

VIGILANTES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF FARMERS/HERDERS CONFLICT IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

Kenneth C. Asogwa, Ngozika A. Oloto-Uzoeto & Samuel N. Asogwa*

Institute of African Studies

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

sam.asogwa@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This study explores the growing role of vigilante organizations in the management of the conflict between farmers and herders in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The area is located in Nigeria. The antagonism that exists between farmers and herders is one of the most significant challenges that impede the sustainable development of rural areas and the maintenance of social order in the region. An investigation of the circumstances that contributed to the conflict, an investigation into the strategies that vigilante organizations employed, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of those strategies are the goals of this study. Deploying the qualitative approach, it explores the challenges that these groups face, such as the lack of trust from the community, the limited resources available, and the ineffective collaboration with existing security services. The statistics suggest that the efforts of vigilante groups alone are not sufficient to address the systemic causes that lead to the conflict, although these groups have been successful in reducing the risk of violent occurrences. In light of the conclusions of the study, it is recommended that measures be taken to enhance their skills and guarantee peace for an extended time.

Keywords: Vigilante, Management, Farmers/Herders, Conflict, Nsukka, Enugu

Introduction

Competition over natural resources that are rare, limited, and diminishing usually leads to violent conflict all over the world, which is unproductive, according to Adisa and Adenkunle (2010). This is because natural resources are limited, scarce, and diminishing. In Nigeria, the conflicts that have occurred between crop farmers and herders can be traced back to the beginning of time, and they are directly tied to the question of who owns the land that is used for agricultural purposes. These conflicts have been going on for a substantial amount of time. As a consequence of the violence that has taken place between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers over the course of the last few decades, hundreds of individuals have lost their lives. The ongoing violence in Nigeria is one of the most persistent threats to the country's security. As is the case with cattle herders and crop farmers in Nigeria, the volatility and intensity of resource-based conflict are

often heightened when competing groups of various ethnic countries, faiths, and socio-cultural values are involved. This is the case in Nigeria. The reason for this is that tensions have arisen between various groups, which has led to this situation.

When it comes to the disputes that are taking place in the central region of Nigeria, where the majority of crop farmers adhere to the Christian faith and herders are of the Islamic faith, this is the situation that has arisen. In the majority of instances, the herders will make use of sophisticated weapons in order to launch attacks against farming settlements. These attacks commonly end in the destruction of infrastructure, the raping of women and girls, as well as the burning of houses and property. In certain circumstances, the entire neighbourhood is annihilated by fire, and the people who live there are left without a place to spend their days. There have been attacks in the states of Benue, Plateau, and Enugu (Nsukka), as well as in certain localities located in the southern regions of Nigeria, where individuals have been murdered. The conflicts have escalated to a higher degree, and they are currently posing a threat to the existence of corporations in Nigeria. It is expected that these attacks will continue. There is a strong desire to look for methods and means of not only resolving the issue but also maybe looking for acceptable strategies to prevent or manage problems of a similar sort in the future. similar desire is overwhelmed by the fact that there is a drive to look for ways and means.

The conflict between farmers and herders has been quite frequent in the Nsukka Local Government Area in Enugu State, which is one of the locations in Nigeria where it has become a persistent security problem. Many other regions in Nigeria have also experienced this problem. The conflict, which is caused by competition for limited resources such as land and water, frequently develops into violence, which results in the loss of lives, the destruction of property, and the displacement of communities. The conflict is fostered by competition for limited resources. The conventional methods of dispute resolution, in addition to the interventions carried out by the machinery of state security, have frequently been demonstrated to be insufficient in resolving these differences.

The security vacuum that has been generated has resulted in the emergence of local vigilante organisations as essential actors in the prevention and management of disputes. This evolved as a potential solution to the security vacuum. It is well recognised that these organisations are known for their grassroots activities, which enable them to make use of their extensive acquaintance with the communities that they serve in order to resolve conflicts, prevent violent behaviour, and protect lives and property. Although the relevance of vigilante organisations is growing, there has been a paucity of academic attention dedicated to the role that they play in the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA). This is even though the importance of these organisations is in the process of growing. This study's objective is to rectify this deficit by providing a complete analysis of the contributions made by the sources as well as the limits of those sources.

