

The Crux of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria

J. C. Ajadike

ABSTRACT

Land and water are crucial for crop farming and livestock raising. But these two resources are strongly affected by physical factors such as climate change, drought, desertification and human factors such as population pressures, over grazing, migrations of herdsmen within Nigeria and from neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger; Boko Haram insurgency that has crippled economic activities in the three States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa in the north east, and cattle rustling that has forced many herdsmen to flee with their animals for security and for sustainability. Detailed reviews were made on all the physical and human factors identified by this study as the flash points of the farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria and the facts are that the farmers and herdsmen are clashing mainly because of resource control which both desire for their occupational survival. This work therefore concludes that heightened farmers-herdsmen conflicts especially since 2015 in Nigeria have nothing to do with race and religions as often portrayed. The National Assembly should establish the standard with enabling laws and administrative structures to ensure that all the ranches meet minimum standard for hygiene and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: *Climate change, extreme weather, resource control, insecurity, farmers-herdsmen conflicts*

INTRODUCTION

Farmers and Herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria have claimed thousands of lives and destruction of property worth billions of Naira. The conflicts have been sometimes misinterpreted as religions because of the different occupations and religious inclinations of the people in the conflicts. The farmers are mainly Christians but the herdsmen are Muslims. In Nigeria, whenever and wherever there are conflicts, religion and race are usually whipped up as the underlining cause of the misunderstanding. But this work is going to unveil what the crux of the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria is, which has caused so much pains, destruction and loss of many lives and property. These conflicts result from complex and combination of factors that are related to resource control and sustenance of livelihood of farmers and rampaging herdsmen.

In fact, Philip-Eze (2009) has observed that in the Sudano-Sahelian States of Northern Nigeria, covering the North east, North central and North west zones, the major sources of conflicts are ecological, degradation-induced by climate change

J. C. Ajadike, Ph. D is a Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Meteorology, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu, Nigeria. E-mail: joajadike@yahoo.com.

Journal of Environmental Issues and Agriculture in Developing Countries, Volume 9, Number 1, April 2017/34

ISSN: 2141-2731



and desertification. Climate change has seriously affected the Sudano-Sahelian region of Nigeria. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) records that dryness has been observed in the Sahel, South Africa and part of southern Asia. The region has also suffered from droughts that have affected African Sudan. The great Sahelian drought of 1969 to 1973 created massive shift of population to the southern and wetter latitudes (Alao, 2008). Desertification is also a problem in the northern States of Nigeria as the Sudano-Sahelian belt of Nigeria has been seriously degraded by combination of natural factors such as drought, deforestation and overgrazing. Desertification creates badland (barren land) that is useless for growth of crops and the grazing of livestock.

Desert encroachment is also turning arable lands to deserts. In fact, Borno which is the most affected State in the North east has about 55percent of its landmass under threat by desert encroachment (Nigerian Common Country Assessment, 2001). Overgrazing is a reality in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Nigeria partly as result of increasing herds of cattle, sheep and goats in Nigeria and partly by increasing migration of herdsmen from other neighbouring countries such as Chad, Mali and Niger. Chad and Mali witnessed severe droughts in the 1980s and many of their herdsmen had to migrate to Nigeria in search of grazing lands and water for their animals. The Boko Haram insurgency in the north east of Nigeria affected the livelihood of the people especially in the Borno, Yobe and Adamawa where farming activities including animal husbandry were disrupted and many of the herdsmen had to migrate southwards looking for pastures and water for their animals.

As expected, the mass migration of herdsmen to the guinea Savanna and forest zone because of unfavourable conditions in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Nigeria creates conflicts between the farmers and the herdsmen. Conflicts arise because both the farmers and herdsmen are competing to maximize scarce resources especially land which the farmers need for their crops, and which the herdsmen also require as source of pastures for grazing. This review therefore preoccupies itself with knowing the crux of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria.

Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events

Climate change is making many regions of the world to experience extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, heat waves, frosts, and severe storms (Climate Change Information Sheet, 1999, Ajadike, 2014). Climate Change is creating serious challenge in the African Sudan because as predicted by (IPCC, 2007) rainfall will decrease in the region and there will be frequent and increasing duration of droughts and these have some implications for water resources and biodiversity. For example, the National Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change for Nigeria, (2011) has reported that increased drought, aridity and water stress in Nigeria Sudan, and Sahel zones will contribute to overall decline in forest cover and herbaceous understory productivity, thus affecting forest products including livestock fodder. The impacts of climate change on livestock has been recognized by Ziervogel,



Cartwright, Tas and Adejuwon (2008) when they noted that the effects of climate change are likely to be felt from an increased severity and frequency of drought and deteriorating of pastures during droughts and periods of over grazing can result to poor health and death of livestock.

