeria's struggles with homegrown insurgents (Werz & Conley, 2012). The climate, migration, and security nexus is a key test case because it is likely to exacerbate all existing risk factors. Climate change alone poses a daunting challenge, no matter what steps the global community takes to mitigate carbon emissions, a warmer climate is inevitable. The effects are already being felt today and are projected to intensify as climate change worsens. All of the world's regions and nations are now experiencing some of the effects of this transformational challenge. In the 21st century, the world has seen substantial number of climate migrants, as many people have been displaced by the slow or sudden onset of climate change. Climate change has aggravated many existing migratory pressures around the world leading to increased number of sudden humanitarian crises in areas least able to cope with it (Frohlich, 2016).

The environmental effect of climate change is evident in the desertification of the Sudan and Sahel savannah region of Africa, forcing herdsmen who depend on the grassland for their means of livelihood, to migrate southward in search of pastures for their cattle. Also, there has been increase in temperature, erratic rainfall, storm and sea level rise which account for the increasing drought and desertification in the northern parts of Nigeria. (Onyia, 2015). Desertification is a process of conversion of some parts of the earth into deserts. One cannot categorically say that herdsmen in Nigeria were considered environmental refugees in 1964 when the Nigerian Grazing Reserve Act was established because it came into force before any scientific or policy framework was developed on environmental or climate change issues. Historical documents from this period show that the enactment of the Act was an attempt to improve access to pasture and reduce potential conflicts that might arise with existing communities as a result of pastoral migration. As such, it is evident that while the reasons for migration were not addressed, its effect on

national security and sovereignty was hugely important to the Nigerian government (Osunmuyiwa, 2016). Security can be conceived as protection against human and non-human threats to lives and property. However, climate change induced conflict between farming communities and herdsmen has been a continuous incident of cataclysmic consequences for the country as it has cost it a fortune in terms of socio-political, economic stability and peaceful co-existence. This paper aims at examining the nexus between climate change and migration in Nigeria; the extent to which climate change has affected socio-economic activities in Nigeria; the rate of farmers/herdsmen conflict in Benue state; and security implications of climate change induced migration.

Climate Change Phenomenon in Nigeria

Climate change is one of the global social problems that is being felt by both the developed and developing countries to which some countries allot huge amount of money to tackle its effects on their citizenry. The effects of climate change have been felt in varying degrees in different countries but Nigeria has been dubbed climate change hot spot likely to experience a drastic shift in weather in the 21st century by the Intergovernmental Panel on climate change (Odoh & Chilaka, 2012). In Nigeria, climate change has had a devastating effect on the socio-economic activities of Nigerians and land degradation especially in the agricultural sector of the country. According to Idowu, Ayoola, Opele and Ikenweiwe (2011), the effect of climate change in Nigeria is felt in terms of increasing flooding which leads to loss of houses, loss of portable water due to incursion of saltwater into the wells, loss of farmlands, public health hazard, livestock mortalities and human displacement; Ocean surge destroying farmland, damaging soil fertility, causing landslide, mud accumulation and salinity of irrigated farmland; public health in terms of the spread of diseases; storm surge leading to the destruction of housing units and farmsteads; loss of forest resources in terms of drought, deforestation and bush fire; and food security. The effect of climate change is also evident in the Niger-Delta as about 15 – 40% of the lowland, mangrove and freshwater forest area



of the Niger-Delta was lost between 1987 and 2011 while the Lake Chad continues to shrink resulting in the increasing aridity of the Sahel region (Daggash, 2018). Over forty years ago, Lake Chad covered an area of 40,000 sq. km but only covers an area of 13,000 sq.km currently (Beyioku, 2016) and the entire north has been devastated by increasing desertification while incessant flooding has been the bane of the coastal parts of the country. Moreover, climate change affects economic activities. Excessive rainfall destroys arable land, increases the growth rate of weeds, disrupts crop cultivation and leads to greater loss at harvest while reduction in rainfall reduces pastures and water available in streams, rivers, dams and irrigation for farming and livestock production purposes which in turn affects food production in the country (Ogbuabor & Egwuchukwu, 2017).

