State’s Contradictions: Farmers, Herdsmen and Environmental Struggle in Nigeria

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Abstract
The irresolute travesty of the state’s intervention in the management of environmental struggle between farmers and herdsmen in the post-authoritarian Nigeria is evidently documented in the literature. Previous works argued competition for scarce environmental resources and climatic reality as the predictors of farmers-herdsmen conflict. Disappointedly, the corrective gears of the post-1999 regimes appear fragmented and contradictory especially in the inelasticity of political, socio-cultural, institutional and legal responsibility of the state and the non-state actors thereby deteriorating the frail farmers-herdsmen relations. This exploratory article excavated the dynamics of contradictions in the instrument of resolution engaged for the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria. A clear discord in the resolution mechanisms was established because of the collaboration gap within the scope of political, institutional and legal arrangements among the vested stakeholders. The paper, therefore, prayed stakeholder approach inevitable for the sustainability of state-based resolution mechanisms for forfending environmentally induced conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria.

Keywords: Post-authoritarian, Environment, Farmers, Herders, Conflict, Interest, State

Introduction
The evocative conflict between herder and farmer communities has continued its reverberation across Western and Eastern regions of Africa. Ample of written testimonies cited hotbed states with record of perpetual environmental conflict between pastoralists and sedentary farmers to include but not limited to Ghana, Niger, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria (Tonah, 2003; Nyong & Fiki, 2005; Shettima & Tar, 2008; Baidoo, 2015; Bukari & Schareika, 2015; Cabot, 2017). These conflicts, which often surfaced in violence expression, exert dire consequences on the survival of the pastoral and sedentary farmers. It culminates into loss of lives and destruction of livestock (cattle) and farm plantation (food and cash crops), thus threatening economic and ecological survival of the two parties. Another is the sharp deteriorating co-habitation of farmers and herdsmen that had shared history of harmonious relations before it becomes a subject of concern (Tonah, 2000; Cabot, 2017; Amnesty International [AI] 2018). This kind of struggle is intractably embellished in the complexities of authoritative allocation of dwindling resources – economic, socio-political and environmental – by the transiting states of the region while the pressure from environmental changes persist (Nyong & Fiki, 2005). In finding the drivers of this conflict, some perspectives have emerged. First is the competition for environmental resources especially land and water (Tonah, 2000; Chikaire, Onoh & Echetama, 2017). For Babagana,
Ibrahim, Adamu and Gujja (2019), competition for resource ownership and exploitation has, from the time of early civilisation, dominated the subject matter of ethnic and communal conflict. The two specializations require water and arable land to flourish in production, as such any perceived competition in this regard is often greeted with stern opposition (Ogbette, Attama & Okoh 2018). For instance, the sedentary farmers, on one hand, depend heavily on water and arable land for all year planting and domestic routines. On the other hand, the pastoralists require rich vegetation and water to feed their herds, leading to land struggle between the herders and the farming communities.

For Steve Tonah, the manifestations of this view are always worsened by the ethnic dimension of the parties involved. The tradition of herding is culturally associated with particular ethnic peoples in the Sahel region of West Africa (Tonah 2003) – the Fulani and the Fulbe – making the conflict a minority against the majority populations. Next is the long-standing migratory practice of nomadic pastoralists. The complex landscape of pastoralist farming is aptly captured in the definition offered by Pratt, Le Gall and de Hall (1997). They describe pastoralism as a naturally induced practice involving the environment component, the cultural structure and diverse political undertone of a society. From this, it appears that the culture of pastoral farming is cut in the web of conflict as they migrate from one settlement to another while navigating through different farming communities.

Another dimension to what can be called environmentally induced migration is the climate change, which had gathered wide literature support. The argument is that the surge in the trend of competition for land and freshwater by the sedentary and pastoralist farmers is premised on the growing pressure imposed by climate change, setting in play an ecosystem that is prone to the conflict which threatens human security (Adano, Dietz, Witsenburg, & Zaal 2012; IPCC 2014a; Cabot 2017).

In recent times, the dangerous and gory trend of conflict involving farmers and herders in Nigeria is climaxing, thus remains topical headline for regional and international debate on climate change-induced resources conflict in West Africa. For instance, Amnesty International in it 2018 report titled ‘Harvest of Death: Three years of bloody clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria’ reported that between 2016 and 2018, more than 3641 lives were lost to bloodletting attacks and counter-attacks involving farming communities and herders in Nigeria. This figure, of course, suggests urgent humanitarian and conflict reduction interventions by concerned stakeholders.