Desertification, Land Degradation and Impact of Desert Encroachment

Desertification has nothing to do with desert because it can occur anywhere with decreased rainfall and increased human activities such as deforestation, overgrazing and soil degradation. Desertification as defined by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub humid areas resulting from various factors, including climate variations and human activities. Failure of rainfall especially over several seasons, can lead to loss of vegetation cover on the soil and hence land degradation (Climate News, 2006). Desertification has its greatest impact in Africa because two-thirds of the continent is desert or dry lands (Medany, 2006). The African Sudan and Sahelian regions are over used and hence degraded because of human economic activities such as unsustainable agriculture, deforestation and unfavourable climatic factors such as drought, desertification and climate change.

Desert conditions are fast developing in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Africa because of drought, agriculture over grazing, soil erosion and climate change. In Nigeria, desert encroachment is a serious environmental concern which has critically affected States such as Borno, Yobe, Jigawa, Sokoto and Katsina. These States have some of their villages and major access roads buried by sand dunes (Dogara, 2008). Sand dunes expand with winds especially in the absence of vegetation and with increasing frequency and duration of droughts in the affected States. Desert encroachment renders the land useless for any form of agriculture including grazing. As expected, once the land is degraded because of shifting sand dunes, the herdsmen must migrate to sites with favourable grazing facilities such as pasture and water otherwise their animals will die and they themselves will suffer from losing the only means of livelihood and sustenance.

Water Resources Depletion in the Sundano-Sahelian Zone of Nigeria

Water is a major resource for all forms of agriculture. The farmers need water for their crops and herdsmen for their animals but there is evidence of serious water scarcity in the Sundano-Sahelian zone of Nigeria. One strong evidence of drought, desertification and land degradation in the Sudano-Sahel zone of Africa is the shrinking of Lake Chad. The lake has shrunk to about one-twentieth of its size in 40 years. Forty years ago, the lake was as large as Lake Erie and it was about the sixth largest lake in the world straddle in borders of Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Niger. Nguigma, a city in Niger once surrounded on three sides by Lake Chad but today, it is more than 60 miles (96kms) from the lake (Gore, 2006). Udo (2006) on his account of the shrinking lake notes that Lake Chad has fluctuated greatly in size from about 25,000 square meters in 1986. The drying up of the lake which started about two



centuries ago, reached a crisis level during the Sahelian drought of 1972 to 1974. The drying up of the lake has a lot of environmental and human economic implications for the Lake Chad basin. For example, fishing, farming and grazing activities have greatly reduced forcing millions to migrate to more favourable areas for the sustenance of their livelihood. Many herdsmen including those outside Nigeria now move southwards in search of water and grazing for their cattle. Lake Chad's dissipation has led to collapsing of fisheries and crops leading to displacement of millions and imperiling of more (Gore, 2006).

Overgrazing

The over concentration of livestock on pastures and without improvement in the growth of the pastures lead to overgrazing. Nigeria does not have functional grazing reserves and absence of grazing reserves force herdsmen to graze on any available pasture and with increasing pressure from increasing number of livestock, the pasture quickly depletes and degrades leading to deforestation and if this is accompanied by compaction of the soil by animals and drought, desertification quickly results. According to Dogara (2008), the livestock economy of Nigeria is concentrated in the nine Desertification Frontline States of Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. The livestock supported in these States were estimated to include 16 million cattle, 13.5 million sheep and 26 million goats. These number of animals in Nigeria and others from neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger put numerous pressures on pasture resources of Nigeria leading to overgrazing and land degradation (Dogara, 2008).

Cattle Rustling and the Migration of Herdsmen

Cattle rustling are a serious and threatening criminal activity in the African Sudan. Criminals armed with sophisticated weapons steal cattle from herdsmen. These criminals are organized gangs who roam about searching for cattle which they will forcefully acquire from the herdsmen and once acquired, the rustlers will sale the cattle for slaughter via their agents in the various cattle markets across Nigeria. The bad news is that most of these cattle rustlers come from outside Nigeria but operate within the Nigerian border and once they finish their operations, they quickly cross the border through the various unchecked border routes which are well known to smugglers. Many herdsmen now carry dangerous weapons to counter the criminal activities of the rustlers. Herdsmen also migrate with their cattle as a strategy to escape the evil plots of cattle rustlers in the Sudano-Sahelian regions of Nigeria. Unwholesome activities of cattle rustlers force herdsmen to migrate with their cattle seeking conducive environment for themselves and their animals.

