

Herder-Farmer Conflict and Issues of Sustainable Development in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State

Michael Daniel¹, Adamson Ganiyu Duncan¹

¹Department Political Science. Kogi State University Kabba, Kabba-bunu LGA, Kogi State
damichael@ksukabba.edu.ng, gdadamson@ksukabba.edu.ng

Corresponding Author: damichael@ksukabba.edu.ng

Received 10 April 2024; revised 23 May 2024; accepted 05 June 2024

Abstract

The context of this paper discusses the brunt of herder-farmer conflicts on sustainable development in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue state. This conflict, which overwhelms different communities in Agatu LGA, had in recent time resulted to killings of over 5500 natives and destruction of properties worth millions of naira. This paper examines the causes of resources conflicts between the two occupational groups in Agatu LGA. This is to assess the outcome of this resources conflict between herder-famer on sustainable development in Agatu LGA. Data for this paper, which were drawn from both primary and secondary sources; rely on groups' discussions and structure interviews with the key actors namely: local authorities, traditional rulers, religious leaders, Fulani pastoralists, farmers and library respectively. The historical analyses were also analyzed via content analysis. The paper reveals that Farmers- herder conflicts affect food security, internal revenue and qualities education of warring communities in Agatu LGA. These however, depleted sustainable development in Agatu area. The study recommends that government should come up with policies to create grazing reserves and dams for pasture in north-central states. This is with the view to prevent pressure on the limited resource and avoiding straying distances in search of pastures.

Key words: Herder, Farmer, Conflict and Sustainable development

Introduction

Agatu local government area was created in 1996 with Obagaji as its headquarters. Though, Agatu is a district of the old Otukpo division. It is one of nine local government areas in the southern senatorial zone which is mainly occupied by the Idoma people of Benue State. This group is popularly called Agatu, as a country name, with about 162,000 inhabitant, predominantly Christian. The resident populations are mainly farmers. The local government shares boundary with Apa and Gwer West local government areas of Benue State as well as with Omala local government area of Kogi State. However, the Agatu people live on their ancestral land in Benue state, therefore, regarded as the native of the community. The local government area is noted for fish production as well as yams, rice, beans, cassava, maize, soybeans, sorghum and millet (Emmanuel, 2016).

The recurrent Conflict of this kind resulted from disagreement between the two occupational groups. It is a natural phenomenon that can manifest in various degrees and mode (Ibidi, 2016). This conflict often occurs between host communities and nomadic herdsmen as a result of survival strategy that is perpetrated by climate change and limited resources (Nte, 2016). These groups adopted several tools to expressing dissatisfaction and this determines the severity of conflicts. It could also be described as a negative feeling that is expressed in forms of hatred, fight, violence etc. Conflict is an essential feature of the society that sometimes makes society to progress. This means that conflict is inevitable in human societies, thus, Otite (1999) writes that conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resource are usually scarce. Thus, conflict is a conscious act involving individual or group interaction leading to stiff competition over limited resources. Perhaps, it is important to understand that conflict can be salient and therefore, it is rife to see a physical expression of discord in its undiluted form in such a way that emotion and physical forms such as verbal abuse; negative sign; the use of instrument of violent may be expressed in all forms of human disagreement such as war between states and actors in all aspect of human endeavour.

Sustainable development is the concept aimed at tackling global issues in 21st century such as poverty, increases inequality, poor structural development and health services delivery. The UN environment program, briefly defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Robèrt, 2000). This definition was the first overview of the world, which examined the environmental aspects of development from economic, political and social perspective. So far, herders/farmers conflict thwart responsive of political system, which aim at strengthen social order.

Cattle rearing were mainly prevalent in the northern Nigeria, where crops production was carried out only during the short rainy season on a small scale, except the use of irrigation. This gave cattle herders a limited access to a vast area of grass land, despite the introduction of irrigated farming system in the northern Nigeria. Yet, the area witness withering of pasture during the dry season, less pasture was available to cattle herders. Thus, herdsmen take advantage of coastal area with longer rainy season, in search of pasture and water (Ijirshar and Terlumun, 2015:2). This increases the pressure on the limited natural resource, which led farmers/herders conflict in central Nigeria (Adegboye, 2004). The most alarming crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Benue state has continued to shows little signs of abating. The nonstop exchange of violence has claimed many lives and several thousand of persons displaced in Nigeria (Global Terrorism Index, 2015).

