

Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

Farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the years. Presently, it poses a threat to national survival. All over the country, there are reported cases of death as a result of the conflicts on daily basis. The orgy of killing and destruction has led to loss of lives and property and communities have been destroyed. This destruction has greatly affected national cohesion. It has also added to the myriad of social problems in our society. Like other members of the United Nations, Nigeria adopted the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a way forward. This global momentum is ambitious and transformational and it has at its heart a promise to leave no one behind. The study assessed farmers-herdsmen conflicts and Sustainable Development Goals. Secondary sources of data from documented materials and journal articles among others were used to generate data. Moreover, content analysis was employed for data analysis. At the end, it was revealed that the disagreement over grazing land has remained the major cause of conflict between farmers and herdsmen. The paper therefore recommended the setting up of grazing reserves as a solution to the problem.

Keywords: Conflicts, Farmers, Herdsmen, Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

In Nigeria, efforts to curb the farmers-herdsmen conflicts have remained unabated in spite of government efforts. The conflicts have increased and spread to all parts of the country. Its reoccurrences has led to destruction of lives and properties. It has also led to the destruction of entire communities thereby retarding national development. There is no consensus between farmers and herders on the causes of their conflicts. However, the farmers assert that the destruction of crops by cattle and other properties such as irrigation equipment and infrastructure by the herdsmen were the main causes of the conflicts. The herdsmen on the other hand traced the causes of the conflict to the burning of rangelands and the blockage of stock routes and water points by crop

encroachment. According to the herders, an increasing rate of cattle theft was also another cause of the conflict (De Haan, 2002).

The public interest have been on the series of bills aimed at bringing lasting solution to the incessant conflicts occasioned by rivalry between herdsmen and their host communities across the country. Generally referred to as the Grazing Bill, legislative debates on the issue have been on the front-burner receiving impetus from increasing spate of violence between herdsmen and their host communities—largely farmers in recent times. Given awareness of its effects for security, the legislature at the various levels of government have given priority to crafting legal instruments with a view to reverse the trends of insecurity that has enveloped many communities and dampened the moral of both herders and farmers. However, while the motif of the legislative intervention has been to ensure peaceful coexistence and regulated interaction between farmers and herders, it has been a subject of controversy (Amusan, Abegunde & Akinyemi, 2017).

Nigeria is among the 189 countries worldwide that endorsed the United Nations Millennium Declaration in New York in September 2000, which led to the adoption of the eight time-bound Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with several targets and indicators to be achieved by 2015. This was with a view to fast track key developmental issues in Nigeria which include increasing the availability of basic life sustaining goods, raising the standard of people’s living as well as expanding the range of economic and social choices (Adejumu&Adejumu, 2014). A set of eight goals to be achieved by 2015 was adopted by the United Nations, which were to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development (Todaro& Smith, 2011).

However, a review of the MDGs implementation in Nigeria reveals that the country registered mixed results across the goals, geographic areas and gender groups. Despite progress on some indicators, many of the goals and targets were not met. Following the expiration of the implementation timeline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which came to end in 2015, the international community through the United Nations in collaboration with the Heads of States and Governments of the 193 Member Nations, launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a new development agenda. This agenda, also known as Agenda 2030, is framed into 17 Goals, 169 Targets and 230 Indicators. Nigeria is one of the countries that ratified and adopted the Agenda for implementation in September 2015, and proceeded immediately to domesticate it. Like every other members of the United Nations, Nigeria adopted the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a vehicle for freeing humanity from poverty, securing a healthy planet for future generations, and building a peaceful, inclusive society as a foundation for ensuring a life of dignity for all. This global momentum has at its heart a promise to leave no one behind. In effect, the 2030 Agenda is both ambitious and transformational, with a set of 17 integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) broken down to measurable targets and indicators. Essentially, the Agenda is a shared plan to transform the world by looking after the welfare of the people within a period of fifteen years. Accordingly, Nigeria began to implement the SDGs in 2015 as an immediate successor and inheritor of the activities previously carried out under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Nevertheless, since independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced different types of violent conflicts that have negatively impacted on the country's development and welfare of the citizens. Indeed, peace and security have been badly undermined by the episodic, yet recurring conflict disorders causing harm, displacement and even death, thus undermining livelihood and welfare. Apart from violent community conflicts, the insurgency caused by the Boko Haram extremist Islamic sect in northern Nigeria; the militancy in the Niger Delta region; there is also increasing incidences of farmers-herders' conflicts. These conflicts, no doubt, portend harmful consequences for the country's cultural and social values; ethnic cohesion; social integration, stability and sustainable development.