The post-authoritarian Nigeria state has continued to battle herder-farmer conflict (Egbuta 2018), without any concrete mechanism put in place by the governments – Federal, State and Local – to neutralize the effects of the conflict and avoid future reoccurrence. Although it has argued in some quarters that in resolving conflict of this magnitude, attention should not only be limited to environmental succour but also the likely non-environmental solutions that mirror the political, social and economic multidimensionality of the
conflict (Ejigu 2009; Cabot 2017). For the time being, the response from the Nigerian Federal government vitiates both environmental and non-environmental conflict reduction mechanisms as such remains elusive as well as attracts wide condemnation.

Remarkably, the growing conflict arising from the struggle for the natural resources in Nigeria has attracted the research focus of many authors (Adisa 2011; Okoli & Alelhe 2014; Adeoye 2017). Yet, only a few explored the multidimensionality of interests involved as a negating factor affecting the attainment of common ground for the conflict reduction mechanisms (AI 2018; ICG 2018). Drawing on the fragmented literature on how multiple conflicting interests are circumnavigating the political, institutional and legal responses of the government towards the conflict, this article further shed light on the network of contradictory realities of vested interests in the lingering environmentally-induced conflict between herders and farmers in contemporary Nigeria. In doing this, qualitative documentary analysis which draws evidence from documented publications (books, book chapters, newspapers, thesis, and institutional reports) was used to substantiate arguments articulated in this work. It is subdivided into four interconnected sections. The foregoing introduction, then followed by a discussion of complexities of conflicting interests along with political, institutional and legal responses. In the next two sections, the article made us understand the growing externalities of the conflict as well as presented the concluding remarks.

Irony of One Conflict, Multiple Interests and the search for Common Ground

The search for common ground and acceptable solution to the lingering herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria has continued, while the unending conflict has added another layer to the fragility of national security already stressed by Boko haram insurgency, cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery and communal crisis (Egbuta 2018). Cases of gruesome killings arising from bloody clashes, notably between herder and farmer communities are becoming extremely worrisome. According to Amnesty International (2018), within 34 months (January 2016 to October 2018), 312 attacks and reprisals were recorded in 22 states (and Abuja), 3,641 deaths, 406 injuries, 5,000 landed properties burnt and 182,530 displaced persons (IDPs) were also documented. The conflict which was limited predominantly among the farming and herding communities – differentiated along ethnic lines, religious sentiments and occupational background –in Northern Nigeria has spread geographically across the country (Tonah 2006). For instance, the distribution of deaths associated with herder-farmer conflict according the AI (2018) shows that all geopolitical zones have had their experience: North Central (1,576); North East (993); North West (955); South East (52); South-South (47); South West (16).

The southward diffusion of the conflict, which has expanded the scope of contradiction and complexities of conflict interests according to Chilkaire, Ajaero, Ibe, Orusha and Onogu (2018) is associated with the worsening environmental
variations in the North and an emerging shift from pastoralism to sedentarism among livestock farmers. Adding to the position of Chilkaire et al (2018), it is the growing tension between farmers and herders, and activities of cattle rustlers and state institutions in the North particularly the Middle Belt that fuel the conflict. Example is the tension that forced herdsmen to move from Benue state to the neighbouring states like Taraba and Nasarawa because of the legal intervention of Benue state government (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017).

As the farmer-herder conflict grown from being regional to national issues so also the vested interests grown more in opposing directions thereby worsening the complexities of the conflict. This makes finding lasting solution a subject of protracted national discussion. Previous writers interrogated the nature, causes, and dimensionality of the conflict from diverse theoretical perspectives. For instance, Egbuta (2018) used Social Conflict Theory to understand the causes and nature of the conflict. Okoli and Alelhe (2014), Adeoye (2017) explored the political-ecology dynamics of herder-farmer conflict using Eco-violence and Eco-survivalism. Adisa (2011) used the Cognitive Appraisal Model to predict the perception of actors involved in the herder-farmer conflict. By way of departure, this article argues for Stakeholder Theory in addressing the conflict. The stakeholder approach of Freeman (1984) view organisation as a group of actors (stakeholder) with different interests, needs and positions regarding organizational resources. The managers are expected to co-ordinate the affairs in such a way that the rights of the stakeholder to participate in decision making are protected and ensure uncurtained existence of the organisation for long term benefits of each actor or interest. Donaldson and Preston (1995) expanded the scope of the stakeholder approach to understanding the three layers of stakeholder: descriptive (interest representation); instrumental (consequence of action); normative (moral basis for decision-making). Here, using Freeman’s management and stakeholder to represent the Nigerian state and stakes in the conflict respectively, the article explained the dynamics of interests in farmer-herder conflict and corded up their implications on institutional, political and legal reduction mechanisms of the government. These interests include but not limited to crop farmers, livestock farmers, government (federal and state), ethnic group, religious group, media and non-governmental outfits. These interests are analysed after a brief review of government responses from political, institutional and legal viewpoints in the next paragraphs.