Theoretical Underpinnings

The climate-migration conflict has become popular among scholars as climate change impels movement away from impacted regions resulting in conflicts with populations receiving migrants especially farmers. Climate variability brings negative impacts such as drought, heat waves, floods, changing rainfall patterns etc. These events could result in population displacement as people migrate due to damage to land and water resources. Fundamental to climate-migration theory is the postulation that changes in the environment is a trigger that encourages people to leave their homes as environmental stressors make such environments undesirable. Land degradation for instance impacts economic opportunity and forces out-migration (Burrows and Kinney, 2016). This situation plays out in the Sahel as rising desertification forces herdsmen to migrate southwards pitching them against farming communities. The Benue people of the middle belt considered the food basket of the nation have had a series of conflicts with herdsmen resulting in loss of lives, destruction of farm crops, arson and rape. The South-east and South-west of Nigeria have suffered similar fate resulting in casualties, rape, kidnappings and death of cattle.

Herdsmen and farmers conflict may prevent the ossification of the social system by exerting pressure for innovation and creativity (Sorel cited in Coser, 1957). According to him a social system needs conflict to renew its energies and revitalize its creative forces. Conflict within and between groups generates new norms, new institutions that will revitalize the creative vitality of the social system. For (Coser, 1957), once old forms of traditional and unitary integration are broken down the clash of conflicting interests and values bring forth new forms of unification and integration. In Nigeria, the myriad of conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have broken down hitherto forms of integration and cooperation between farming communities and herdsmen. This calls for new forms of thinking and cooperation which could crystallize into new institutions such as the concept of ranching and new farming methods to reduce the pressure on available land. The creeping desertification occasioned by climate change and the rise in population have reduced both grazing and farm lands resulting in tensions and conflicts between farmers and herdsmen hence the need for new forms of cattle rearing, animal husbandry and new farming methods.

The environmental migration theory assumes that environmental degradation is a major factor that forces people to migrate from one geographical location to another. This can possibly result in conflict between migrants and indigenes of the host location in four ways. First, the arrival and increasing population of environmental migrants in an area can mount pressure on the economic and natural resources which both natives and migrants compete for. The influx of herdsmen into the middle-belt region of Nigeria has sparked competition between them and the resident farmers for arable land which constitutes both economic and natural resources in the region. Second, when environmental migrants and natives belong to different ethnic groups, the natives may view the influx of the migrants as a threat to their ethnic identity. This may lead to incessant ethnic conflicts which threaten security of lives and property. The farmer/herdsmen conflict in the middle-belt in Nigeria has been



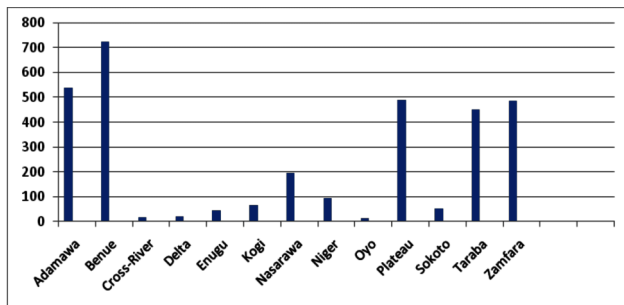
seen by many people as ethnic cleansing. They belong to different ethnic groups and there has been a competition for domination by the herdsmen and the ethnic groups that constitute the host communities. There has been series of clashes between herders' settlements and the host communities in the middle-belt region at an alarming rate in recent time. Third, mutual suspicion between the government or leaders of the place of origin of environmental migrants and leaders of the receiving communities of maltreatment of their people may trigger conflict and insecurity in the host communities. In recent time, the leaders of the herding groups in Nigeria have continuously justified herdsmen attacks on farming communities on the ground of maltreatment of their people and cattle rustling and that preventing the herdsmen from grazing anywhere in the country is a deprivation of human right. Fourth, conflict between environmental migrants and natives can follow existing fault lines. For instance, herdsmen and farmers in the middle-belt region of Nigeria compete for land which is a common means of survival resulting in insecurity in the region. Whatever the case, environmental degradation, particularly desertification resulting from climate change in the Sahel region forced the herdsmen to migrate in large number southward, especially to the middle-belt to take advantage of the abundant vegetation to keep their hope of survival alive. The herdsmen's quest for grazing land in the middle-belt has resulted in series of violent attacks that heighten insecurity in the region formerly characterised by ethnic and tribal conflicts.