Against this background, this paper examined farmers-herdsmen conflicts and sustainable development goals in Nigeria. It argued that the phenomenon of farmers-herdsmen conflicts pose great danger for the realization of the SDGs in Nigeria. However, notwithstanding the attempts made by the various levels of government in addressing the conflicts, the problem has remained unabated. The paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals?
2. What is the nature of farmers-herdsmen conflicts?
3. What are the effects of farmers-herdsmen conflicts?

Addressing the above research questions have major development implications and could enhance policy formulation to address the problems of farmers-herdsmen conflicts. The study adopted the secondary source of data collection. Materials such as documented materials, journal articles and magazines were used. Moreover, content analysis was employed for data analysis. The paper flows through overview of the SDGs, farmers-herdsmen conflicts and SDGs, sampled cases of clashes between herdsmen and farmers, effects of farmers-herdsmen conflicts, recommendations and conclusion.

Overview of the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides opportunities as well as challenges for developing countries, as the cost of its implementation will be high though it can bring long-term benefits. Nations are different and have their peculiarities and different perspectives. It is important that each nation should translate each relevant SDG into National Plans of Action. This must be borne in mind when creating plans and policies for Africa.

The Sustainable Development Goals are made up of 17 goals and 169 targets. The spirit and agenda of the SDGs are commendable as they combine efforts to eradicate poverty and increase the development of poor countries. The SDGs is expected to take a more inclusive and diverse approach by mobilizing actors in both developed and developing countries.

However, focus should be on integration among the substantive goals and targets. Vital as this may be, there is the need for similar attention to be devoted to obtaining a systems view and integrated approach to the means of implementation, dispersed in an imbalanced way through all the goals and specifically in Goal 17.

Across the goals, 42 targets focus on means of implementation, albeit somewhat unevenly, while the final goal, Goal 17, is entirely devoted to means of implementation. However, these implementation targets are largely silent about inter-linkages and

interdependencies among goals, regardless of their ambition to be - universal, indivisible, and interlinked. This leaves open the possibility of perverse outcomes and unrealised synergies. Examples include situations where achieving human development in the short term may undermine the capacity of the global life support system to support advances in human well-being in the long term; or, indeed, where environmental interventions undermine the rights and well-being of certain social groups. For example, promoting increased consumption to alleviate poverty may lead to the failure of other goals, such as the sustainable management of water.

Uncoordinated action may create internal conflicts, such as subsidies for both renewable and non-renewable fuel sources, or missed synergies, for example, where appropriately targeted investment in renewable energy reduces emissions, but it could also reduce pollution, improve human health, and increase equality.

Table 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

SDG		SDG	
1	No poverty	9	Industry, innovation, and infrastructure
2	Zero hunger	10	Reduce inequality
3	Good health and well-being	11	Sustainable cities and communities
4	Quality education	12	Responsible consumption and production
5	Gender equality	13	Climate action
6	Clean water and sanitation	14	Life under water
7	Affordable and clean energy	15	Life on land;
8	Decent work and economic growth	16	Peace, justice, and strong institutions
17	Partnership for the goals		

The UN's categorisation of means of implementation of the SDGs indicators will require an unprecedented amount of data to be produced and analysed. Without quantified targets and monitoring, it is impossible to determine whether sufficient progress is being made. This will be the problem for most African countries. The SDGs place greater demands on the scientific community than did the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which they replace. Addressing climate change, renewable energy, food, health and water provision requires coordinated global monitoring and modelling of many factors - social, economic and environmental. Notwithstanding, four major challenges that need to be addressed for achieving the SDGs in Africa are financial, maintaining peace, measuring progress and accountability. The successful implementation of the SDGs depends on standardised and accurate data.

Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts and Sustainable Development Goals

Indeed, peace is imperative for the development, stability and security of nations and individuals. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on

Sustainable Development provides guidance for achieving the transition to sustainable development as a means of increasing the well-being of current and future generations in all countries. Sustainable development strategies need to be inclusive and take special care of the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. Strategies need to be ambitious, action-oriented and collaborative, taking into account different national circumstances.

Sustainable development simply puts entails development that can be kept going or maintained (Abumere, 2002). This should entail proper attention given to the transformation of productive forces and commensurate transformation in the social relations of production. Lele (1991) describes sustainable development as “a new way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor which are compatible with the preservation the Environment Sustainable Development refers to the efficient management of resources for human survival taking into consideration both the present and future generation. The ability to maintain this guarantees sustainable development. Several factors affect the achievement of development goals.