Between 2013 to date, there have been thirty different cases of herders/farmer conflict in Agatu Local government area. Because of the ongoing tragedy in various communities in Agatu local government area, an estimated, 5500 people have being killed, this in way have affected sustainable development in the area. For example, the killing of cattle, destruction of crops and displacement of people affects agricultural production and internal generated revenue in the affected areas (Nte, 2016). As well, it increases poverty level and food insecurity in the affected villages and town of Agatu Local Government Area and beyond (Crisis Group interview, 2017). The study finds that all Agatu communities are exclusively agrarian societies, the disintegration of families and communities due to the crisis, undermined economic growth and sustainable development. This was as a result of Encroachment on grazing tranches, Conflict of interest over scarce resources (land), the absence of grazing reserves and routes and Human and livestock population growth with no corresponding increase in land mass caused the frequent crisis in Agatu area.

The herders-farmer conflict in Agatu Local government area, had establishes unhealthy relationship between the two occupational group in area. Partly, this inadequacy in the existing relationship between them had affected sustainable development (Robèrt, 2000). Against this background, farmers-herders conflicts in Agatu LGA get worsening on daily basis, which the study considered as revival of old hatred between warring parties. However, the paper set out to examine the outcome of herders-farmer conflicts on sustainable development in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue state.

The choice of this theoretical framework helps us to establish the limit, in terms of range of variables, and facts to be studied. This in turn led to better understanding of the topic before us. To accomplish this analytical task, the Frustration & Aggression theory is adopted for this paper.

The study derives significance from the fact that it addresses a phenomenon that creates undesirable and inimical consequences for sustainable development in North Central Nigeria. Consequence upon this view, the study adds to multiple literatures that will provide adequate information that increases readers understanding on the effects of resources conflict on sustainable development in North-Central Nigeria. This is predicated on the assessment of various contributions made by scholars regarding causes and outcome of resources conflict between farmers and herders in North Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study sets out to consider the following research questions in this study:

- i. What are the causes of farmers-herders conflicts in North Central Nigeria?
- ii. How does the herders-farmers conflict in north central Nigeria affect sustainable development?
- iii. Are there measures that can end the effect of herders/farmers conflicts on sustainable development?

Research Methodology

Data for this paper were drawn from the primary and secondary source mainly from group's discussions and structure interviews with the Fulani pastoralists, and Farmers, traditional rulers and library. Historical-descriptive were also analyze via content analysis. It is believed that both sources of data improve the understanding of farmer/herders conflicts in Benue state and Nigerian at large, in order to ensure a comprehensive analysis of farmer/herders conflicts and sustainable development.

Study Area

Agatu is one the Local Government Area of Benue State; t play host to arable farming and pastoral agriculture for the reason that it has good temperate climate which offers, a favourable environment for crop and animal production to thrive thereby making it not only a producer of raw materials, but an avenue for multi-cultural relations (Zahemen, 2018). These occupational groups to provide food security, raw materials and job creation. These contribute to internal revenue of the state. The agricultural potential in Agatu Local Government Area are vast in food production ability that resolving food scarcity in Nigerians. The headquarters of Agatu LGA is called Obajaji. The host community had benefiting from mutually beneficial relationship, where both enjoyed absolute peace in their area. The arrival of agricultural pastoralist resulted to stiff competition over scarce resources in the area, due to 'intensification of crop and animal production that are necessitated by increasing human population in Agatu LGA. Agatu, is a country name, with about 162, 00 inhabitant, (National Bureau of Statistic, 2006) predominantly Christian. The resident populations are noted for fish production as well as yams, rice, beans, cassava, maize, soybeans, sorghum and millet (Akevi, 2014). The vulnerable people are Ogule, Owule and Enungba with history of frequent attacks. The attackers were, fully armed with dangerous weapons, invaded the communities to destroyed human lives, crops and livestock; which led to food scarcity, unemployment, marital dissatisfaction, rape, and breakdown of trust. (Michael and Ufo, 2015). Today, this cordiality had degenerated into blood confrontation between the two groups due to desire to protect their opposing interest.(Nte, 2016). The study assumed that the cause of conflict between pastoral and crop farmers are conflicts over the material needed for existence.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The population of the study comprises of Farmers, Herders, Youths, traditional rulers and clergy men. The totalling of twenty (20) respondents purposively selected out total population of 162,200 for the purpose of interview. The sample size of the study is 20 respondents; comprising of Farmers, Herders, Youths, traditional rulers and clergy men draw from three selected communities' purposive sampling techniques were applied to select the sample size of 20 respondents. Purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling (non-probability sampling) was adopted to select the respondents for the interview. This is to ensure gathering of data from respondents who are difficult to identify and locate, by uses our discretion to

