



Conflict Assessment Between Fulani herdsmen and Crop Farmers: Impact on Water and Food Security

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ABSTRACT

This review examines the complex relationships between water resources, agriculture, and conflict in Nigeria, highlighting the impacts of Fulani-herder and farmer disputes on sustainable water management and food security. While the crop farmers accused the herdsmen of destroying their crops and contaminating community waters, the herdsmen accused the crop farmers of denying them access to grazing lands which they need for grazing their cattle. The cause for concern is the invasion of farm areas by armed bandits under the guise of herdsmen, leading to the destruction of rural areas, displacement of rural farmers and the villagers resulting in insecurity and violence. The intensity of the menace is higher in Plateau, Benue, Nassarawa, Southern Kaduna, Zamfara and Taraba States. The menace is also felt in the Southwest with minimum security threats and loss of lives as compared to the North Central zones. The attendant consequences of these clashes are better imagined than described in communities where they occurred. This paper identifies remote and immediate causes of the clashes and provides recommendations and solutions that can be employed to end the clashes or reduce it to a bearable minimum. The paper argues that Fulani herdsmen have in several ways infringed on the privacy of the crop farmers leading to loss of lives and reduction in valuable food produced in these farms leading to increase in food prices as a result of scarcity. By implementing the proposed recommendations, Nigeria can work towards sustainable conflict resolution, ensuring the preservation of inland waters and the promotion of food security for all its citizens. Access to land is a major cause of conflicts. There is the need for the government to review the existing laws as it relates to accessibility to land by members of community. Government should ensure that there is equity and accessibility to arable and grazing land to avert constant conflict. There is need to create awareness on the difference between pasture and crop farm. Therefore, a peaceful coexistence between the crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen in order to create a greater lasting peace between the Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers who had hitherto lived in harmony and co-existed for many decades was emphasized.

Keywords: Conflict, Fulani herdsmen, Crop farmers, Inland waters, Food Security.

1 Introduction

Nigeria's growing population and climate variability intensify competition for water resources, while the Fulani-herder and farmer conflict undermines agricultural productivity and food availability. The Fulani is an ethnic group of the West African savannah. Some of them live in towns and cities, and engage in farming and trading. A large proportion of them are cattle herders. Through the series of events called the Fulani jihads, the Fulani conquered a greater part of the area that later became Northern Nigeria between 1804 and 1810 (Bamidele, 2019). Among the places they did not conquer



were many places in central Nigeria, in present-day Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa and Kogi states. In many of these places, in the words of Reuben Udo, ‘hill sites provided adequate refugee outposts for people fleeing from the onslaught of mounted Fulani warriors. The fate of other savannah areas in central Nigeria, especially those that lacked the protection of hills, was much worse. With the advantages of cavalry and unity, the Fulani routinely raided them for slaves. The frequency and depredations of Fulani slave raids helped to make central Nigeria, despite its vast farming lands, one of the sparsely populated regions of Nigeria’ (Ikelegbe, 2019, Ojo and Adeniyi, 2022)

Crops, livestock, water resources and other natural resources played key roles in the development, maintenance and projection of socio-economic strength of a society. The Fulani herdsman livelihood strategies had resulted in conflicts over the destruction of crops. The conflicts occur when Fulani herders move into non-Fulani farmlands with their cattle. This usually leads to the destruction of farmers’ crops. Thus, the herders provoke their victims to acts of resistance such as preventing entry into farms, killing or stealing cattle, or poisoning fields (Obasi, 2020.). In response, the herders wage deadly attacks on farming communities (Akungwa, 2020)

In Nigeria, grazing lands have barely been demarcated, and this large sector of agriculture always suffers compared to crop farming or fruit plantation (FAO, 1985). The latter two are mostly demarcated favourably for the fact that most people are sedentary and areas needed are small. The establishment of demarcated rangelands and passageways (cattle corridors) allow the livestock to access water points and pastures without causing damage to cropland (FAO, 2011). Pastoralists usually graze over areas outside farm lands, and these have been accepted to be the norm from time immemorial. Their movements are opportunistic and follow pasture and water resources in a pattern that varies seasonally or year-to-year according to availability of resources (FAO, 2011). The patterns of movement may be controlled by seasonal climate variations. However, increase in population, drying of waterholes, shifting in rainfall pattern leading to drought as a result of the changing climate affects both sectors of agriculture. At the same time, smaller and local agricultural production systems are becoming more and more integrated into the global economy, pushing up land values. These, coupled with the absence of good governance and the increase in level of poverty creates avenue for conflicts. Both customary and statutory land management systems are often not responding adequately to the tenure insecurity these changes bring. Government land policies and acquisitions often favour agricultural development, marginalizing traditional grazing routes. Ethnic and cultural differences between Fulani herdsman and sedentary farming communities further exacerbate tensions. Economic inequality and poverty also contribute to the conflict, as livestock and crop farming compete for dominance. Overgrazing and soil erosion compound environmental degradation, threatening livelihood. (Djire *et al.*, 2014, Olatunde and Adewoyin, 2017).