Nigeria is synonymous with deep divisions which cause major political issues to be vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious and regional divisions (Osaghae & Suberu 2005). There is evidence of the various intra-ethnic conflicts witnessed among the minority groups, like the Ife-Modake, Tiv, Jukun, and the constant clashes that have become a daily occurrence in the Niger Delta regions of the country (Anderson, 2010). The various conflicts that have taken place show that the unity of the country is at stake. The Niger Delta crisis has got to be resolute, and environmental degradation in oil producing regions remains a problem. Exacerbating this is the public perception that the government has been insensitive and slow in addressing fundamental issues affecting Nigerians such as poverty alleviation resource distribution, infrastructural development, and security. An air of uncertainty continues to pervade the Nigeria society, thereby negating the maximum utilization of both the abundant human and material resources in the country for the total development of socio-political and economic sectors of the nation. As Anam (2015) said “ethnic conflicts has a clear chance of following the part to a serious imbalance or disjunction between order and development at any level of the economic, social and political structures.

The conflicts therein have been mainly resource-based and identity-driven in nature. These conflicts become violently expressed in contexts of religious, ethno-religious, indigene-settler, chieftaincy, land and boundary struggles. The latest occurrences of intense herders-farmers conflicts and the associated problem of cattle-rustling and other forms of criminality driven by informal networks (Kwaja, 2013) signify the economically induced nature of conflicts in the zone. As a recent country-wide occurrence, the cases o farmers-herders’ conflicts were confirmed in all the zonal reports. Fasona and Omojola (2005) reported that conflicts resulting from cattle-grazing actually accounted for 35 percent of all reported cases between 1991 and 2005. Also, more recently, Amaza (2016) has reported that, out of a total of 389 incidents of herders and farmers conflicts that spanned 1997 to 2015, a significant chunk of 371 had occurred in the Middle-Belt region alone, also known as the North Central geopolitical zone of the country.

The main cause is the environmental resource scarcity-induced movement of herders from the northern part of the country southward. Other identifiable causes of conflicts between the herders and the farmers are the blockage of water points leading to

freshwater scarcity, burning of rangelands, cattle theft, inadequate animal health care and disease control, overgrazing of fallow lands, defecation on roads and streams by cattle, extensive sedentarisation, and ethnic stereotyping (De Haan, 2002).

The main trigger is the widespread encroachment of farmlands, destruction of farm produce and alleged raping of non-herders women by the herders. The debate on grazing reserves versus ranching continues, while, informally, the top hierarchy of the umbrella body of the herders regularly intervenes to pay compensation in established cases of encroachment and destruction of produce. But in mismanaged instances, attacks and reprisal attacks have been common. All of these can be situated into the context of access to and control of land as a scarce resource and economic survival of the pastoralists and farmers.

However, the effect on arable crops, which constitutes the substantial part of Nigeria's agricultural production, has been a source of serious research and academic debate and a source of concern for the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). The security of the state and human security implications have escalated to unprecedented proportions with the recent classification by foreign and local observers of some herders as "Boko Haram" collaborators, or the next security challenge. Food and economic security have been the worst-hit, while the collateral damage to, or the adverse impact caused on, the women have become another externality of the conflict; given the extent of allegations of rape of women in virtually all communities where the conflict has occurred. Also, personal and communal security has been adversely affected – given the increasing wave of kidnappings for ransom that have been added to the profile of the conflict.

The victims of conflicts within the geo-political zones of Nigeria have been largely the vulnerable groups; that is, women, children, the physically challenged, and the aged. However, women, children and the physically challenged were also found to be active and willing participants in some cases. Conflicts across the country have placed strains on hitherto peaceful inter-group relations, while worsening state-society relations in many other cases.

