



Fulani-Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict in Nigeria: Implications for National Development

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Abstract

As the Federal Government is beginning to have respite over Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, another uprising has just raised its ugly head and this has to do with incessant Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict. The dimension the phenomenon has taken across the country is not only alarming but also worrisome to a discernable mind. This is in view of the fact that these conflicts have always taken the root of horrendous violence with considerable loss of lives and property on both sides. Using a library research approach and critical observation, the paper applies the Frustration and Aggression Theory to explain the roots and nature of Herdsmen and farmers conflict. It examines the socio-economic implications of the conflicts on the development of Nigeria and concludes by positing that without addressing this hydra-headed phenomenon, the task of national development will be very difficult to achieve. Suggestions are made among others that government should get to the roots of arms proliferation and confiscate illegal fire arms. No doubt, the huge fatalities associated with herdsmen and farmer's conflict is due to the sophisticated arms available to both herdsmen and farmers.

Keywords: National Development, Conflicts, Fulani Herdsmen & Farmers

Introduction

Conflict is a fact of life and we must live in this reality. It is indeed an integral aspect of social existence brought about by contradictions arising from differences in ideas, perceptions, goals and competition for acquisition of scarce resources. This lend credence to the statement credited to the Marxists in extant literature that to understand society is to understand social conflict (Segun, 2013). Thus, an ideal society is not noted for absence of conflict

but rather its ability to manage conflicting interests constructively so that it will not metamorphose into violence that will threaten the continued existence of such a society.

The history of humankind is replete with conflicts. We see nations taking up arms against one another because they are involved in one conflict or the other. Nigeria as a nation is not an exception. Since May 1999, when the country

transited to a democratic civilian rule, Nigeria has been a theatre of violent conflicts. Though there are varying figures; one source has it that right from 1999 to 2002, the country has witnessed over forty ethno-religious and communal clashes (Jega, 2003); while another source pegs it at fifty-three between May 1999 and May 2003 (Okechukwu, 2003). Regardless of the complete difference in execution and timing of such clashes and those perpetuated by the Boko Haram terrorists, the spatial dimension of these conflicts have not exonerated any geo-political zone free from this orgy of violence (Cinjel & Kachi, 2015). As the Federal Government is beginning to have a respite over the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, another uprising has just raised its ugly head and this has to do with the Fulani herdsmen and Farmers conflict across the country (Esan, 2016). The dimension the Fulani herdsmen and Farmers conflict has taken is not only alarming but also worrisome to a discernable mind. This is in view of the fact that these conflicts have always taken the root of horrendous violence with considerable loss of lives and property on both sides. This trend, if not checked is capable of not only derailing our democracy, but also the corporate existence of the Nigerian state.

It is in view of this looming disaster that this paper makes a modest attempt at unravelling the sources and implications of Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict on national development, as well as proffering some strategies for curtailing the hydra-headed phenomenon.

Conceptual Framework

This section clarifies the key concepts central to the discourse. The key concepts to be clarified are: *Conflict* and *National Development*.

(a) Conflict

There is a plethora of definitions on the concept of conflict from various scholars of different intellectual orientations with varying but interesting submissions. Notwithstanding how fluid the definition of conflict appears to be, an attempt will be made to articulate some definitions offered by many scholars on the subject. Coser's Definition of Conflict is said to be the most often quoted traditional definition of the concept. According to Coser (1956), conflict is "A struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are (usually) to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals." Arguing in the same vein, Okpaga (2002) sees conflicts as manifesting themselves in the struggle to acquire wealth and positions of power, influence and prestige. He therefore directs us to examine the role of individuals and community development organisations in fuelling these conflicts. According to him, these groups of people generate conflicts when their individual and corporate existence is threatened.

Ekanola (2004: 34) posits that "the term conflict embodies notion of strife, struggle, differences, and disagreement." It is indeed the struggle for mutually exclusive rewards or the use of incompatible means to achieve a goal. Horowitz (1985:101) sees conflict as "a struggle in which the aim is to get objective and simultaneously neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals." To Deutsch (1972:10) conflict exist "whenever incompatible activities occur; an action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures or in some ways makes the latter less likely to be effective."

Taking a projection from the above position, Rose (1993) submits that if disadvantaged groups and individuals refuse to consider open conflict, they deny

themselves what sometimes is their most effective means of bringing about needed change. Rose therefore saw nothing wrong in conflict; he saw it as a natural and inevitable human experience and as a critical mechanism by which goals and aspirations of individuals and groups are articulated; it is a channel for the development of a collective identity. What rose is trying to infer is that, without conflict, we cannot have change.