2 Statement of Problem

The conflict between Fulani herdsman and crop farmers in Nigeria has escalated in recent years, posing significant threats to inland waters and food security. This conflict stems from competition over resources such as grazing land and water sources, as well as cultural and religious differences. The consequences of this conflict are far-reaching; affecting not only the livelihoods of those directly involved but also the larger Nigerian society posing a significant threat to national security, food security, and environmental sustainability (Adibe *et al.*, 2020). The conflict has resulted in the destruction of farmlands and livestock, leading to food insecurity and displacement of communities (Adeleke *et al.*, 2019). Fulani herdsman have been accused of allowing their cattle to graze on crop farms, leading to the destruction of crops and farmlands (Akoro *et al.*, 2020, Osunade and Adeyemo, 2022). This has resulted in the pollution of inland waters due to the destruction of water sources and infrastructure (Adeleke *et al.*, 2019). Disruption of aquatic ecosystems and loss of biodiversity. Increased water scarcity for local communities due to competition for water resources. The resultant effect is the reduction of water quality due to increased sedimentation and pollution from animal waste. Erosion and loss of vegetation cover along riverbanks, leading to habitat degradation. Livestock waste and agricultural runoff have been identified as major sources of water pollution in Nigeria (Akoro *et al.*, 2020). This conflict has led to the displacement of communities, with many farmers and herders forced to flee their homes and livelihoods (Adibe *et al.*, 2020). This displacement has resulted in the loss of cultural heritage and traditional ways of life thereby resulting in



various negative consequences for inland waters and food security in Nigeria (Ikelegbe, 2019). The overgrazing of pasturelands by the herds has led to soil erosion, reduced water quality, and diminished vegetation cover, adversely affecting the ecosystems of rivers and lakes (Awoyemi & Adebayo, 2021). In addition, the destruction of crops by roaming cattle has caused significant economic losses for farmers, thereby threatening food security in the country and resulting in crop destruction and reduced agricultural productivity, loss of income and livelihood for farmers, exacerbating poverty levels. Increased food prices due to reduced supply. Insecurity and displacement of farming communities (Balogun, & Ogunbode, (2019). The conflict has resulted in food insecurity, with many communities unable to access nutritious food (Adeleke *et al.*, 2019). Food insecurity has severe consequences on human health, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly (Bamidele, 2019) which has resulted in the loss of lives and properties, with many farmers and herders killed or injured in the conflict (Akoro *et al.*, 2020). The loss of properties has also resulted in significant economic losses for both farmers and herders (Obasi, 2020). Several factors, including Land Scarcity have been identified as a major cause of the conflict, with many farmers and herders competing for limited land resources (Adeleke *et al.*, 2019). Ethnic and religious differences have also been identified as a cause of the conflict, with many farmers and herders belonging to different ethnic and religious groups (Adibe *et al.*, 2020). In addition, poor governance and lack of regulation have been identified as a major cause of the conflict, with many governments failing to address the root causes of the conflict (Akoro *et al.*, 2020).

2.1 Water Related Conflicts Between Fulani Herdsmen and Crop Farmers

Pasture and water conflicts have long been part of the socio-cultural pattern of the pastoral communities in Nigeria. The lands are traditional tribal grazing areas, such that migration in search of pasture and water by one tribe into areas that belong to other tribes often causes conflict between pastoralists. Besides, livestock movements into grazing lands that stretch into crop-growing areas also result in conflicts (Abdullahi, 2018). Over time however, pasture and water around the settled areas steadily decreases, leading to emaciation and loss of livestock. Traditionally, whenever scarcity of pasture and water or disease depleted a community's livestock, it often sought to replenish numbers through raiding or rustling (Eze, 2019).

Pastoralists in Nigeria are mainly transhumance in nature, and are dependent on livestock for their livelihood. Traditionally, they move seasonally from their home bases and drive their herds to places with pasture and water and come back to their homes in other seasons when pasture improves. Of all the livestock kept by the pastoralists, cattle are highly prized, others in order of importance includes sheep and goats. Because of the importance attached to cattle, there is a tendency to accumulate them even under unfavourable environmental conditions, often exerting a lot of pressure on the scarce resources, notably pasture and water (Ige & Olatunji, 2020). Inevitably, there is competition amongst pastoralists in the district for the available pasture resources, necessitating frequent livestock movements within the range in search of pasture and water (Ibrahim, 2019).

