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CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICT ON FOOD SECURITY IN ADAMAWA STATE-NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

The farmers-herdsmen conflict in Adamawa State, Nigeria, has had a profound impact on food security in the region. This crisis, driven by the scarcity of natural resources, has disrupted agricultural production, livestock management, and the overall food supply chain, leading to dire consequences for the availability and accessibility of food. This, in turn, has led to food shortages, price hikes, and reduced access to nutritious food for the affected populations. The destruction of critical infrastructure, such as roads, storage facilities, and market centres, has hindered the movement and trade of agricultural goods, further limiting the flow of food within the region. The lack of investment and innovation in the agricultural sector, driven by the prevailing insecurity, poses a significant long-term challenge to the productivity and sustainability of the food system. The impact of the farmers-herdsmen conflict on food security has been disproportionately felt by the most vulnerable members of the community, including women, children, and the elderly. To address the impacts of the conflict, a comprehensive and coordinated approach is required. This should involve enhancing security measures, promoting sustainable natural resource management, investing in agricultural infrastructure, providing targeted assistance to vulnerable populations, facilitating dialogue and conflict resolution, incentivizing agricultural innovation and investment, and strengthening early warning and response mechanisms. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards restoring the resilience and stability of the region, ultimately safeguarding the food security of the affected communities in Adamawa State.

Keywords: Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict, Food Security, Causes, Implications and Adamawa State

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria has been entangled in protracted conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, with the situation worsening in recent years. These conflicts, stemming from resource scarcity and conflicting land-use demands, have had significant repercussions for the nation's food security (Nmadu & Omolehin, 2019). Analyzing the origins and impacts of these conflicts is essential for formulating effective solutions to the escalating crisis. A major factor driving the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria is the issue of land tenure and access to grazing lands.

With population growth, both farming communities and pastoralist groups face mounting pressure on limited land resources (Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). Herdsmen, who have traditionally depended on communal grazing lands, have seen their access to these areas reduced due to farmland expansion and land privatization. This has led to increased encroachment of herdsmen onto farmlands, triggering tensions and violent confrontations with local farmers (Abbass, 2012).

In addition to land tenure issues, climate change and environmental degradation have intensified the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. Reduced rainfall, desertification, and the depletion of water sources have compelled herdsmen to migrate further south in search of pasture and water for their livestock (Mcgregor, 2014). This migration has resulted in more frequent and intense encounters with farming communities, leading to disputes over the use of limited resources. The consequences of the farmers-herdsmen conflict on food security in Nigeria have been dire. Continuous cycles of violence have disrupted agricultural production, with farmers unable to cultivate their land due to the threat of attacks (Babagana & Abubakar, 2018).

Adamawa State, situated in northeastern Nigeria, has been consistently troubled by conflicts between farmers and herdsmen. These conflicts, primarily driven by resource scarcity and competing land-use demands, have significantly impacted the region's food security (Nmadu & Omolehin, 2019). Analyzing the origins and effects of these conflicts is essential for crafting effective strategies to mitigate the escalating crisis. A key factor in the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Adamawa State is land tenure and access to grazing lands. As the population has grown, both farming communities and pastoralist groups have faced increasing pressure on limited land resources (Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). Herdsmen, who have traditionally depended on communal grazing lands, have seen their access to these areas reduced due to farmland expansion and land privatization. This has led to greater encroachment of herdsmen onto farmlands, igniting tensions and violent clashes with local farmers (Abbass, 2012).

2.0 Literature Review

Conceptualizing farmers-herdsmen conflict

The farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria refers to the persistent struggles and violence between farming communities and pastoralist herdsmen, particularly in the Middle Belt region. Central to this conflict is the competition for access to and control over land and other natural resources (Abbass, 2012; Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). Historically, farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria had a mutually beneficial relationship, engaging in the exchange of agricultural products and livestock (Blench, 2010). However, population growth, urbanization, and environmental degradation have increased pressure on available land and water resources, disrupting this balance and leading to escalating tensions and violent clashes (Mcgregor, 2014; Okello et al., 2014).