The foregoing suggests that conflict is a condition of disharmony within an interaction process. This usually comes about as a result of clash of interest between the parties involved in some form of relationship. Conflict is therefore an inevitable outcome of human dynamics and diversity. Its major source in any given society is derivable from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or group in a defined socio-economic and geo-political environment. The nature of conflict however changes as the society progresses and new avenues for conflict are created.

(b) National Development

The concept of National Development would be more meaningful if the idea of development itself is explained. This is because a lot of scholars have put forward various definitions as to what development stands for. To Olumola (1997:41), development is “an advancement through progressive changes in economic, social and cultural, technological and political conditions, leading to an improvement in the welfare of citizens.” He also posited that no society could be regarded as developed if there is a high level of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition, child-mortality, political instability and income inequality.

In a similar vein, Dudley Seers in Uche (1991) explains development as “the

Creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentials.” This definition implies an increase in skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-freedom, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. The attainment of these aspects of development according to Michael (2006:59) is tied to the state of the society as a whole and in turn tied with national development.

Development is thus, a directed and widely participatory processes of deep and accelerated socio-political changes in producing substantial changes in the economy, the technology the ecology and the overall culture of a country, such that the moral and material advancement of the majority of its people can be obtained within conditions of generalized dignity, justice and liberty (Michael, 2006).

It is clear from the above that development is an improvement in the material as well as non-material conditions of a people. It is an improvement in the standard of living and the quality of life. This standard of living includes the material aspects like wealth and nutrition, while the quality of life includes non-material aspects like health and leisure as well as political and cultural freedom.

The foregoing suggests that national development involves changes or advancement in a nation aimed at improving the political, economic and social lives of the people. It covers political, economic and social issues. National development can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. It is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, namely, by providing social amenities like good education and pipe-borne water.

To enhance a better understanding and appreciation of the concept of national development, one needs to look at economic development, socio-cultural integration and development and how these flow to human development. Without human development, which is the development of the human capital of a nation or its citizens, national development can be thwarted or defeated. Human development is one basis of judging the effectiveness of the economic development component of national development.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the Frustration and Aggression Theory as its analytical framework. The origin of Frustration and Aggression Theory can be linked to the publication of Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939) and Zillmann (1979) in which they presented what is now popularly called the frustration aggression hypothesis. According to them, the central thesis of Frustration and Aggression Theory is that aggression is always a function of frustration and the occurrences of aggressive behaviour always presuppose the existence of frustration. They further defined aggression as any behaviour which is intended to injure, cause harm, pain to the individual to whom it is directed. According to Zillmann (1979), the major tenets of the theory are:

- i. Frustration instigates behaviour that may or may not be hostile or aggressive;
- ii. And any hostile or aggressive behaviour that occurs is caused by frustration.

Applied to the purpose of the present discourse, the Frustration and Aggression Theory offers insights into the nature and reasons for violent conflict between Fulani herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria.

Conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have been driven by the desperation for the affected groups to protect and advance their livelihood interest in the context of an ever shrinking ecological space, characterized by resource-scarcity, livelihood crisis, population explosions and resource competition. It is therefore not out of context to assert that the severe ecological changes and the Boko Haram incessant attacks in the North- East make the herdsmen – who migrate to other parts of the country in search of grazing field – put on aggressive behaviour which is a derivative of the previous frustration they have encountered as a result of grazing in the face of adverse weather condition, scarcity of environmental resources. Therefore, the destruction of farm crops, properties, houses and massive death toll that perpetually fill up the front pages of the national dailies are the product of aggression that evolves from frustration and sense of deep loss on the side of the herdsmen. Again, no rational being or farmer can stand idle and watch his means of livelihood being destroyed by Fulani herdsmen cattle. As a result of this reality, conflict and confrontation is bound to occur. The main thrust of the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers is frustration as a result of the loss of the means of livelihood.

Causes of Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

(a) Competition over Scarce Ecological Resources

Competition over scarce ecological resources engenders violent conflict. Competition over scarce ecological resources has been aggravated in contemporary times owing to the impact of

climate change, which has exacerbated ecological scarcity across the world. According to Blench (2004), Climate change gives rise to certain ecological changes and outcomes, which often precipitate conflicts. Some of the conditions are: environmental degradation, desertification/desert encroachment, loss of wetlands, inadequacy of rain fall/drought, and extreme climate variability and volatility. These conditions interface to produce dynamics of ecological misfortunes with far reaching implications for the agrarian communities. The shrinking of ecological space and resorts creates an atmosphere of eco-scarcity which raises the stakes and premium on the available resources (Cinjel & Kachi, 2015). What usually results from this is fierce competition and desperate struggle for subsistence. In this context, therefore, conflict does not only become inevitable, it simply becomes a matter of survival. With reference to the Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflicts, Blench (2004) observes that the ecological dynamics engendered by climate change tend to drag various land users into conflictive relations in the context of resource scarcity and want. This situation has been made worse by the claims and contestations over land ownership and/or tenure rights. Hence, as farmers take up more of the river banks for farms, they come into conflict with the users, especially the Fulani herdsmen. The herders have been coming to the river for many years for the grass and tend to consider they have ownership rights. When they arrive and find their grazing area covered with tomatoes, they may become angry. The farmers, often desperate to feed their families in a situation where the old rain-fed systems no longer work regard the Fulani herdsmen as dangerous and intrusive (Blench, 2004). When the people's sources of livelihood are threatened as a consequence of the ecological vicissitudes and vagaries