According to Okereke (2012) and Bello (2013), the 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, as people now see these conflicts as religious attacks. Recent studies conducted by Okereke (2012) and Kasarachi (2016) have shown that, serious conflict erupt between Fulani herdsmen and farmers leading to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers for fear of attack could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. The latest attacks by Fulani herdsmen is on the upsurge, with attacks happening in States like Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa and few cases of attack in other states in Nigeria. In recent times, the killings recorded by Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash has rampaged most communities displacing them of their farmlands and loss of their major source of livelihood (Ejere, 2020).

This is becoming unbearable with the Fulani herdsmen always having their ways leaving the farmers at their mercy (Adegbola, 2020). Herdsmen attribute the roots of the crisis to religious differences resulting in the killing of their cattle



while the farmers see the herdsmen as a threat to their crops and agricultural produce since the herdsmen allow their cows to feed on the farmer crops. Incidents often occur when Farmers retaliate against herdsmen for crop damage. Herdsmen's cattle encroach on farmlands, leading to confrontations. Ethnic or religious tensions escalate into violence; In addition, livestock and crop farming compete for economic dominance since Fulani herdsmen and sedentary farming communities have had distinct cultural practices and territorial claims. Desertification and drought force herdsmen to seek greener pastures, leading to encroachment on farmlands. Furthermore, expansion of agricultural land and urbanization encroach on traditional grazing routes and cattle corridors. International Crisis Group (2020)

This recent wave of violence in Nigeria as observed by Kasarachi (2016) has disrupted socioeconomic, religious and educational activities, political instability and threatened the national unity in Nigeria. These extra judiciary killings have forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety. Okereke (2012) asserts that this unfolding violence have become so alarming that there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is at a crossroad and gradually drifting to a conflict society. Equally begging for answers are the social issues of the rape of women, robbery and kidnapping with ultimate intent for ransom.

2.2 Danger of Rustling Cattle (Pastoralism) Into Farmlands

Rustling cattle into farm lands, a common practice in Pastoralism, poses significant risks to the environment, human health, and educational development. This nomadic practice facilitates the transmission of diseases from one area to another, as livestock can carry and spread pathogens (Majekodunmi *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, pastoralism often involves trespassing on private land, leading to conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, soil compaction, and reduced crop yields. Furthermore, pastoralists and their animals are exposed to various hazards, including harsh weather conditions, predators, and accidents. The constant movement also results in energy loss for both humans and animals, reducing the animals' weight and overall productivity. Most concerning is the impact on the educational development of pastoralist children, who are frequently, denied access to formal education due to their nomadic lifestyle. This perpetuates a cycle of low educational attainment and limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement. According to a study published in the Journal of Arid Environments, "the mobility associated with Pastoralism can limit children's access to education, healthcare, and other essential services" (Watson *et al.*, 2020). This underscores the need for alternative, more sustainable livestock management practices that balance economic and environmental considerations with social responsibilities.

2.3 Land use conflicts between Fulani Herdsmen issues and Crop Farmers

- a. **Crop damage:** This is widely identified as major cause of conflict between farmers and pastoralists. Farmers perceive this to be highest cause of conflicts while the pastoralists perceive it as insignificant in causing conflicts also; cattle enjoy crops better than grasses. Increase pressure on land: Inadequate grazing land area has promoted an increase in the destruction of crops (Johnson, 2018).
- b. **Lack of formal institutions for effective dialogue:** The lack of institutions for proper communication was identified as major barriers between the Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers to work together to resolve issues of concern that can lead to conflict in open and fair manner. At present, very few formal institutions exist to allow such discussion to take place. This contributes significantly to the misunderstanding that exists between the two groups. The rebuilding of Conflict Management resolution Committees have been found to be very beneficial especially where the traditional customs and local government are supporting the initiatives (Ogunbodede, 2021).
- c. **Changing Cultural Practices:** There are cultural pastoral practices that are changing and these changes are not adequately recognized and appreciated by the crop farmers for example, the modern herdsmen settle in different places, but their animals continue to migrate from one place to another. As a result, it is the younger



herdsmen and boys that now take control of cattle rather than the practice where the Fulani herdsmen migrate with the entire household. This new cultural change is being interpreted by the crop farmers as a deliberate act on the part of the herdsmen to destroy their crops and escape from their land and areas (Adibe, *et al* 2020).