It is not new that the context of social contract expect the government to protect the individual and collective right of everyone in a state. Having this in mind brings the Nigerian state at the centre of the farmer-herder conflict. Government interventions in addressing the conflict has not yielded meaningful results. On political intervention, the government has chosen consultation and dialogue in a bid to harmonise the diverse interests of the parties involved. Committee system and traditional
institutions are often used to wade the conflict (Chikaire et al 2018) but solutions that are more political are being explored recently. In the last half-decade, options such as the creation of cattle colonies, National Livestock Transformation Plans and the current controversial RUGA Settlement are tabled (ICG 2018; Udegbunam 2019) but not implemented due to tension clot arising from multiplicity of warring interests in the allocation of environmental resources.

The political will and approach of the Nigerian government (federal) has been questioned for lack of sincerity because of the soft and un-coordinated stand of her measures (AI 2018; ICG 2018). The indefinite action of the Nigerian government has made the conflict more protracted unlike what is obtainable in Ghana and Cote d’ Ivoire. According to Steve Torah, Ghana policy of expulsion and exclusion forced the herders to evacuate the trouble regions as a short-term solution but a long-term deterioration of the domestic livestock industry (Tonah 2003). This approach is unlikely in Nigeria because Fulbe herders in Ghana were predominantly seen as migratory strangers while the herder population in Nigeria is seen as a minority group. In Cote d’ Ivoire, the policy intervention is accommodative. The state prioritized capacity development in terms of cattle shops, slaughterhouses, veterinary services and integration of herder communities into her livestock industry (Tonah 2003).

The institutional response appears to be contagiously linked with the weak political will. Institutions abound in Nigeria as far as herder-farmer conflict is a concern (Chikaire et al 2018), but there are serious allegations of conspiracy, lack of commitment, discriminatory sense of obligations among state institutions that often intervened in curbing the spread of the conflict-related attacks. For instance, Amnesty International (2018) reported that a number of interviewed victims raised heavy liability on activities security forces like the police and the military for the loss of family members and that many of the attacks are preventable if law enforcement agents had acted on the information received from the victims. The report quoted one of the victims:

…soldiers asked me to follow the villagers into the classroom but I told them I wasn’t going in there. They said if I didn’t go in they would shoot me, so I told them to go ahead, but that I wasn’t going into the classroom. So, they ordered me to go and lie down on the ground in the school compound as punishment, which I did. While lying down, I turned and saw one of the soldiers beckoning with his hand on the Fulani asking them to enter the school (AI Report 2018:50)

The above extract indicated contradictions in what is expected of state institutions like the security forces whose obligations are to safeguard and protect unarmed civilians during conflict time. Another bothering question one could ask is why the security apparatus failed to stop gun and ammunition supplies to the two warring communities (herders and farmers). This supports the thesis that conspiracy of the security institutions, which contribute, to the protracted nature of the conflict. The legal response to the conflict has continued to generate controversy in the vertical pattern of intergovernmental relation
approach to the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria. In recent time, the federal-state government’s legal response to the conflict is not convergent. The state government appears to favour the side of farmers with expulsion-driven state laws while the federal government assumes protectionist legal proposals for the minority population of herders (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017; Mathias 2019).