associated with climate change, desperate tactics are employed to ensure survival.

(b) Destruction of Crops by Cattle

The most frequent cause of conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers is the destruction of crops by cattle. This is often as a result of herdsmen leaving their cattle unattended to and thus making them wander into cultivated fields. This is particularly the case during the planting season and post-harvest period. In many settlements, Fulani herdsmen have their grazing areas near to fields reserved for farming, thus raising the likelihood of cattle entering cultivated fields. The increasing cultivation of bush farms by migrant farmers have also contributed to the destruction of crops by cattle (Cinjel & Kachi, 2015). During the farming season, herdsmen have to meander through farmlands to obtain access to grazing fields and cattle are prone to tramping on farmers crops. In the pre-harvest period, cattle frequently destroy or eat ripened crops as they are led from the fields (Tonah, 2006). It is imperative to note that, no rational being or farmer can stand idle and watch his means of livelihood being destroyed by herdsmen cattle. As a result of this reality, conflict and confrontation is bound to occur.

(c) Population Explosion

Population explosion is another major cause of conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and Farmers. In his account, Atih (2003:10-15) associated the conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers to what he calls "Population explosion," which he attributed to high birth rate and immigration. According to him, people tend to move from Northern and southern Nigeria into the Middle belt region where population is relatively low and where there is availability of vast arable land. The consequent rapid growth in population has

caused the farmers to struggle for farmland which is becoming scarce by the day. With this development, grazing areas that were hitherto abundant are being taken over by scattered small farms, making grazing in these areas difficult. This situation often induces competition and conflict over means of existence.

(d) Land ownership System

The mysticism and inclination to land ownership in Nigeria is also a major cause of conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers. In Nigeria, the indigene-settler syndrome is always a factor necessitating conflict over land use especially when there exist a deliberate deprivation or perceived marginalization of one group in the allocation and utility of land and access to water. As a result of transhumance, herdsmen from North-eastern and western Nigeria who migrate to the middle-belt and other parts of the country in search of forage and water inevitably become host and settler and are often seen as strangers, settlers or foreigners despite being Nigerians (Cinjel & Kachi, 2015). The attendant effects of this is that in case of any further deprivation of resources by the indigenes, the Fulani herdsmen often transfer aggression on the indigenes for their previous losses and flee while the indigenes respond by employing every means of evacuating Fulani herdsmen from their land.

(e) Intensification of Boko Haram Crisis

The intensification of the Boko Haram crisis has caused nomadic Fulani herdsmen to abandon their foraging ground in the North-East and migrate to other parts of the country in search of grazing fields. This uneasy relocation or migration usually stirs up aggression, hostile behaviours, and displacement of aggression on the host communities for the occurrence of further loss of herds by the

Fulani herdsmen or in retaliation to any perceived deprivation or denial of access to land, forage and water.

Implications of Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict on National Development

Whatever the roots of Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict, it is evident that this hydra-headed phenomenon has been of great negative effect on national development. These effects will be examined under the following sub-headings: Threat to national Integration, economic effect, and Population displacement.

(a) Threat to National Integration

The conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria have divided Nigerians across ethnic and religious lines. The sharp division between distinguished Nigerian Senators from the core North and their counterparts from the South is quite illustrative. While Southern Senators vehemently oppose further incursion of Fulani herdsmen into their areas and blamed the incessant killings on the unguarded activities of the herdsmen, their counterparts from the core North not only blame the invasion to terrorists from the neighbouring countries of West Africa, but insisted on creating grazing land for the Fulani herdsmen in all parts of the country (www.authorityngr.com). Reactions and counter reactions in the press by Nigerians from the core North, Middle-belt and south with provocative utterances have negative effect on the fragile nature of unity in the entity called Nigeria.