Statement of the Problem

The menace of Fulani herdsmen and their entanglement with rural farmers, as well as the state intervention in curtailing it has attracted sufficient academic scholarship (Abroulaye et al., 2015; Adibe, 2020; Einstadter and Henry, 1995, Hall, 2001; Idowu, 2017; Idowu and Okunola, 2017). Apart from the numerous deaths the conflict has engendered, it has created suspicion and allegations of conspiracy from the subnational state actors against the central government (Abubarkar, 2012, Adisa and Adekunle, 2010, Alhasan, 2021, Amnesty International, 2018, Babajide, 2018). The deficiencies of institutional security services and government initiatives have been brought to light as a result of the continuous violence that is taking place in the Nsukka Local Government Area between farmers and herders. There has been a resurgence of violence as a consequence of the inability to address the fundamental causes of the conflict. This has further deteriorated the security situation and increased the level of poverty in the regions that have been affected by the conflict. Nevertheless, even though vigilante groups have established themselves to fill the hole, the duties that they perform continue to be inadequately defined and unsupported. Overreach, bias, and, in certain cases, abuses of human rights are some of the allegations that have been levied against these groups. Additionally, the fact that they do not have access to formal training or resources is a factor that contributes to the fact that their effectiveness is diminished. It is the intention of this study to analyse the contributions that vigilante groups have made, the challenges that they are confronted with, and the ways in which their efforts could be enhanced in order to guarantee that peace is preserved in the Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA).

The Characteristics and Roots of the Conflict

Farmers, who rely on land for agricultural cultivation, and herders, who want grazing spaces for their cattle, are the two groups that are at odds with one another in the Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA), which is the source of the conflict between farmers and herders. Both the growth of the population, which has resulted in an increase in the amount of strain placed on land resources, and climate change, which has pushed herders to migrate in a variety of different ways, have contributed to the aggravation of this conflict. Furthermore, problems surrounding the access to resources are frequently the result of insufficient enforcement of grazing limitations and laws that govern land usage. This is a common cause of disagreements. As a consequence of occurrences involving cattle encroachment on farmlands, destruction of crops, and theft of animals, a cycle of violence and mistrust has been developed between the two groups. Farmlands have been destroyed, and cattle have been stolen. Tensions amongst the parties involved have been further exacerbated as a result of these instances.

The Roots of the Conflict Between Farmers and Herders in Nsukka

It is possible to categorise the immediate causes as follows:

The destruction of crops caused by wild animals: The fact that the devastation of crops by cattle will lead to war is a well-known fact that has been widely acknowledged. Cattle are known to consume crops, which is the reason for this. This type of destruction is often carried out by animals that have wandered off from their herders, under the supervision of herders, and on occasion, under the control of both herders and farmers. According to the conclusions of those who conducted research (Tonah, 2006; Ofuoku and Isife, 2009), the activity that is responsible for the majority of conflicts is the destruction of crops. There is contamination in the origins of the water that is used for drinking: When it comes to agriculture and herding, it is general information that cattle, just like people, want water to drink. This is something that is common knowledge. The circumstance in which cattle contaminate the supply of drinking water with their faeces and urine, so damaging it, is often the most contentious issue. This is because cattle have the ability to degrade water sources. There is also the fact that the herdsman regard water to be a shared resource to which they have the right to lay claim. As a result, they are adamant about their right to utilise it, which may result in a conflict due to the negative effects that it has on the sociopolitical and economic growth (Tenuche and Ifatimehin, 2009).