A key factor driving the farmers-herdsmen conflict is land tenure and access to grazing lands. As farmland has expanded to meet the growing demand for food production, traditional transhumance routes and communal grazing areas used by pastoralists have been encroached upon or privatized, limiting the herdsmen's access to these resources (Abbass, 2012; Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). This increased competition for land has intensified conflicts between the two groups as they vie for control over diminishing resources. Additionally, climate change effects, such as declining rainfall, desertification, and water scarcity, have worsened the resource scarcity fueling the conflict (Mcgregor, 2014; Mercy Corps, 2018). Herdsmen, forced to migrate further south in search of pasture and water for their livestock, come into more frequent and intense contact with farming communities, leading to disputes over these scarce resources (Babagana & Abubakar, 2018; Nmadu & Omolehin, 2019).

The escalation of the farmers-herdsmen conflict has had severe consequences for food security in Nigeria. Repeated cycles of violence have disrupted agricultural production, as farmers are unable to cultivate their land due to the threat of attacks (Babagana & Abubakar, 2018; Mercy Corps, 2018). This has led to significant losses in crop yields and livestock, reducing food availability and raising prices in local markets. The displacement of both farming and pastoralist communities has further strained the country's capacity to produce and distribute food, exacerbating the food security crisis (Nmadu & Omolehin, 2019).

Food Security

Food security is a multifaceted concept that encompasses several dimensions, fundamentally involving access to sufficient food for healthy living. According to the World Bank (1986), food security is the state in which everyone has access to adequate food to live healthily and productively. Pottier (1999) describes food security as involving interconnected domains such as agriculture, society, environment, employment and income, marketing, health and nutrition, and public policy. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Africa (1986), as cited by Eme, Onyishi, Uche, and Uche (2014), defines food security as a situation where all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life. The World Bank (2007) further elaborates on food security as a threefold concept comprising food availability, food affordability, and food accessibility. Food availability for households means ensuring sufficient food through production. These definitions collectively highlight at least two key aspects of this complex concept: access to available food and adequate nutrient intake for sustainable health.

2.1 Theoretical framework

One theoretical framework that can be utilized to study the causes and implications of the farmers-herdsmen conflict on food security is the Resource Scarcity Theory, proposed by Thomas Homer-Dixon in 1994. The Resource Scarcity Theory posits that conflicts can arise due to the scarcity of natural resources, such as land, water, and grazing areas (Homer-Dixon, 1994). In the context of the farmers-herdsmen conflict, this theory suggests that competition for these limited resources can significantly drive the conflict.

According to this theory, population growth and environmental degradation exacerbate the pressure on these resources, leading different groups (farmers and herdsmen) to resort to violence to secure access and control. This can threaten the livelihoods and food security of both groups, as the conflict disrupts agricultural production and livestock movement. The Resource Scarcity Theory also posits that the impact of the conflict on food security can be multifaceted. Disruption of agricultural activities and displacement of people can decrease food production, resulting in food shortages, price hikes, and reduced access to nutritious food for affected communities (Homer-Dixon, 1994). Moreover, the theory emphasizes the potential for the conflict to exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities, as marginalized groups may be disproportionately affected by the loss of access to resources and the disruption of their livelihoods.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design, utilizing secondary methods of data collection and analysis to explore the causes and implications of the farmers-herdsmen conflict on food security in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Comprehensive review of existing literature, including academic journals, books, government reports, and policy documents related to farmers-herdsmen conflict and food security in Adamawa State and Nigeria at large. Collection of relevant data from government and international organizations such as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),

and other pertinent bodies. Analysis of news articles, reports, and documentaries from reputable media outlets to gather recent and historical perspectives on the conflict.

The study used content analysis to systematic analysis of the collected documents and reports to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends related to the causes of the conflict and its impact on food security.

4.0 Data presentation and Discussion

4.1 Causes and Triggers of Farmers-Herders Crisis in Adamawa State

Several factors contribute to the escalation of conflicts between herdsman and farmers. These include the policy gap and underdevelopment of grazing lands, issues related to land ownership and utilization, population growth leading to increased production demands, climate change, competition for resources, poverty, insurgency, armed robbery, corruption, economic sabotage, and environmental degradation (Fasona, Adebayo, & Olufemi, 2016).