Boko Haram Insurgency and the Collapse of Economic and Livelihood Activities in the Chad Basin

Jama'atu Ahlus Sunnah lid Da'awati Wal Jihad or People Committed to the Prophets



Teachings for Propagation and Jihad or Boko Haram is a terrorist Islamic group that has caused a lot of harm and pain to Nigeria and Nigerians. The deaths caused by Boko Haram ran into hundred of thousands and property loss would be several billions of Naira. In fact, insurgency caused by the Boko Haram sect has grounded economic activities in the three most affected States of the North East of Nigeria (Borno, Yobe and Adamawa). State of Emergency was declared in the three States by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2013 and by 2014, 276 girls from Government Secondary School Chibok, in Borno State were kidnapped by the Boko Haram group (Smith, 2015).

Boko Haram insurgency paralysed economic activities in the North East zone of Nigeria leading to millions of people been displaced in their homes as internally displaced persons (IDPs). Millions migrated outside the North East and these included the herdsmen who moved with their cattle to other parts of Nigeria including the Southwest Southeast and Southsouth zones of the country where more favourable conditions were prevailing. Boko Haram activities also heightened criminality including kidnapping and cattle rustling in the Northeast of Nigeria and all these favoured migration out of the Northeast zone for security purposes and for brighter economic sustaining opportunities. The migration of the herdsmen from the northeast zone of Nigeria and indeed from the Lake Chad Basin diametrically increased conflicts between herdsmen and farmers.

Violence over Grazing Land by Herdsmen

Violence over grazing land between herdsmen and farmers is not new in Nigeria. But in the past, only isolated cases were recorded with very few deaths. For example, the Tivs in Benue State had a violent conflict which involved fighting and bloodletting between them and Fulani nomads over grazing land. The conflict led to the displacement of people and loss of family ties and people were forced into rescue camp in Makurdi (Madu and Ayogu, 2009). But since 2015, the herdsmen have become Nigeria's deadliest killer group as the group has killed more people than the dreaded Boko Haram sect. According to Olafioye (2017) the killer herdsmen killed more Nigerians in the last 12 months than those killed by the Boko Haram terrorists. Killer herdsmen killed about 1404 people while Boko Haram accounted for only 418 deaths from 36 attacks in the last 12 months. Olafioye (2017) also recorded that the deaths tolls attributed to the rampaging herdsmen to include 808 in Southern Kaduna in 53 communities in December 2016; 300 people in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, 40 deaths on Tuesday, April 26, 2016 in Ukpabi Nimbo community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area in Enugu. There were deaths also in other parts of Nigeria including those of Ndiagu Attakwu and Akegbe Ugwu Communities in Nkanu West L.G.A of Enugu State; Rafin Gona and Gbagyi Villages in Bosso LGA in Niger State, Ikole Local Government Area in Ekiti State and on May 21, 2016, three people were killed in Plateau State and on 18 July, two were killed in Ubulu-Unor in Aniocha South LGA of Delta State. Deaths



caused by herdsmen across Nigeria will never be all recorded because some of the killings took place in very remote villages where information takes time before filtering out to the general public. Apart from deaths of humans, herdsmen are also associated with the rape of women, kidnapping of unsuspecting people, stealing and the burning and looting of homes and farms of their victims. The herdsmen kill many people because they are armed with sophisticated weapons and they are many and well spread in all the four geopolitical zones of Southeast, Southsouth, Southwest and North central. Moreover, the herdsmen disguise themselves as cattle rearers but in real sense, they are killers, armed robbers, looters and rapists.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown very vividly that the heightened conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria have nothing to do with religion or race but have a lot to do with the control of land and associated resources which both farmers and herdsmen need for the sustenance of their livelihoods. The farmers need land and water for their crops and the herdsmen need the same for their animals. But these land resources are affected by physical factors such as climate change, drought, desertification, desert encroachment and human factors such as population pressures, over grazing, Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, criminal activities of cattle rustlers, migration especially from the Northeast zone of Nigeria and from the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger because of insurgency and displacement caused by the shrinking of Lake Chad and associated impacts on the Lake Chad Basin economy.

Climate change is a reality and it has intensified some extreme weather events such as drought and desertification. More frequent and long lasting droughts have hit the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Africa including Nigeria where many herdsmen and farmers have been displaced because of drought. Desertification has intensified in at least 10 northern States creating serious aridity and rendering economic activities such as farming and livestock keeping almost impossible. Desert encroachment has devastated farmlands and grazing lands with shifty sand dunes in the Northwest and Northeast geopolitical zones of Nigeria forcing the farmers and herdsmen to migrate.