When herders and farmers in the region come into confrontation with one another, one of the issues that frequently develops as a source of contention is the theft of cattle, which is sometimes referred to as cattle rustling or the slaughter of livestock. Shehu (2018) asserts that there are criminal elements that, in a number of places of that country, represent a threat to the safety of herders and the animals that they are responsible for caring for. Due to the fact that herders' livelihoods are based on the livestock, they are experiencing enormous financial losses as a result of cattle rustling. The herders of a community will often hire assassins to carry out a horrific vengeance in the event that cattle are taken from the community. This is the case regardless of whether or not the individual was involved in the crime. Because of Nigeria's inadequate security infrastructure, violent attacks between warring factions are unable to be prevented. This is one of the factors that leads to the ineffectiveness and lack of accountability of the administration. In the majority of cases, law enforcement or military forces arrive at the scene of an assault very late, and as a result, they are unable to prevent armed groups from destroying neighbourhoods or killing individuals before they actually do so. One of the reasons for this is that security agencies are chronically short in both training and equipment. This is only one of the many elements that contribute to this situation. When they are not well equipped, they do not possess the technologies that are required to deal with difficult natural situations such as hills and woods. The fact that some officers are believed to be working alongside the individuals who carried out the attack is another factor that makes it more challenging for the state to deal with the matter (Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2016).

In the dry season, herders have a tough time feeding their cattle due to the regular burning of bushes without distinction. This makes it difficult for them to survive. Some of them are responsible for starting fires in bushes prior to the start of the rainy season. These fires can sometimes spread to the farm and cause damage to crops that have already been harvested as well as crops that have not yet been harvested. Ofuoku and Isife (2010) state that during the dry season, grasses and forages become drier and less likely to be found. Herdsmen are of the opinion that if the dried vegetation is burned, then new pasture will be able to begin growing again. The vegetation eventually dries out as a result of the dry season, which is the reason for this phenomenon. During the course of its combustion, the fire extends to fields that are adjacent to it, resulting in the destruction of crops that were cultivated on personal farms owned by some farmers.

Do not take into consideration the authority that has been established: Nsukka is one of the rural villages in Nigeria that has power structures that are made up of traditional rulers, chiefs, village/town unions, and other groups that are comparable to these. Having rules and regulations within their jurisdiction, as well as the means to participate in rural development programs, allows these local authorities to improve their lives and provide aid to the government in the process of community development. In addition, they are able to provide assistance to the government. It has been observed by Ofuoku and Isife (2010) that the majority of herders often refuse to pay development taxes that are charged on producers of crops and livestock/poultry by traditional authority in the communities in which they are located. These taxes are assessed on producers for the purpose of generating revenue.

As a result of the fact that the subsistence of all stakeholders is entirely dependent on the common component of land, it is of the utmost importance that the expanses of land that are used for grazing and agriculture be reduced. In contrast, a crop farmer is dependent on the land for crop yield in order to survive, whereas a herder considers his herd, which is dependent on grazing pastures, to be his existence. This is due to the fact that life is meaningless without his cattle. It has been reported by IRIN (2009) that he is of the opinion that the encroachment of farmers on his grazing fields and routes represents a legal declaration of war. As a result of the shrinking quantity of arable lands and grazing areas that have been generated as a consequence of urbanisation, desertification, population increase, industrialisation, and other external forces, crop farmers and herders are continually in competition for productive land. This is because of the fact that the amount of land that is available for cultivation and grazing has decreased.

It is possible to categorise the remote causes as follows:

In Nigeria, one of the factors that indirectly promotes conflict between crop farmers and livestock herders is ideological competition between different ethnic groups. This competition is fuelled by the fact that different ethnic groups have different religious and ethnic tendencies. In accordance with Klare (2001), these conflicts frequently give the impression of being ethnic, and it is plausible that they have matured into such conflicts. On the other hand, if academics choose to ignore the reality that they originated in conflicts over resources, they run the risk of being misunderstood. According to Mikailu (2016), herders constitute approximately 29% of the overall population of Nigeria. They are members of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, which is a large ethnic group. They are always brave and adventurous when it comes to issues of confrontation between crop farmers and livestock herders. They are always willing to take risks. One more key hidden factor that is contributing to the increase of the conflict between farmers and livestock herders is religion. This is another factor that is adding to the conflict. Religious sentiments become a big part in the confrontations that take place as a consequence of the fact that the majority of cattle herders are Muslims and the settlements in which they take place are largely owned and operated by Christians.