Climate Change and Migration in Nigeria

Climate change has led to environmental degradation which forced many people in the much-affected areas to move to other parts of the country to seek better environmental conditions suitable for the type of economic activities they are directly involved in (Fatile & Adejobi, 2012). The increasing aridity and desertification of the Sahel region of the country has forced many herdsmen to migrate southward as the grazing land continues to reduce by 3,500 sq. km. annually (Dimelu, Salifu, Enwelu & Igbokwe, 2017; Sotunde, 2016). According to Odoh &

Chilaka (2012), about 35% of land cultivated over 50 years ago have become deserts in 11 of northern states including Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Yobe, Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa. This has affected the livelihood of about 15 million herders in the north. This situation is not unconnected with the continuous reduction in the amount of rainfall resulting in continuous dryness of the area and shrinking pastures for grazing, forcing herdsmen and farmers alike to migrate to the middle-belt where there are abundant pastures (Abugu & Onuba, 2015). It has been estimated that over 700 million people have migrated internally from their original place due to several factors, one of which is the issue of climate change (Werz & Conley, 2012). Historically, herdsmen normally migrate from water sources to grazing land in response to drought and cope with climatic stress but climate change has triggered massive movement of herders southward especially to the middle-belt and the southern parts of the country in the past decades (Fatile & Adejobi, 2012). The Sahel drought of the 1960s that led to the loss of traditional grazing land contributed a lot to the migration of herders southward and the continuous intensity of the effects of climate change further encouraged the migration of herdsmen in the country (Sotunde, 2016). This has resulted into serious conflicts between the migrant herdsmen and their host farming communities owing from the competition that ensued over arable land which is the main economic resource for both groups. The incessant violent conflict between the herdsmen and the farmers took a cataclysmic nature when the herdsmen took to sophisticated weapons to claim lands from their host communities killing about 1229 people in 2014 alone and accounted for more death in the country than Boko Haram in 2016 (Gbaradi, 2018). The militant nature of the herdsmen led to the killing of about 6,000 people in Nigeria between January 2016 and October 2018 (Ojekunle, 2018). As a result of this crisis, the Global Terrorism Index rated the Fulani herdsmen as the fourth deadliest militant group in the world. Moreover, the chart below shows death toll in the 14 most affected states in Nigeria between 2016 and 2018.

Figure 1: Death toll in 14 most affected states by farmers/herdsmen conflict in Nigeria (2016-2018)



Source: Adapted from Ojekunle (2018)

The figure 1 above shows that 726 people died in the farmer/herdsmen conflict between 2016 and 2018 which was the highest in the country within the period while Oyo state had the lowest number of deaths not more than 13. This shows that Benue state is the most affected by the insurgence of the herdsmen and hence the focus of this paper.

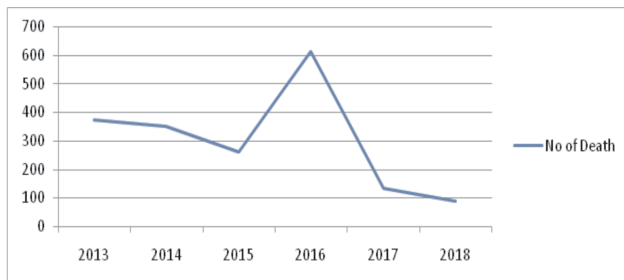
Conflict in the Benue Valley

The farmers in Benue and the migrant herders had lived together peacefully before 1980. The invitation given by the colonial masters to people from other parts of the country to come to the Benue valley during their operation on tin mines encouraged the Fulani herdsmen to come into the valley to graze (Sotunde, 2016). However, the influx of the herdsmen into the valley as a result of increasing effects of climate change on grazing land in the core north has been responsible for the conflict between farmers and the herders for decades. For instance, it has been estimated that the influx of herders into Benue from Nasarawa has increased by 3% to 4% annually while about 1.5% to 2% leave the valley annually which by implication shows that there is an increasing number of cattle and herders in the valley to compete with farmers for the available land which is the basic economic resource of the people (Ajaero et.al, 2015). The cause of the conflict has often been tied to herders grazing on farmlands destroying crops planted by the farmers while the herdsmen on the other hand complain about cattle rusting by farmers (Ajibo et. al, 2018). The relationship between the farmers and herdsmen in the past was a symbiotic relationship where