- d. **Lack of development of grazing reserves:** To help address the problems of inadequate access to land, water, infrastructure and services and promote intensification of livestock production to avoid conflicts, problem of Grazing Reserves, inadequacy of water, soil compaction, the roles of law enforcement agencies and vigilante groups have contributed greatly in the remote causes of conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers thus; when law enforcement agents take side in emerging conflict between the farmer/herdsmen, relationship suffers. In the same way when youth carry out indiscriminate arrest of cattle rearers, unwarranted violence emerges (Akoro, *et al*, 2020).
- e. **Water:** This is usually a problem during the dry season, depending on the ponds and small stream; when animals are watered in these ponds and streams, they pollute the water, a practice that is viewed offensive by the crop farmers were not properly managed, such have resulted into violent confrontation (Adeyemo & Adetunji, 2019)
- f. **Soil Compaction as remote cause of conflict:** The problem of Cattle “Mashing” the ground was identified as a problem related to grazing of cattle on farmlands. This was of particular concern in areas of clay and clay/loam soils such as those found in the Fadama or Swampy areas. These fertile areas are the most productive soils for rice cultivation and other crops most adapted to soils with high moisture content (Akitunde, *et al*, 2017). Fadama soils remain wet and soft until February and grasses also remain green, therefore attracting cattle into the area. Farmer expressed their belief that allowing cattle onto Fadama while the soil is soft exacerbates soil compaction and makes the soil very hard to cultivate (Alabi, 2018). Thus, today, pastoralists in central Nigeria are deliberately prevented from grazing animals in many areas containing fresh grasses because of this belief. Not surprising, the pastoralists see this as a deliberate act to prevent their animals from feeding fat on the lush pasture. The outcome is usually conflict.

3 The Role of The State in Conflict Management and Resolution

The state has the monopoly of violence and the capacity to implore cohesion or diplomacy in resolving conflicts especially as they relate to pastoralists and crop farmers who have hitherto co-existed and share historical antecedents as major beneficiaries of their natural environments. Good governance help to de-escalate conflicts, diffuse tensions, and remove problems as they evolve through taking right decisions as at when due (Oyedepi, 2020, Ejere,, 2020). Fundamental to the above assertion by (Adeleke *et al*, 2019) is a huge possibility of locating an argument through actions and inaction of government in the escalating conflict which has created a new paradigm and has become a huge movement in North-Central Nigeria.

3.1 The Way Forward

The following are some of the strategies for ensuring peaceful cohesion between the Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers in the society:

1. **Land Management and Planning:** Strengthen land management and land use planning to allocate grazing reserves and protect farmlands.
2. **Dialogue and Conflict Resolution:** Promote dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers.
3. **Alternative Livelihoods:** Invest in alternative livelihood options for Fulani herdsmen to reduce their dependence on grazing.
4. **Sustainable Agriculture:** Implement sustainable agricultural practices to improve crop yields and environmental conservation.
5. **Enhanced Security:** Enhance security measures to protect farming communities and prevent violent clashes.



6. **Inter-Ethnic and Inter-Religious Dialogue:** Promote inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue to foster understanding and tolerance.
7. **International Support:** International organizations should provide support for conflict resolution and sustainable agriculture practices in Nigeria (Oyedeki, 2020).

Table 1: Reported damages and their consequences

Damages	Consequences
Destruction of crops	Loss of crop yields
Unsustainable and over grazing of vegetal resources: economy plants	Loss of economic plants
Destruction of major sources of domestic water	Pollution of drinking water
Hardening of soils, rendering them infertile and difficult when tilling for agricultural practices	Increased labour in pre-farming activities;
Destruction of ponds and fishery resources	Loss of soil fertility and Loss of fish resource

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The conflict between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers in Nigeria poses significant challenges to inland waters and food security. Addressing this conflict requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of the issue. By implementing the proposed recommendations, Nigeria can work towards sustainable conflict resolution, ensuring the preservation of inland waters and the promotion of food security for all its citizens. Access to land is a major cause of conflicts. There is the need for the government to review the existing laws as it relates to accessibility to land by members of community. This is very important for land resource sustainability in Nigeria because majority of its citizens require land for farming and grazing. Government should ensure that there is equity and accessibility to arable and grazing land to avert constant conflict. There are genuine concerns by discerning Nigerians on the need to review the existing constitution in the country. Government should play active role by way of legislation to restrict movement of Fulani herdsmen and prevents destruction to food crops. This will also reduce the chance of endangering these animals by human thereby reducing conflict in the process. Building and promoting the construction of Ranches, this will be fenced or demarcated and reserved for raising cattle, sheep, goats, etc. Government can also work on desert encroachment as a phenomenon that has pose serious threat in the core north thereby forcing most pastoralists to move to central Nigeria. This situation has been made worse by Global warming. There is also the need to conserve the energy and reduce the maltreatment of the animal through a launch, thereby preventing the transmission of animal's diseases from community to community. The need for lasting solution for the crisis is the essence through sustainable development.

The grazing reserve Act of 1965 has evidently failed and it is obsolete in terms of best practices across the world that restricts animals to well fenced ranches where such animals are provided with animal feed and medications. This act should be amended to modern best practices that are acceptable globally.



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