One possible explanation for the development of conflict on the African continent is that the majority of African states, including Nigeria, are seeing a worsening of their poverty levels. An additional issue that might be taken into consideration is the internal displacement. There is a high probability that the individuals who are directly involved in the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria are rural farmers and cattle herders who are living in difficult circumstances. There is also the possibility that these individuals are not the actual owners of the animals when they are observed. Those individuals who were compelled to leave their villages as a result of the violence that occurred between farmers and herders do not have access to camps that are suitable for internally displaced persons (IDP at this time). In the majority of instances, the so-called "camps" where some individuals could find shelter are actually churches or school facilities. These facilities also have a negative impact on the day-to-day activities and educational possibilities that are accessible in the communities that are hosting them (Genyi, 2017).

Climate change has the following effects: A number of the fundamental issues that contributed to the outbreak of the war in the first place include climate change. According to Okeke (2014), the northern regions of Nigeria are facing a problem with desertification, which is having an impact on the livelihoods of a significant number of people throughout the country. During the course of the past sixty years, approximately 350,000 square kilometres of land in Nigeria has been turned into a desert or semi-desert, according to estimates provided by the United Nations. This transformation has occurred within the country. Shehu (2018) reports that the rate of desertification in the southern sections of the country is continuously increasing at a rate of 600 meters per year. This is a rate that is projected to continue. The implications of climate change,

which are drying up the Chad basin and fostering desertification in the north, are forcing herders to shift southward in search of water and grasses for their herds. This is happening as a result of the fact that climate change is producing these effects. The strain of development and deforestation is compounding the effects of climate change in the south, which is leading in a decline in the quantity of land accessible for cultivation and even less area suitable for grazing purposes. This is a consequence of climate change. As a consequence of this predicament, farmers and cattle herders will eventually find themselves in a position where they are at odds with one another. According to Mikailu (2016), the situation may grow significantly more serious in the years to come as a consequence of climate change and desertification, both of which are driving migrant herders further south. This is reinforced by the fact that the problem is becoming more severe.

Consequences of Farmers/Herds Conflicts

Despite the fact that the conflict between cattle herders and farmers in Nigeria has been going on for a number of years, it has become significantly more pronounced during the course of the last twenty years. The repercussions have been extremely concerning. According to Kwaja and Ademola Adelehin (2018) and Ilo et al. (2019), it is presumed that more than 10,000 individuals have lost their lives over the course of the last ten years. In order to emphasise the lethality of the Fulani herders, it is estimated that the death toll that resulted from clashes between herders and farmers in 2016 alone was approximately 2,500 people, and that the average number of fatalities that occurred between 2011 and 2015 was 2,000 (International Crisis Group, 2017). As a result of these conflicts, it is projected that 13.7 billion dollars, which is equivalent to 6.7 trillion Naira, have been lost. This information comes from NLTP (2019). According to the most recent information provided by the Nigeria Security Tracker, the number of people who lost their lives as a result of herders and farmers violent clashes in 2017 and 2018 was 1,041 and 2,037, respectively (Campbell, 2018).

The Importance of Vigilante Groups in the Management of Conflict

In the Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA), particularly in rural regions where institutional security measures are absent, it has become increasingly clear that vigilante groups are an integral component of conflict management. This is especially true during times of heightened tension. The establishment of a mechanism for the reporting of prospective disagreements, the reduction of the likelihood of conflicts occurring, and the guaranteeing of the safety of the community are the fundamental objectives of these organisations.

When it comes to the resolution of conflicts, vigilante organisations frequently take on the position of mediators, a role that allows them to facilitate peaceful negotiations between farmers and herders between the two groups. The fact that they patrol areas that are particularly susceptible to cattle encroachment on farmlands is one

of the ways in which they contribute to the prevention of such incidents. The provision of monitoring and the rapid response to incidents of theft or violence are two additional ways in which vigilantes contribute greatly to the establishment of community security. Vigilance members are also responsible for providing monitoring. In order to avoid the conflict from becoming more severe, they report early warning indications of conflict and address them, in coordination with traditional rulers and community leaders. This is done in order to prevent the conflict from becoming more severe.