farmers got manure for their farms from cow dung and herdsmen got plants from the farmers to feed their animals; meanwhile, disagreement were usually settled amicably without resort to violence (Kennedy, 2018). But in recent years, the conflict between these groups has turned violent to an apocalyptic proportion. For instance, it was estimated that about 2,000 people were killed in farmers/herdsmen conflict in 2016 while about 6,000 farmers were killed in 2018 (Ningxin, 2018). Herdsmen in a bid to fight for their right to grazing on cultivated land have deployed sophisticated weapons including AK47 and chemical weapons not only on the farmers on the farms but also on communities that belong to the farmers (Kennedy, 2018). The way and manner the herdsmen carry out their attacks and reprisals on the farming community led to the listing of the herders as the 4th deadliest terrorist group in the world by the Global Terrorism Index behind ISIS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabab. The victims of the conflict are women, children, young and old members of the communities (Olusola, 2018). Consequent upon the incessant conflict in the Benue, tension and actual conflicts have ensued in other states where herdsmen are grazing as farmers have become wary and suspicious of the herdsmen while the herdsmen on the other hand have become so conscious of the negative label attached to herding among Nigerians. This triggered conflicts in states like Adamawa, Ekiti, Enugu, Zamfara, Ogun and Bayelsa states among others. As a result of the conflict, thousands of farmers have been killed by the herdsmen in Benue while on the other hand, thousands of cow and herdsmen have lost their lives with hundreds of thousands displaced. While many commentators have emphasized the ethnic dimension of the conflict in the Benue as a form of ethnic cleansing on the part of the Fulani, some commentators have focused on the religious dimension with the claim that the herdsmen who are predominantly Muslims are on a retaliatory mission owing to their defeat to the farmers (who are mainly Christians) during the incursion of the jihadist in Nigeria (Ajibo et.al, 2018; Olusola, 2018). However, many people have blamed the government and the security apparatuses for their inaction; allow the conflict to escalate to the

proportion it is today. To stem the tide of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Benue state, the state government promulgated an Anti-Grazing law which prohibits open grazing in the state as contained in Section 97 and Section 19(2) of the Penal Code of Benue state, 2017 (Ajiye, 2018). Despite this, the 'Myeti Allah' a Fulani association vowed to resist the implementation of the law. Nevertheless, the implementation of the law in the state seems to have reduced the numbers of violent attacks in the state. The timeline of the farmers/herdsmen's conflict provides an insight into the proportion of the conflict as presented in the figures below.

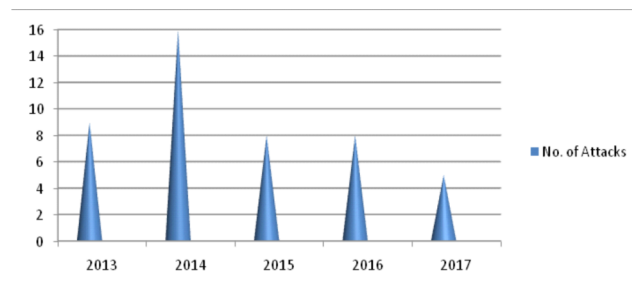
Figure 2: Death toll in Benue over farmers/herdsmen conflict (2013-2018)



Source: Adapted from Ajiye (2018) and CAN (2018)

Figure 2 above shows a slight fall in the number of deaths reported from 376 in 2013 to 352 in 2014 and a steady decline to 262 in 2015. But 2016 recorded a sharp rise in number of deaths to 614 with a sharp decline to 136 in 2017 and the lowest number in 2018. The sharp decline in 2017 may be as a result of greater efforts by the law enforcement agencies to deal with the insurgent herdsmen and the promulgation and implementation of anti-grazing law in Benue state. So, 2016 recorded the highest level of fatality in the period in Benue state. However, the number of attacks on farming communities by the insurgent herdsmen varied from year to year. This is revealed in the chart below.