There is yet another dimension of consistency test of the laws of the state governments against the federal government, which gives the federal law upper stand. The contradiction in state responses toward the herder-farmer conflict in contemporary Nigeria cannot be exempted from complexity clot built around diverse interests involved. Placing the scarce resources at the centre of Stakeholder theory, relevant interests vested in the conflict are considered. The farmer and herder communities, relevant actors in the conflict chain. The farmers’ interest lies in the means of crop production which often include arable land (inherit, purchase or hire), freshwater, while the herders strive on green pasture on the land, freshwater and migration routes (national or international). As climate change intensifies, an upward shift in the frequency of the conflict becomes reoccurring decimal (Cabot 2017). For the farmers, the search for green pasture by the herders for their herds causes encroachment and destruction of farmlands (Tenuche & Ifatlmehin 2009). This environmental struggle according to Tenuche and Ifatlmehin (2009) is aggravated by a lack of adequate and functioning grazing reserves in the country. Therefore any attempt (political, institutional, socio-cultural and legal) which might limit the production capacity of either of the parties, as such is seen as a threat to survival. This at times provokes gruesome attacks and reprisals claiming lives and properties. The pogrom continues due to unrestricted access to guns and ammunition (AI 2018).

More so, the government constitute conflicting interest. The federal and state governments are expected to protect lives and safeguard properties of the citizens. The federal is obligated to regulate the affairs of the entire country while state government represent the interest of its residents. In upholding these mutually inclusive independent commitments, knowingly or unknowingly contradictory positions ensue. The legal responsibility of the two-level of government vitiate the principle of collective obligation. For instance, some states like Ekiti, Benue and Taraba enacted anti-open grazing law in order to deescalate the killings and destruction of properties (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin 2017; ICG 2018), but the processes and provisions of the laws are subject of national controversy. These laws are being considered as the policy of expulsion of the minority herder population in the concern states (Punch 2017).

According to Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin (2017), the defects in the laws, especially in Benue state, include discriminatory provisions on access to ranching leases putting the non-indigene at disadvantage. Also, the potential inconsistency of state law with the federal legislation, huge financial implication on the herders, inadequate preparation time for an effective date are the issues up against
anti-open grazing laws. It also contravenes the 1999 Constitution provisions on freedom of movement and residency. There is a high probability of legal battle between state and federal government. It further compounds by section (6, 29, & 30) of the Land Use Act of 1978. These provisions invariably grant the state government the power to allocate or revoke land ownership. The federal government policy and legal intervention are cut in the storm of agitation. Just recently, the government proposed RUGA policy sparked nationwide condemnation for lack of adequate consultation with relevant stakeholder (Okuku 2019) as well as its inconsistency with the National Livestock Transformation Plan. It was reported by Odunsi (2016) that three grazing-related bills (Grazing Areas Management Agency; National Ranches Commission; Keeping and Movement of Cattle in Nigeria) were rejected by the national assembly due to duplication and constitutional restrictions (Odunsi 2016). All these cast doubts on the sincerity of the government to manage the conflict owing to intrinsic complications of diverse interests. The increasing ethnic, religious, media sentiments contribute to the protracted conflict. The herders are mainly Fulani extraction of northern Nigeria and are predominantly Muslims. The aim of finding a uniform front to confront the conflict is being compromised by opposing demand from different groups affiliated with either the farmer and herder communities along ethnic and religious lines. All other ethnic groups recognise the Fulani minority as a threat to lives because of their cultural orientation and farming lifestyles (Idowu & Okunola 2017). For instance, the demands by socio-cultural groups like Northern Elders’ Forum, Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, Ijaw Youth Council, Yoruba Elders’ Forum and Ohaneze Ndi Igbo for their members to defend themselves increases the polarization of the entire country and breeds breakdown of law and order (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin 2017; Sahara Reporters, 2019; Punch 2019). The growing acrimony between the crop farmers and the herders promotes unleashing dangerous attack at least provocation from either party. Similarly, the media cannot be absolved from creating more tension between the farmer and herder communities due to their biased and sensational reporting of one group as a dangerous entity. The media stereotype against the Fulani herdsmen is worrisome. Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017) questioned the media reportage for engaging in war-driven journalism as against peace-focus reportage. They observed violent media frames such as ‘Killer herdsmen’, ‘Fulani herdsmen’, ‘Gun-carrying herdsmen’, and ‘Jihadist herdsmen’. This belligerent reporting of the conflict contribute to its being protracted. Another interest fixed around the conflict is the allegation of violation of fundamental human rights, which has increased the focus of non-governmental organizations on the conflict. Reports raise concerns over activities of security forces that vitiate the principle of civil liberty and fundamental human rights (AI 2018; ICG 2018). Going further, the stakeholder approach, which considers representation stakes,
analysing possible consequences and understanding moral basis of stakes, should guide the conflict reduction activities of the governments.