The Obstacles Confronted by Vigilantes

However, despite the fact that they provide an important purpose, vigilante organisations are challenged with a variety of challenges that hinder their effectiveness. The lack of accessible resources is one of the most major difficulties that these organisations face. This is due to the fact that they typically operate with inadequate funding, training, and equipment. It is difficult for them to efficiently manage conflicts due to the fact that they do not have sufficient resources at their disposal. Because many vigilante organisations operate informally and without clear legal frameworks, legal constraints also provide significant challenges. This is because of the fact that legal limits are a significant hurdle. Because there is no regulation in place, there is a possibility that there will be instances of power abuse or conflicts with the agencies that are responsible for law enforcement.

Additionally, claims of prejudice and partiality, in which vigilante organisations are seen to favour either farmers or herders, can weaken the legitimacy of these groups and aggravate tensions. These allegations can be made in a number of different ways. Their activities have, in some instances, led in a rise in the level of violence, which has further exacerbated the conflict. This is because of the use of disproportionate force, which contributed to the increase in violence.

Methodology

In order to accomplish the goals of data collection and analysis, the research project decided to make use of the document analytic approach. The methodology is a component of the qualitative method of data collection and analysis. It required the review and analysis of pertinent literatures, reports from the media, academic journals, newspapers and magazine publications, and seminar presentations that are related to the subject matter, which primarily focuses on the problem of vigilantes and the management of conflicts between farmers and herders in the Nsukka local government area of Enugu State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to properly manage the conflict between farmers and herders in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, it is necessary to employ a strategy that engages several parties. It is vital that the actions of vigilante organisations be

supported by appropriate legislation, collaboration, and funding. This is the case even if vigilante organisations play a significant role in lowering the possibility of violence and maintaining the safety of communities. It is possible to achieve a number of desirable outcomes, including the reduction of tensions, the promotion of peaceful coexistence, and the enhancement of the overall security of the region. These objectives can be accomplished through the implementation of solutions that are both inclusive and long-lasting, as well as through the resolution of the issues that distinct groups are facing.

It is proposed that a number of efforts be put into action in order to help overcome these challenges and improve the role that vigilante groups play in the management of the conflict that is occurring between farmers and herders. One of the first things that needs to be done is to establish regulations for vigilante organisations and to give them with training. The effectiveness of their operations can be improved by the establishment of legislative frameworks that would formalise their activities and through the provision of training on topics such as conflict resolution, human rights, and community policing.

The cooperation that occurs between vigilantes, law enforcement, traditional rulers, and local governments ought to be given a higher amount of attention and prioritisation. The formation of local peace committees that comprise members of both farmers and herders in order to foster conversation and mutual understanding is one of the strategies that can be utilised. This is done in order to create peace and harmony in the community. In addition to this, the formulation of policies is of very crucial significance. It is possible that the establishment of ranching or grazing reserves could contribute to the reduction of conflicts about the utilisation of land. Additionally, the enforcement of regulations that prohibit the theft of cattle or the damage of crops could be of assistance in preventing the occurrence of such conflicts.

An additional stage that is of critical importance is the participation of the community. By encouraging communication and inclusiveness among the several stakeholders, it will be possible to ensure that solutions are accepted by all of the parties involved and that they can be effectively maintained over time. Last but not least, vigilante organisations should be provided with appropriate funds and resources to enable them to carry out their obligations in an effective and accountable manner through the provision of enough funding and resources.