In the views of Abass (2012) and Soriola (2018), violent attacks by Fulani herdsmen on farmers and innocent citizens in Nigeria in the recent past has taken more sophisticated dimensions with the use of new types of weapons and communication devices. Fasona and Omojola (2005) also noted that conflicts resulting from grazing problem accounted for more than 35% of reported clashes from the 1990s to date in the country. Thus, the destruction of several lives and properties has further aggravated the violence. In consequence, the agrarian communities have resorted to self-defence through local vigilante groups (Fajonyomi, Fatile, & Ejalonibu, 2016). The table below shows samples of recent cases of clashes between pastoralists and crop farmer in Nigeria

Table 2: Samples of cases of clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria

S/N	Nature of the Incidence	When	Where
1	Fulani herdsmen attacked UkpabiNimbo in Uzo – Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State and about 40 people were killed	April 25 th 2016	Enugu State
2	Twenty-five Local Government Areas in Delta State protested on the Benin-Asaba Expressway, the alleged killing of about 23 persons by herdsmen.	April 19 th 2016	Delta State
3	15 people were killed as the Fulani herdsmen attacked two villages in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba State	April 12 th 2016	Taraba State
4	5 days to the end of Governor Suswam’s administration in May 2015 over 100 farmers and their family members were killed in villages and refugee camps located in Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa LGAs of the State	May 24 th 2015	Benue
5	Farmer’s hand was cut off; his sibling was raped and farmland destroyed.	March 2015	Oyo State
6	Clashes between Gbagyi farmers and Fulani nomads near Abuja left two people dead, five injured, and over 1,500 people displaced from about 27 settlements that were destroyed.	December2012	Plateau State
7	About 200 persons, including a serving federal senator, Gyang Dantong, were killed in Matse and Kakuru villages during a funeral for some people killed earlier by suspected Fulani herdsmen.	July 2012	Plateau State
8	At least six people were killed, houses burnt, and several farmlands were destroyed in Ngandum village, Adamawa State as pastoralists and farmers engaged in a fierce battle. These occurred after Herdsmen led their cattle into rice fields resulting in the death of a farmer.	June 2012	Adamawa State
9	A clash between farmers and herders in Gwer West areain Benue	May 2012	Benue State
10	April 2012 One person was killed, and several others were injured in a Fulani-Hausa Clash in Sokoto.	April 2012	Sokoto
11	Sixteen people were killed in a clash between Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Kadarko community, Giza Local Council of Nasarawa State. About 5,000 residents fled to safer areas in nearby towns.	March 2012	Nasarawa State
12	The conflict between Fulani pastoralists and sedentary farmers in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State left over 30 people dead.	March 2012	Benue State

13	Fulani/ farmers clash in Kirikasamma Local Government area of Borno State left one person was killed and over 17 people from the farmers’ side seriously injured. This was triggered when farmers in the area took measures to protect the perennial destruction of their yet -to-be harvested farm produce and frequent attacks on them by the Fulani pastoralists. Conflicts between farmers and Fulani pastoralists in Benue State, left two soldiers, some 50 men, women, and children dead.	November 2011	Borno State & Benue State
14	Fulani herders invaded three villages of Dogo Na Hauwa, Ratsat and Jeji in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State killing many people including mostly children and women in a barbaric manner.	March 2010	Plateau State
15	32 people were killed, scores of houses burned, and several farms destroyed following clashes between pastoralists and farmers in Nasarawa State. About 700 pastoralists were sent away from Borno State	December 2009	Nasarawa State & Borno State
16	Dozens of people were killed in Adamawa state when Fulani herdsmen alleged to come from Chad and Niger attacked farming communities in a dispute over grazing land.	February 2005	Adamawa State
17	49 farmers were killed as they flee nomad attacks by Nomads in the farming town of Yelwa, Plateau State.	February 2004	Plateau State
18	Herdsmen attacked and burned 34 farming villages in Adamawa and Gombe States which resulted in 63 dead and over 500 people were injured.	May 2003	Adamawa/ Gombe States
19	About 100 people were killed in clashes over the past days between Fulani and the Yungar ethnic groups in Adamawa State.	February 2003	Adamawa State
20	About 30 people were killed in conflicts between farmers and herders over grazing land in BarkinLadi local council area of Plateau State.	January 2002	Plateau State

Source: Adapted from Agbedo, (2016)

Fajonyomi, Fatile and Ejalonibu (2016) explained that the herder/farmer conflict has serious implications for the progress of Nigeria. Social and economic factors continue to provoke violent conflicts among the Fulani herdsmen and farmers. The intensity and variations of the conflicts depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the herders graze. These conflicts have constituted serious threats to the means livelihoods of both the farmers and herdsmen (Isah, 2014). As noted by Tonah (2006), conflicts between farmers and herders have been a feature of economic livelihood in Nigeria. This development is unhealthy in achieving community and/or rural development in Nigeria.