The shrinking of Lake Chad to all time low in 40 years has greatly reduced the economic support system of the Chad Basin prompting displacement of farmers, fishermen, and herdsmen not only in Nigeria but also from Chad, Niger and Cameroon. The criminal activities of cattle rustling made many herdsmen to migrate with their animals to safer places to ensure their own security and the security of their animals. Boko Haram insurgency created terror in the north east region of Nigeria and this has paralyzed all economic activities in the zone including farming and livestock rearing. Insurgency made many herdsmen to flee with their herds to more conducive and more secure environment especially places in the Southern and North central zones of Nigeria where crop farming is a dominant economic



activity and this created conflicts that have engulfed these zones following massive trespassing by the herdsmen on people's farmlands. These conflicts have taken many lives and destroyed property worth billions of Naira. Women have also been reported raped by the herdsmen and the conflicts creates fears among farmers who feel threatened and stay away from attending to their daily farming routines and hence threatening food security in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, this study puts it that the immediate solution to farmers and herdsmen conflicts is to separate farming from livestock herding activities. Grazing reserves and ranches should be created for the herdsmen to carter for their livestock. Grazing reserves should be restricted to the Northern States where animal husbandry is the dominant economic activity. But ranches should be created in all parts of Nigeria but certain standards must be met before any ranch is approved for operation. The National Assembly should establish the standard with enabling laws and administrative structures to ensure that all the ranches meet minimum standard for hygiene and environmental sustainability.

REFERENCES

- Ajadike, J. C.** (2014). Climate Change Mitigation Responses and Investment Opportunities in Enugu State. Unpublished (Ph.D) Thesis Submitted to the Department of Geography and Meteorology, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu October, 2014.
- Alao, H. T.** (2008 August, 25). How Desertification Climate Change Impact and Nigeria's Development Agenda. *The Guardian, Nigerian Daily Newspaper*, P. 33
- Climate Change Information Sheet** (1999). Publication of the United Nations Environment Programme and International Union for Conservation of Nature, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Climate News** (2006). Climate and Small Island Developing States. Issued by the World Meteorological Organisation Geneva, Switzerland (28), 1.
- Dogara, B.** (2008). Sustainable Management of Drought and Desertification in Nigeria. Paper Presented at the First National Environmental Summit under the theme, Green the Environment for Sustainable Economic Development, Organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development 20-21st October 2008 at Trans Corp Hilton, Abuja.
- Gore, Al.** (2006). An Inconvenient Truth–The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and what We can Do About It. Melcher Media, New York, USA.
- IPCC** (2007). Summary for Policy Makers. In An Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007. Working Group contributions to the Fourth Assessment Report. IPCC Plenary XXVI, Valencia, Spain.
- Madu, I. A. and Ayogu, C. N.** (2009). *Geography and Conflicts*. In: Ikejjani Clark M. (ed) *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Reader*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, Ltd, Pp. 417-434
- Medany, M.** (2006). Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change in Africa. Background Paper for African Workshop on Adaptation and Implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Held in Accra, Ghana, 21-33 September.
- Nigerian Common Country Assessment** (2001). United Nations System in Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria.
- National Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change for Nigeria** (2011). Prepared by the Building Nigerian's Response to Climate Change Project, Federal Ministry of Environment Special Climate Unit, Abuja, Nigeria.



- Olafioye O.** (2017, Feb. 25). Killer Herdsmen Dislodge Boko Haram. *Sunday Sun, Nigerian Weekly Newspaper*, p.10.
- Philip-Eze, P. O.** (2009). *The Environment, Peace and Conflict in Nigeria*. In: Ikejiani – Clark, M. (ed) *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Reader*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, Ltd, pp 389 – 416.
- Smith, M.** (2015). *Boko Haram – Inside Nigeria’s Unholy War*. London: I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd.
- Udo, R. K.** (2006). *Population Pressure and the Nigeria Environment*. In: Ivbijaro, M.F.A, Akintola, F and Okechukwu, R. U. (eds) *Sustainable Environmental Management in Nigeria*, Mattivi Production, Ibadan, Nigeria, p 211-249.
- Ziervogel G., Carwright A., Tas A., Adejuwon J Zermoglio F., Shale M. and Smith B.** (2008). *Climate Change and Adaptation in African Agriculture*. Stockholm: Environmental Institute Stockholm, Sweden.