pick the samples population. This is applicable to the cases of nomadic herdsmen. For the purpose of interview, purposive sampling techniques were applied to select total of 4 farmers, 4 youths, 4 herders, 4 traditional rulers and 4 clergy men (Islam and Christianity) see table 1.

Table 1: Sample Frame of the Interview Respondents

Respondents	Agatu LGA		Total
	Ogule,	Owule	
Farmers	2	2	4
Herders	2	2	4
Youths	2	2	4
Traditional rulers	2	2	4
Clergy men	2	2	4
Total	10	10	20

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 1, shows the sample frame of the Interview-respondents in each of the two selected community in Agatu LGA of Benue. The total sample size of 20 respondents was purposively selected from Ogule, and Owule, in Agatu LGA, respectively. The researcher was able to interviewed 15 respondents, among groups of farmers, youth, traditional rulers and clergy men. Although 20 persons were slated for interview, however the following were successfully interviewed. They were:

Table 2.: Sample Frame of Responses

S/N	Scheduled Respondents	Number	Successfully interview
1	Farmers	4	4
2	Herders	4	-
3	Youths	4	3
4	Traditional rulers	4	4
5	Clergy men	4	4
6	Total	20	15

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 2, this is showing the responses rate of the respondents during the interview; out of 20 respondents scheduled for the interview, 15 respondents that represent 75% were Successfully interviewed. This was considered adequate for research consideration.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The study is a survey research and data was collected using an instruments; this include interview. An interview was conducted with community heads, herders, farmers, youth and clergy men, while herders from the selected volatile communities earlier mention, could not be identified and located. An in-depth interview was conducted with the selected respondents. Each of them have its particular responsibilities in such a manner as to bring forth information as regards causes of farmers/herders conflicts, effect of herders-farmers conflict on sustainable development and measure to end effects on resource conflicts on sustainable development in Agatu LGA. The interview was conducted at the instance and convenience of the interviewee, which lasted for a period of less than 40 minutes. The in-depth interviewed respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique. These instruments rely on probing questions and face-to-face discussion techniques to seek information. The use of face-to-face techniques allows the researcher to seek

for clarification, elaboration or additional details from the respondents, using Tape/video recorder. The discussions took place in locations that were conducive to elicit information. The researcher carefully observed and analysed the comments and the experiences being shared by respondents from the target population in the selected local government area. The identity and purpose of the researcher was revealed to only the community leaders and not revealed to the community members as regards to the cases of the two occupational groups.

Conceptual Framework

Conflicts is the state of disagreement caused by the either real or alleged opponent of needs, values and interests and can be within oneself or between two or more individuals (Bradshaw 2008). Conflict refers to the contradictions inherent in power relations and which manifest themselves in individual and group interactions with one another and with nature in the pursuit of limited resources or opportunities. Conflicts according to Sullivan (2003, p. 11) is the struggle between different groups in society to gain control of, and have access to scarce societal resources that are considered valuable.

So far, conflicts in Agatu LGA have taken the dimensions, civil national strife and boundary conflict (Abiola, 2007, p. 327). Most of these violent confrontations were between these occupational groups in states, while others were between ethnic groups over available limited resource. The aftermath of these conflicts led to millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, severe economic dislocation and a humanitarian crisis of enormous proportion.