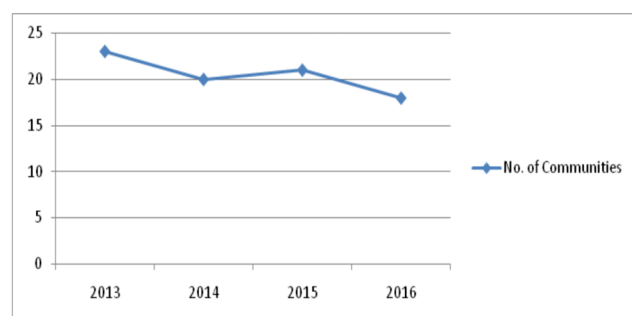
Figure 3: Number of Attacks on Farming Communities in Benue (2013-2017)



Source: Adapted from Ameh (2018)

The figure above shows that 9 major attacks were launched against farming communities in Benue in 2013. The number of attacks increased to 16 in 2014 and reduced to 8 in 2016 but further decreased to 5 in 2017. Despite the reduction in the number of attacks by half in 2016, the year had the highest fatalities as figure 2 shows. The rate of fatality in that year prompted the state government to take drastic legal steps to stem the tide of the attacks. The year also witnessed the greater outcry and agitation from people in the state and all over the country and beyond. Moreover, a number of farming communities were affected by the conflict and this is presented in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Number of Communities Affected by Farmers/Herdsman Conflicts in Benue (2013-2016)



Source: Adapted from Ameh (2018)

Security Implications

Loss of lives: Lives of men and women as well as children have been lost as earlier indicated in figures 1 and 2 above. Just within seven months in 2018, about 1,300 people have been killed in the



country over farmers/herdsmen conflict (Keghku, Alom & Fanafa, 2019). Lynching of herdsmen in some communities where they are seen as threat and consistent reprisal attacks by herdsmen on those communities are common leading to more loss of lives (Olusola, 2018). This is affecting the life expectancy of the country and exposing women and children to abuse and various security risks.

Loss of property and farmlands:

Farmers/herdsmen conflict in Nigeria has led to the destruction of property worth millions of naira in the past few years. Farms have been destroyed with the crops grown on them, irrigation facilities, reservoirs and sources of drinkable water have been destroyed while theft of cattle and goats has been on the increase as well as cattle rustling (Ajibo et.al, 2018).

Threat to food Security: Destruction of farmlands and killing of cattle has contributed to high cost of food in the country and the quality of food tend to be lower as some crops have been affected by chemical weapons used by herdsmen in the process of claiming land for grazing. The farmers/herdsmen conflict threatens the security of crops on the farms and also the cattle being reared aside human security.

Displacement: The conflict between farmers and herdsmen has led to the displacement of so many people from their place of origin to unknown destinations which offer them uncertainty in terms of livelihood and security. Increasing humanitarian crisis has rocked the country in recent years such that in 2017, about 2,500 farmers were displaced and rendered homeless in Adamawa state while over 100,000 people were displaced in Benue and Enugu states (Oli, Ibekwe & Nwankwo, 2018). This increases humanitarian crisis in the country as many of the displaced could not return home and are vulnerable to robbery, kidnapping, rape and all sorts of criminal incidences.

Criminal Activities: The magnitude of farmers/herdsmen conflict in the country creates opportunities for criminal groups to perpetrate

crimes such as kidnapping, robbery, human trafficking, theft, burglary and even terrorism amidst the crisis (Frohlich, 2016).

Negative image for the country: The incessant farmers/herdsmen conflict in the country has portrayed the country negatively in the international community. The country is now seen as one of the most dangerous places to live on earth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been established from the foregoing that climate change is here with us in Nigeria and that the effects are enormous to security of lives and property, resources and even food. Continuous desertification as a result of increasing temperature and reducing rainfall in the northern part of Nigeria, forced the herdsmen to migrate to the middle belt region of the country, and the southern regions, leading to increasing scramble for the limited resources. This situation has resulted in the escalation of conflicts between the host farmers and herdsmen in the regions that are already marred by ethnic and religious crises, leading to the recent debate over the idea of cattle ranch. To de-escalate the conflict situation, the following are hereby suggested.

1. There is a need for the re-forestation of the regions undergoing desertification through massive planting of climate resistant plants to reduce the effects of climate change induced insecurity.
2. The state governments in the northern part of the country should assist herdsmen in the development of cattle ranches where herdsmen can keep their cattle while they source for food for them.
3. The Federal, state and local governments should strengthen the law enforcement agencies to deal with arms proliferation in the country.
4. The government at all levels should develop a coping strategy to help those affected by climate change crisis.
5. The federal government should declare a state of emergency on climate change and convey a summit of experts in environmental science to find a means of



making the regions most affected by climate change habitable for the populace.

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