Furthermore, Ofuoku and Isife (2009) and Adoji (2013) affirm that a significant factor contributing to farmers-herders' conflicts is climate change, resulting in inadequate rainfall and insufficient grazing lands for animals, compounded by the lack of coping mechanisms among herdsman.

Additionally, other factors and triggers include:

Resource Competition

The conflict between farmers and herders often arises from competition over scarce resources, increasing the likelihood of confrontation (Pruitt & Kim, 2014). The search for land and resources by cattle herders has emerged as a major catalyst for these conflicts. With up to 70% of grasslands swallowed by desertification and more frequent droughts, tensions over the use and allocation of grazing areas between herders and farmers intensify due to conflicting interests (Ismaila & Umar, 2015). Suspected Fulani militants have been arrested with dangerous weapons, while farmers accuse herders of crop damage and inadequate animal control. Herders, in turn, cite the need for weapons to defend against attacks and cattle theft by farming communities.

Government Response

The government's response to the farmer-herder crisis has been marred by insincerity and a lack of timely action. The inadequate handling of the issue by all levels of government has led to a sharp increase in poverty rates in affected areas. Subsistence farmers, reliant on crop sales for survival, suffer significantly when their crops are destroyed, exacerbating frustration and poverty. The illegal possession of arms by herders, coupled with government inaction, has fueled retaliatory actions by farmers, escalating violence and conflict (Osumah, 2018).

Political Inaction

Political leaders have shown a lack of political will in addressing the conflicting claims of various actors in the farmer-herder conflict. Despite past efforts to regulate pastoral activities, enforcement of laws remains weak. Some perceive the government as sympathetic to herders' activities, particularly given the ethnic background of the current President, raising concerns about impartiality in handling the crisis. The failure to address the conflict with the same vigor shown in other security issues exacerbates tensions and encourages vigilante actions among affected communities (Egbuta, 2018).

Security Concerns

The escalating conflict between herders and farmers poses a regional security threat, weakening local authorities' ability to enforce agreements between the groups. Reports indicate widespread cattle theft, prompting many herders to arm themselves for protection. While President Buhari has taken steps to

address the conflict, it persists as a threat to national security, contributing to deteriorating living conditions and the potential for further disorder in the region (Ningxin, 2018).

Land Disputes

The conflict between farmers and herders often stems from struggles over land access. In the early 21st century, there was a notable expansion of agricultural populations and cultivated land, encroaching upon pasturelands in the Middle Belt. In this politically volatile region, obtaining legal land titles for both farmers and herders has been challenging. Consequently, the transhumance routes traditionally used by herders became increasingly unavailable, particularly due to the effects of global warming, forcing herders to migrate southward in search of land and pasture for their animals. This migration has frequently led to clashes with farmers, resulting in crises and property destruction. For instance, the fertile farming areas along the Benue River, which yield over 20,000 tons of grain annually, also serve as crucial grazing grounds for herders, leading to conflicts, especially along riverbanks (Egbuta, 2018).

Environmental Pressures

Environmental degradation, desertification, and soil depletion have compelled Fulani herders from Northern Nigeria to alter their traditional migration routes. Access to pasture and water sources in the Middle Belt became imperative for herders traveling from the North. Climate change significantly influences the activities of both herders and farmers. The shifting climatic patterns attributed to global warming have exacerbated challenges for both groups, particularly as herders increasingly move southward in search of viable grazing areas, bringing them into conflict with farmers and local communities. This global trend is impacting various regions worldwide, contributing to the farmer-herder crisis (Egbuta, 2018).

4.2 Insecurity and Availability of Food in Warring Regions of the Farmers-Herders Crisis in Adamawa State

The farmers-herders crisis in Adamawa State, Nigeria, has had a profound impact on the availability and accessibility of food in the region. This conflict, driven by the scarcity of natural resources as explained by the Resource Scarcity Theory (Homer-Dixon, 1994), has disrupted agricultural production, livestock management, and the overall food supply chain.