Abiola, writes that an endless nature of violent conflict necessitate a severe impact of sustainable development (Abiola, (2007, p. 238). Thus, reducing the risk of war, will establishing a durable peace and sustainable development in Nigeria. The triggers of conflicts identified by the writer includes, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, disrespect for minority rights and majority interests. Others include abuse of political power, human right abuse, competition for scare natural resources including land and water.

Conflicts lead to undue emphasis on military spending, increases in flows refugees and internal displaced persons, which themselves aggravate existing tensions, and encourage the diversion of valuable funds that could otherwise be used for sustainable human development. Abiola, (2007, p.238) argues that conflicts also create political instability, which affects foreign investments. This overview is an unbearable review by loyalist of the causes and the effects of the economic woes in the country in terms of its security lapses. Put differently, land is a critical issue over herders/farmer conflicts in Agatu Local Government Area. Ethnic claims over space and land are often buttressed by a specific history of migration and settlement. Hussani, (2010, p. 115) writes that issues over land and space often generates serious controversies, sometimes resulting in violent conflicts.

The unwillingness and lack of genuine commitment of government to engage the services of security experts to tackle the problem of insecurity in Nigeria is another causal factor. Aligwara, (2009: 65) observes that to ensure security human and material resources must be coordinated in order to achieve security. The objective of national security is to ensure protection of territorial integrity, economic resources, political and social values as well as national interests which are found within the immediate borders of the State.. The link between economy and insecurity affect sustainable development in Benue state and beyond. Consequently, Payne, (1995) argues that the tight linkage between economic developments is an essential part sustainable developmental policy of United States. In Benue State, herders-farmer conflict has been responsible for the direct and indirect death of millions of civilians and has contributed significantly to abject poverty, inadequate services provision; political instability, retarded economic growth (Richard and Annie, 2010:10), among other challenges that affects sustainable development.

This resources conflict is detrimental to sustainable development (Economic, social and environment). Marta, (2015:51) observes that armed conflicts appear to be major obstacles to sustainable development. In spite of pressure by large number individual and institution to end the conflict violence that does not seems to be abating. Apart from detrimental materials effects, herders-farmers conflicts have considerable psychosocial effects such as loss of history and identity. For instance, victim of herders-farmer conflict are victim of sustainable destruction. Therefore, herders/farmer conflicts not only destroying potential sustainable futures but also wipe out large portions of history. Similarly, conflict of this nature creates additional strain on limited financial resources by creating a need for humanitarian work. As if that was not enough misery already with proliferating illness and poverty in the crisis area.

Sustainable development is the concept aimed at tackling global issues, such as poverty, increasing inequality, and deterioration of health service delivery. The UN Environment Program briefly revealed that sustainable development is an approach to meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations (Robèrt, 2000). This recognized that human needs are central. For example, pastoralists need land for grazing purpose, while farmers also need land for farming activities. This is fundamental to sustainable development in Agatu LGA. But this needs for land has created clash of interest due to scarcity, therefore, put pressure on the available resource (land) in Benue State and beyond.

In our society today, it is established statistically that eight out of ten of the world poorest countries experienced violent conflict in large scale (Frances, 2002). This violent conflict of this nature is the basis of civil wars in most developing countries. Historically the incidence of violent conflict has been on the rise since 1950 with most of the conflict being within state. One major cause of conflict is premised on human needs, which are usually ignored or suppressed in the current conflict management systems, as largely constituting the root cause of conflict and in that context points out negotiation and settlement as tools that can be problematic in conflict resolution (Burton 1990). Conflict, however, is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, what is important is the way in which the society responds to the emerging conflicts.

The impacts of conflicts on society can be drawn from explicit destruction of material and lives; this is true of inter-tribal conflict (Richard and Annie, 2010, p. 13). This destruction dimension in term of physical infrastructure; road, bridge, school, hospital, and administrative building were experienced. The physical devastation of conflicts has terrible effects on sustainable development through reduced production, falling exports, increased debt and decreased social expenditure (Steward and Fitzgerald, 2001). In fact, this resources conflict puts sustainable development into reversed, as it reduces the daily income in the conflict areas. Perhaps, maybe, the infrastructure and economy are both shattered during conflicts.