Effects of farmers-herdsmen conflict

The conflict has had devastating effect on inter-regional relationships nationwide. Aside loss of lives, farm lands, food produce and property it has profound influence on residential relationships leading to new trends in polarisation of communities (Fasona & Omojola, 2005). Loss of Socio-cultural and communal value system further forms a security challenge that affects the achievement of development goal in Nigeria. The traditional value system of the Nigerian society like most African societies is characterized by such endearing features as collectivism, loyalty to authority and community, truthfulness, honesty, hard work, tolerance, love for others, Mutual harmony and co-existence, and identification of individual with one another (Other distinctive features of Nigerian traditional society are abhorrence for theft and high value for living. Stealing was considered extremely disgraceful and lives were also highly valued). All of these values which made society secured and safe have all gradually been thrown away and lost. New values have taken over their place over the years, with the so called 'modernity and civilization'. All our endearing values and morals have been traded off for western values.

It must also be pointed out that unemployment and poverty further heighten the security challenge in the country. As a result of the high level of unemployment and poverty among Nigerians, especially the youths, they are adversely attracted to violent crime. Failure of successive administrations in Nigeria to address challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities is one of the major causes of insecurity in the country.

There is a strong scepticism that if the level of insecurity in Nigeria is not addressed, efforts towards the actualization of development goals may end in futility. The nation must strive to get to a level where crimes will be nipped in the bud before they are perpetuated. Therefore, the government, civil society groups, business organisation, and individuals must fight insecurity so as to create an enabling environment where business organizations will feel free and secure to achieve their full potentials and the country will itself be safe to achieve sustainable development.

There has been an increase in the number of deaths and occurrences of lethal violence resulting from cattle grazing. This could be linked to the sophisticated weapons, which kill faster than the traditional dane guns, machetes, spears and arrows. The attacks by Fulani herdsmen have in recent years taken a new dimension with the use of new types of weapons and communication devices. . in consequence, the sedimentary agrarian communities have resorted to self- defence through local vigilante group (Abass, 2012; Mcgregor, 2014). This has further aggravated violence, with destruction of lives and properties.

According to Fasona and Omojola (2005) conflicts resulting from cattle grazing actually accounted for 35% of all reported crisis between 1999 and 2005 (Adekunle & Adisa, 2010). Similarly, the International Crisis Group (2017) reported that there was an estimated death toll of about 2,500 from herdsmen attack in 2016. Undoubtedly, the loss of human lives, land and animals, plants and crops has security, social political and economic implications, including an impact on livestock production in Nigeria (Folani, 2009; Bello, 2013). Serious conflicts erupt between farmers and herdsmen 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 to harvest their farm produce.

Recommendations

To come up with a comprehensive solution to farmer/herder clashes, and enhance the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals, the following recommendations are made:

1. To avert crisis resulting from farmers/herdsmen conflict, the media should do away with the culture of exaggerating every crisis and do more of developmental and investigative journalism. The media should stop reporting the crisis with political and ethno-religious undertone, giving room for ethnic profiling of the entire Fulani race, accusing them of undertaking an ethnic cleansing agenda against the Northern minorities.
2. It is reported that the killer herdsmen are migrants from neighbouring countries like Niger, Chad and Cameroun among others. To this end, the federal government should as a matter of urgency review our border patrol system, thereby providing more security personnel deployment of new technological facilities that will aid the immigration and other security agents to verify and admit any foreign herder entering the country.
3. The human service providers such as social workers should be trained and posted to communities to help in conflict resolutions. This could be done through the provision of social education which will enable individuals groups and communities to live harmoniously.
4. Creating and revitalizing grazing reserves, especially with some Northern states that have already indicated interest in doing so will go a long way in curbing the conflicts. This development will go a long way in restrict the movement of cows that destroy farms. It is the reaction of the farmer/herder that results to conflicts.

Conclusion

Owing to the loss of thousands of hectares of arable land to desertification in the northern part of the country, the pressure on the highly fertile farmlands of the middle belt and southern parts of the country increased the consequent movement of land cultivators and pastoralists towards the basin. It is evident that one of the immediate causes of conflict between the herdsmen and farmers was crop damage by the animals of the Fulanis. The damage attracted quick reactions from the cultivators either in form of litigation or open clashes.

It is obvious that internal security has remained a major challenge in the Nigerian society and there is an urgent need to review our security policy and strategy to accommodate the security challenges that results from farmer herder clashes. The communal value system should be able to address the security challenges that might obstruct the achievement of development goals.

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