One of the primary consequences of the crisis has been the widespread insecurity faced by both farmers and herders. The violent clashes between the two groups have led to the displacement of communities, the destruction of farmlands and grazing areas, and the loss of lives and livelihoods. This insecurity has had a direct impact on the ability of farmers to cultivate their land and of herders to move their livestock to access water and pasture (Nweze, 2005). As a result, food production has declined, leading to shortages and price hikes in the local markets.

Moreover, the insecurity has discouraged investment and innovation in the agricultural sector, as farmers and herders are hesitant to expand their operations or adopt new technologies in the face of an unstable environment (Ajuwon, 2004). This lack of investment and innovation can have long-term consequences for the productivity and sustainability of the food system. The crisis has also had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of the community, such as women, children, and the elderly. These groups often face greater barriers to accessing food and other resources during times of conflict, exacerbating existing inequalities and further undermining food security (Nweze, 2005). The farmers-herders crisis in Adamawa State has had a devastating impact on the availability and accessibility of food in the region. The widespread insecurity, displacement of communities, and disruption of agricultural and livestock activities have led to a decline in food production, shortages, and price hikes. The crisis has also

undermined the resilience of the local food systems, discouraged investment and innovation, and disproportionately affected the most vulnerable members of the community. Addressing this crisis and its impact on food security will require a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that takes into account the complex interplay of factors driving the conflict.

4.3 Socio-Economic Consequences of Farmers-Herders Crisis on Sustainable Development

The crisis between herdsman and farmers in most of the violent zones of middle-belt and southern parts of Nigeria has reduced the rate of food production in the country, thereby making farmers not to produce food in surplus as a result of fear of being killed on their various farmlands by the herdsman. This has negative effects on the moral of farmers to plant more crops. The lives of farmers and herdsman, women and children have been lost while others displaced from being landowners to tenants in IDPs camps. Again, as a result of destruction of farm produce by the herds of cattle, the local farmers are exposed to poverty and unemployment for some period of time since their major occupation is on farming, and their farm produce destroyed. The youths among the farmers will probably sojourn into cities to engage in one job opportunity or the other. But the opposite will be the case as they need to survive. In the course of survival, they could involve themselves in any sort of crime as a result of psychological frustration. This depicts a scenario of a popular quote where a hungry man is an angry man (Osumah, 2018).

Ajibefun (2017) also stated both the social and economic effects and consequences of the crisis. On the social effects, he listed the following: sexual harassment of women, acquiring of weapons/arms, reduction in quality of social relationship, reduction of social support, loss of human life and on the economic effects, Ajibefun (2017) listed the following: loss of produce in storage, displacement of farmers, scarcity of agricultural products, loss of houses and properties.

5.0 Conclusion

The farmers-herdsman conflict in Adamawa State, Nigeria, has significantly impacted food security in the region in multiple ways. This crisis, driven by the scarcity of natural resources as described by the Resource Scarcity Theory, has disrupted agricultural production, livestock management, and the overall food supply chain, resulting in severe consequences for food availability and accessibility. The widespread insecurity from violent clashes between farmers and herdsman has been a major factor in this food security crisis. Displacement of communities, destruction of farmlands and grazing areas, and loss of lives and livelihoods have led to a substantial decline in food production. Consequently, this has caused food shortages, price increases, and reduced access to nutritious food for the affected populations.

5.1 Recommendations

The study recommends the following measures:

- i. Government and religious leaders should organize regular dialogue sessions and peacebuilding workshops to foster understanding and cooperation between farmers and herdsman.
- ii. The government should increase the presence of security forces in conflict-prone areas to deter violence and protect lives and property. This includes deploying more police and military personnel where necessary.
- iii. The government should encourage integrated farming systems where both crop and livestock farming can coexist. This approach can reduce competition for resources and promote mutual benefits.
- iv. Provide alternative livelihood opportunities for both farmers and herdsman to reduce dependency on land and livestock. This can include skills training, microfinance schemes, and entrepreneurship support.

- v. Conduct awareness campaigns to educate both communities about the causes and effects of the conflict, promoting peaceful coexistence.

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