The framework for sustainable development is gear towards understanding the present reality of conflicts and challenges for the sustainable development. Conflict is predictable but Sustainable Development is attainable. Whereas conflict over natural resources or of any kind are neither new phenomenon nor are they unavoidable it is the approaches that are adopted to manage them that generate interests and makes a difference between peace and violence (Muboko 2011). There are two major perspectives on conflict particularly as it is being viewed today. Some sees conflict as evil or a curse that needs to be avoided at all costs. In that context, rational systems theorists view conflict as a destructive force. The other perspective sees conflict as both constructive and destructive. It is based on the argument that much emphasis on the potential negative consequences of conflict distracts attention from its potential benefits (Muboko 2011). Armed conflicts appear to be major obstacle to sustainable development. Apart from detrimental material effects, armed conflicts have considerable effect such as loss of history and identity. Still, violent conflicts have verity of negative social impacts including quality of life, population displacement, and communities' resettlement, inadequate of health care and social service and distrust. The violent conflict has detrimental effects on mental health of children as well as their whole families.

Conclusively, the economic impact of herders/farmers conflicts is deep, with negative impacts on economic fracture such as the supply of basic goods, banking system, productivity and employment. The conflicts of this nature discourage investment. In 2015 study, the federal government was losing \$13.7 billion in revenue annually because of herders/farmer conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and plateau state (Crisis Ground Interview, 2017).

Frustration & Aggression theory

Frustration – aggression theory, more commonly known as frustration–aggression hypothesis, ranks among the most influential and useful theories in research on aggression. Aggression theory is adopted by various areas of discipline. These include clinical and social psychology, ethnology, sociology, criminology, among others. Mowrer, and Sears in 1939 stated the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression (Sturmey, 2017). This theory was originally conceived by Dollard and Miller (1939) but substantially refined by Berkowitz in 1969. The theory states that aggression is an outcome or result of blocking or frustrating a person's efforts towards a certain goal (Dollard, 1939; as cited in Myers, 2007). The theory further posits that frustration caused by interference in goal-directed activity produces a 'readiness' for aggression which if 'triggered' can result in aggressive response. According to Rationis (2014), the trigger could be an insignificant element of behaviour, such as a casual joke, gesture or mild criticism which would normally be overlooked, but to the frustrated individual who is already waiting for an opportunity to show his frustration it may provoke aggressive response or reprisal. This proposed theoretical model helped to explain these complexities in the frustration-aggression paradigms as done below. In the midst of plenty, herder-farmer conflicts affect sustainable development suffer social disorder that open up unemployment, poverty, hunger, terminal illnesses, deaths, and Frustration causing aggression and violent conflict in Agatu LGA of Benue state. According to the above statement, Miller et al. (1941), write that aggression is one of several possible consequences of frustration. Among the characteristics aside from aggression that frustration can affect is the development or increase of injustice and depression. According to Dollard and Miller (1939), frustration is the "condition which exists when a goal-response suffers interference," while aggression is defined as "an act whose goal-response is injury to an organism (or an organism surrogate)." The theory says that frustration causes aggression, but when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target. For example, if a man is disrespected and humiliated at his work, but cannot respond to this for fear of losing his job, he may go home and take his anger and frustration out on his family. This theory is also used to explain riots and revolutions, which both are believed to be caused by poorer and more deprived sections of society who may express their bottled up frustration and anger through violence.

When people perceive that they are being prevented from achieving a goal, their frustration is likely to turn to aggression. The closer you get to a goal, the greater the excitement and expectation of the pleasure. Thus the closer you are, the more frustrated you get by being held back. Unexpected occurrence of the frustration also increases the likelihood of aggression. Frustration does not always lead to aggression, particularly when people deliberately suppress it because either they know that it is wrong or they fear the social consequences of being aggressive (e.g. losing friendship of target, criticism from others). As a result, they often displace aggression into other activity, such as sports, driving fast and so on. Some people are more predisposed to aggression and find it harder to contain it. For such people, frustration is more likely to that lead directly to aggression than for other people with a calmer disposition or greater self-control (Barker, 1941)