The genocidal rampage of well-armed Fulani herdsmen has become a feature of life across the country in the last seven years. It is however baffling that virtually no successful prosecution or conviction has been secured on any of these incidents of killing and wanton destruction of property by the Fulani herdsmen (Nwosu,

2017). In view of this, it will not be out of context to submit that the partiality of government security agencies in handling the conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers would not augur well for national consciousness among Nigerians. In an apparent attempt to echo this view, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) wondered why government security agencies would allow herdsmen to carry deadly weapons and also use them freely on innocent Nigerians. The Christian body accused government security agencies of wilfully looking the other way while the herdsmen go about their murderous activities (Esan, 2016). This trend, if not checked is capable of not only derailing our democracy, but also the corporate existence of the Nigerian state. It is in view of this looming disaster that senator Ben Murray Bruce cautioned the Buhari-led government not to treat the conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers with kid-gloves. He said:

The problem is a very serious one. This is how the civil war started. My problem right now is when retaliation begins. The civil war was fought in a conventional passion, one army is facing another army, you are going to have guerrilla warfare. It is not a war anybody can win; it will cause a destruction of Nigeria (www.authorityngr.com).

Senator Ben Bruce further said:

The time to act is now. This is a wake-up call. The executive and legislature should take pragmatic steps to put these barbaric killings behind us and save the nation from a repeat of the Nigerian civil war as those who lost their dear ones would not wait to be killed along side with their dead relatives. A word is enough for the wise, are Nigerian listening? (www.authorityngr.com).

(b) Economic Effects

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Herdsmen and Farmers conflicts have greatly affected food security. Farming activities have come under threat in the North-central, South-west, south-East and South-south regions owing to the incessant conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. This has resulted in drastic reduction in farm outputs, a development that has heightened the fear of hunger. Already, most farmers in the affected states have abandoned farming activities for fear of being attacked by herdsmen. For the predominantly farming communities of affected regions, farming is no longer business as usual. Several farmers have been displaced of their farms by armed men believed to be Fulani herdsmen (Awesu, 2016).

Conflicts between herdsmen and Farmers have reduced the movements of cattle and food stuff to markets in the southern part of the country, as the Hausa/Fulani traders are weary of travelling down to the region for fear of reprisal attacks. While many farmers in the North-central and southern part of the country had abandoned their farmlands. For security reasons, traders from the North have cut down the quantity of cattle, rice, beans and vegetables they move down to the south for sale. The end result has been an unprecedented increase in prices of these staple foods in the market especially in the southern region of the country (Awesu, 2016). The cost of living has never been so high in Nigeria and the masses are really complaining about the high cost of essential foodstuffs.

(c) Population Displacement

Another effect of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers is the displacement of people from their homes and communities for safety reasons. This has created a serious problem of internally displaced people. Djadi (2016) reported that about 20,000 people are thought to have fled the wave of attacks which some

locals say is the worse massacre by mainly Muslim Fulani herdsmen since 2010 when 400-500 died near Jos in Plateau state North central Nigeria (Cinjel & Kachi, 2015).

While the conflict persists, the displaced victims have to contend with the problems associated with refugee's status. The host communities on their part have to accommodate feed and provide other essentials of life to their guests. However, with the prolongation of the conflicts and in the absence of any meaningful assistance from the various arms of government, the problems of these internally displaced persons multiplies and range from starvation, poverty and disease to breakdown in family ties. Hence, destitution, prostitutions, divorce and unwanted marriages become the order of the day.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper explores the causes and implications of the conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers on national development. It is found that these conflicts are accentuated by the climate change-induced migration of Fulani herdsmen from the far North to other parts of country in search of grazing fields. Other identified causes of conflicts between herdsmen and farmers include: destruction of crops by cattle, population explosion, land ownership system and the intensification of the book Haram crisis. Whatever the causes of the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers, it is evident that these conflicts have been of great negative effects on national

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development. As panacea to conflicts between herdsmen and farmers, the paper recommends as follows:

- i. Government should enact laws banning the indiscriminate movement of herds and insist that every cattle farmer must ranch his or her herd. This is because, the problem is not the ownership and grazing of cattle; rather, it is the indiscriminate and insensitive movement of herds in search of grass that is the root cause of herders and farmers conflict.
- ii. Government should get to the roots of arms proliferation and confiscate illegal firearms. No doubt, the huge fatalities associated with the herdsmen-farmers conflict is due to the sophisticated arms available to both herdsmen and farmers assailants. It is troubling that private citizens can have apparently easy access to unlicensed sophisticated military grade weaponry.
- iii. Government should invest more in combating climate change. Climate adaptability, agricultural and climatologic research should be enhanced to combat desert encroachment, and in the long run reduce inherent conflict between herdsmen and farmers.
- iv. Law enforcement agencies should treat the complaints of both Fulani herdsmen and farmers with more seriousness before reprisals by both parties lead to huge conflagration.

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