Externalities of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria

Across African nations, there have been reported clashes between the herders and farmers throughout the colonial period and even beyond (Abubakar 2012). The conflict existing between the herdsmen and the farmers is not a new societal crisis in Nigeria but in recent time, the heat of this conflict is on the high side thereby making it a subject of security concern and public debate (Bamidele 2018). Oli, Christopher and Nwankwo (2018) avers that the incessant clash between the herdsmen and farmers has resulted in general insecurity in Nigeria and many more socio-economic effects. The persisting crisis of herdsmen and farmers has resulted into “herdsmenism” which in the word of Ojo (2017) means unprecedented forceful and violent grazing activities of Nigeria’s herdsmen that have almost completely driven farmers off their farms. In addition, if this is allowed to persist for a few more years, have the potential of precipitating nationwide severe food insecurity and turning Nigeria into a food import-dependent nation (Ojo 2017).

The herder-farmer clash is resulting in a serious threat to economic prosperity and food security, which cannot be overemphasized. The clash has resulted in killings of thousands of farmers and their farms are being maimed or wiped off completely (Babagana et al 2019). This implies the possibility of a reduction in the food production capacity of the country. Another negative consequence of the conflict is viewed from the socio-economic perspective. Chidi Oguamanam adequately captured this grievous effect of the socio-economic implication of this conflict. He rightfully observed that 80% of Nigerian food production by crop farmers constitute the bedrock of the country’s informal economy and the country’s highest employer of labour (Oguamanam 2016; Babagana et al 2019). Various farmlands have come under attack which has resulted in many farmers having nothing or only a miserable portion of what they sow. Nigeria has suffered a great deal of loss of life and properties, couple with displacement of people across various regions due to the reoccurring crisis. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) placed Nigeria’s Fulani herdsmen as the world fourth-deadliest militancy group for having accounted for about 1,229 deaths in 2014 and accounted for nearly 500 deaths in the first quarter of 2016 (Oli et al 2018). Ojo (2017) also confirms this claim by reporting the SBM intelligence that there were 389 incidents involving herdsmen and farming communities between 1997 and 2015. Similarly, in 2016, SBM survey over 470 victims were killed because of cattle rustling and 1425 killed in attacks involving Fulani herdsmen. Loss of life and property accompany with displacement of victims has become the order of the day in any farmer-herder clash. The conflict resulted in near-mutual genocide of Christians and Muslims. In the course of the attacks and reprisals among herder and farmer communities, the
Christian and the Muslim societies have felt the heat of the atrocities, which clearly indicated that the attack is not religious-based but a plain act of terrorism. Over 5,000 lives have been lost with 100,000 internally displaced people through the attacks of herdsmen in the North-Central region (Idowu & Okunola 2017). An endless list is the damage done to the nation at large because of herder-farmer crisis.

The ongoing menace of herder-farmer conflict has imposed a threat on the national unity of the nation. This has resulted in religious sentiment and ethnic enmity, which made members of the society recognise some tribes as a threat over others (Idowu & Okunola 2017). In a similar tone, Ndubuisi (2019) pinned externalities such as human displacement, and dwindling spirit of security and nationalism as agency of the conflict. The herder and farmer conflict portrays adverse effects in the whole nation at large. It ranges from loss of lives and properties, assault on women and girl child, negative national image in foreign nations, economic loss and agricultural deficit resulting in scarcity of food. All these and more place urgent wake-up call on the nation and that stakeholder interests should be accommodated in the conflict reduction plan of the state.

**Conclusion**

The article submits that inconsistency and contradictory views of state apparatus (at the state and federal levels) contributed to the lingering conflict between the crop farmer and herder communities. For instance, the article established that the body language of state governments favoured the sedentary crop farmers as against the migratory cattle farming in their respective states with the instrumentality of the law by playing indigenous sentiments within the context of legal intervention (see Anti-Open Grazing Laws of Ekiti and Benue States). The federal government intervention appeared as a direct opposite of states affected by the farmer-herder conflict, thereby making the intervention a subject of public controversy. Going from here, firstly, it is suggested that adequate involvement of stakeholders in formulating policies bring about effective conflict reduction mechanisms. This is expected to provide workable institutional and legal arrangement that guide the relationship of state institutions with conflict-prone communities. Secondly, the media report should be adequately regulated to avoid the spread of bias and not so true report on conflict events. Lastly, the government should provide enabling support systems for commercialization of the ranches and its value chains in order to guarantee the sustainability of state-based solutions to the conflicts.


Oluku, E. (2019, 7 5). Nigeria: Ranch owners back suspension of Ruga settlements. This Day, pp.1