For example, the desire for natural resources abundantly endowed Agatu LGA has transformed the previous peace into a dreadful region of chaos as a result of herder-farmer conflict. The gravity of this disorder can be imagined from the postulation of Ijirshar and Terlunmun, (2015) in which they avers that withering of pasture during the dry season, less pasture was available to cattle herders and high volume of Tsetse flies make the herder to approach the southern and central Nigeria whose advantage of coastal area and longer rainy season, provides abundant pasture and water. Ijirshar and Terlunmun submission is very clear. It means

the increase pressure on the limited natural resource, led to farmers-herders conflict in Agatu LGA. In other words, this resource conflict is an outcome of clash interest over scarce resources (land) in Agatu LGA. Both occupational groups rely on land for their economic activities thereby put pressure on the available resource, because pastoralists need land for grazing purpose, and farmers equally need land for farming activities.

The influx of nomadic herdsmen represents huge development, because the situation spring up economic activities in such area. For example, a pastoral Fulani family is the traditional herds unit. Tasks are divided by gender and age among the members of the family (Iro, 1994:103). The main work of men is to manage the herd, build tents and camps and make security tools such as knives, bow, arrows and guns for commercial quantity. The Women unit play domestic role, such as selling cow milk, weaving and mat making (Iro, 1994:104). Some women are also involved in farming such as growing vegetables and raising poultry. This expansion increases economic activities of the hosting communities. This nature of development over time has translated into immense structural development, namely: construction of road networks and houses. This had caused encroachment of both local and international ranches and farmland. Besides, the influx of nomadic herdsmen in Agatu LGA that put pressure on limited resource (land), which translates into conflict, the impact assessment on the environmental neglect to the detriment of the hosting communities within the area. Such actions degenerate into several tragedies creates sad feeling for the warring parties whose special attachment to the land is survival.

Causes of Herder-Farmer Conflicts in Agatu LGA

Komolafe empirically review herder-farmer conflict in Agatu LGA. This believes was drawn from the fact that the area is predominantly agrarian societies. It is perhaps, the oldest occupation of the people in the state. The people survive on natural reward of land however, as these natural resources became scares due to pressure from the growing population, they later restored to domesticating animals and plant (Komolafe, 1979). But the conventional practices of crop production and animal husbandry among Fulani have resisted the pleasure of modernity and instead chosen to remain attached to their animal in the bush. As result of their movements in search of grazing pastures most times, they cross path of crop producers herein referred to as farmer, who find fault in the destruction of their crops by animals. The aftermath of such unavoidable contact is usually conflict or outright of bloodletting.

The conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers usually arise when the herdsmen invade community farmland with their cattle and let them graze unrestricted both on cultivated and uncultivated land thereby destroying valuable food and cash crops which are the mainstay of the host communities. When the communities try to resist them and request their exit, the Fulani herdsmen become violent and attack the community sometimes with the aid of hired mercenaries from the neighboring western Africa countries (Elnathan, 2014). Farmer in Agatu community for instance, accused Herders of killing hundreds people in Benue State, herders reacted that the crisis started after 10,000 of cattle belonging to its members were killed by Agatu natives. Thus, the herdsmen were bent on turning farmland into their grazing area.

Recently, there have been escalations of reported attacks by Fulani herdsmen who brutally kill natives of the invaded farming communities including women and children in Agatu LGA (Agency Report, 2018). The massacre witness in Benue state gets worsens; as the entire situations were not properly manage. In fact, Peter writes that over 5,500 lives were reportedly lost in the bloody crisis between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Agatu LGA, since the outbreak of the crisis in 2013 to date (Peter, 2017).

In February 2013, there was Fulani attacked Inoli, Ologba, Olegeje, Olegogboche, Olegede, Adana and Abugbe community. In May 7, 2013 forty-seven mourners were gunned down in Agatu during burial ceremony. A week later, in same month over 200 herdsmen surrounded Ekwo-okpanchnyi in Agatu LGA, killing forty locals. In July 2013, herdsmen invade two villages in Agatu LGA killing eight villagers allegedly in reprisal for killing 112 cows. Later, in November 7th 2013, herdsmen strike at Ikpele and okpopolo communities killing 7 persons and displacing over 600 inhabitants. In November 9, 2013 thirty-

six (36) natives of Agatu were killed and 7 villages overrun in an attack by Fulani herdsmen (Agency Report, 2018).