References

- Abroulaye, S., Issa, S. and Abalo, K. E. and Nouhoun, Z. (2015). Climate change: A driver of crop farmers-agro pastoralists conflicts in Burkina Faso. In *International Journal of Applied Science and Technology*, 5(3).
- Abubakar, M. (2012). Sociological assessment of nomadic pastoralist and sedentary farmer conflicts in Katsina State. MSc Thesis, Presented at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

- Adibe, R. (2020). Climate change and conflict in Nigeria. *Journal of Environmental Studies*, 40(2), 123-135.
- Adisa, R. S. and Adekunle, O. A. (2010). Farmer-Herdsmen Conflicts: A Factor Analysis of Socio-Economic Conflict Variables among Arable Crop Farmers in North Central Nigeria. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 30, 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09709274.2010.11906266>
- Alhasan, S. (2021). Miyetti Allah To FG, NASS: 'Stop Governors from enacting Anti-Open Grazing Laws'. Channels Television. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mybcGrU73ys>
- Alu, A. (2017, March 22). Fulani herdsmen in Ekiti: Their many attacks, attempted solutions. Retrieved February 2, 2019, from kapital929:
- Amnesty International (2018). Harvest of death: Three years of bloody clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Amnesty International Ltd.
- Babajide, J. (2018, April 24). Protest in Makurdi as herdsmen allegedly kill priests, 17 worshipers. Retrieved from [://tribuneonline.ng.com/protest-inmakurdi-as-herdsmen-kills-priests-17-worshipers/](http://tribuneonline.ng.com/protest-inmakurdi-as-herdsmen-kills-priests-17-worshipers/)
- Benue State Government. (2017). Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law. Makurdi: Benue State Government Printing Press.
- Einstadter, W. and Henry, S. (1995). *Criminological theory: An analysis of its underlying assumptions*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Genyi, G. A. (2017). Ethnic and Religious Identities Shaping Contestation for Land Based Resources: The Tiv-Farmers and Pastoralists Conflicts in Central Nigeria until 2014. *J. Living Together - 4-5 (1)*: 136-151.
- Hall, J. R. (2001). "Religion and violence: Social processes in comparative perspective". In Dillon, M. (Ed.) *Handbook for sociology of religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Idowu, A. J. and Okunola, B. T. (2017). Pastoralism as a new phase of terrorism in Nigeria. In *Global Journal of Human-Social Science Interdisciplinary*. 17(4), Version 1.0.
- Idowu, A. O. (2017). Urban violence dimension in Nigeria: Farmers and herders onslaught. *AGATHOS*, 8(1), 187-206.
- Ilo I.S. (2019). The Fulani herding system, Washington, African Development Foundation. pp. 6-12
- International Crisis Group. (2017). Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict, *Africa Report*, 252. IRIN, (2009). Nigeria: curbing farmer-nomadic clashes and protecting livestock routes. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/news/v.phd>
- Klare T. M. (2001). Resource wars: the new landscape of global conflict. Reviewed by Richard N. Cooper. Capsule Review May/June
- Kwaja, A.M.C. (2018). Blood, cattle and cash: Cattle rustling and Nigeria's burgeoning underground economy. *West Africa Insight*, 4 (3).

- Mikailu, N. (2016). Making sense of Nigeria's Fulani-farmer conflict. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News, 5th May
- Moore, K. M. (2005). Conflict, social capital and managing resources: a West African case study. *CABI Publishing*, Cambridge, USA, 44-53
- NLTP. (2019). National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) 2019-2028. Strategy Document, National Economic Council. pp 28
- Ofuoku, A. and Isife, B. (2010). Causes, Effects And Resolution Of Farmers-Nomadic Cattle Herders Conflict In Delta State, Nigeria. *Agricultura Tropica Et Subtropica*, 33-41.
- Olaniyan, A. and Yahaya, A. (2016). Cows, Bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria. *Africa Spectrum*, 93-105.
- Shehu, H. (2018). The Causes and Consequences of Fulani Pastoralist-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria. *Int. J. Inn. & Res. Edu. Sci*, 5(3):357-361.
- Tenuche M. S. and Ifatimehin O. O. (2009). Resource conflict among farmers and Fulani herdsman: Implications for resource sustainability, *Afr. J. Pol. Sci. & Int. Rel.* 3 (9): 360-364. <http://www.academicjournals.org/ajpsir>
- Tonah, S. (2006). Managing farmer-herder conflicts in Ghana's Volta Basin. Ibadan. *J. Soc. Sc.* 4(1):35-45