Two months later, January 20th, 2014 to be precisely Fulani herdsmen was alleged of killing 5 soldiers and 7 civilians in Agatu LGA. Then, in March 30, 2014 nineteen native killed and fifteen abducted in Agatu LGA. In April 15, 2014 there was attack on Obagaji, Headquarters of Agatu LGA twelve youths were killed.

January 27, 2015 seventeen persons killed in the attacks on Abugbe, Okolo, Ogwule and Ocholoyan in Agatu LGA by herdsmen. In March 15, 2015 Egba village in Agatu LGA sacked by herdsmen, where over 90 people, including women and children killed (Agency Report, 2018).

In March 11th, 2016 there is attack on Senator David Mark convoy by suspected herdsmen in Agatu LGA, but no casualty recorded. In February 29th, 2016 eleven persons were killed in edugbeho agatu LGA including a police inspector. Then, in March 10, 2016 two persons were killed in attack on Obagaji the headquarters of Agatu LGA (Agency Report, 2018). Perhaps, ever since the last attack on Agatu LGA in 2016, from 2017 to date the community has not witness any form of conflict violent; except that of the similar crisis within other local government that make of Benue state. This is because conflicts of these nature are inevitable in Nigeria; reason been it is a complex states. I write that many states have experienced several conflicts, usually of ethnic and religious character and, more often, violent in nature. Almost always, these conflicts arena consist the Hausa-Fulani Muslim community against Christian neighborhood. The conflicts have not only heightened the level of insecurity, but have also demonstrated high potential to worsen the economic development and food crisis in Agatu LGA and Nigeria at large due to loss of lives, animals, crops and properties.

Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Sustainable Development in Agatu LGA

Agatu LGA has experience the worst hit of late, having tasted the devastating attacks by the Fulani herdsmen with heavy toll in human lives and property and still counting their loses. Most worrisome is the brutality and impunity with which the attackers operate without regard for the rule law and the sanctity of life coupled with the inability of the Nigeria security agencies to defend the victims.

In more general term, immediate outcome of herders/farmer conflicts affect process of achieving sustainable development directly and indirectly, such as, loss of life, sexual violence and the displacement of people. The conflicts of this kind led to the spread of infectious disease chronic hunger, malnutrition, inadequate water supply, the destruction of private and public property, and the destruction of basic social services such as, education and health. These entire outcomes directly or indirectly ruin the efforts towards achieving sustainable development in Agatu area.

For instance, in February 2016, some fiends alleged to be Fulani herdsmen swooped on 10 communities in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State killing about 500 persons and setting ablaze properties worth billions of Naira. This was said to be a reprisal attack for the killing of some of the cattle of these nomads when they grazed on the farmland of the Agatu people. For the records, it was not the first time this happened, just that the February faceoff was of genocidal proportion (OJA Development Consult, 2016). From this episode, I argue that thousands of people have lost their lives and means of livelihood to this crisis, which affect the political and economic activities in Agatu LGA.

Discussions on Key Findings

Major issues from the Herders/Farmers conflict and sustainable development formed the main crux of the assertion. The origin of the conflict is the conflict over the material needed for existence. The struggle between the two groups is because each is struggling to survive or exist and each group depends on the same material called the 'green of the land. In fact, the herdsmen, before 1980 had enjoyed cordially relationship between farmer/herders in Agatu Local Government area especially in these three districts of Obagaji, Olegede and Abugbe.

The herdsmen often attacked with sophisticated weapons, which did not only kill people but also set into flames houses and structures. The attackers came in the military uniforms so they could have been hired. They may not necessarily have been Fulanis if they came for revenge they could be militia on a mission to revenge. The attack was fast and the attackers came using speed boats by river Benue, completed their assignment and went back through the same route. Poverty level in Agatu LGA had increase; this is because the people displaced are peasant farmers that depend on others to give them land to plant crops on a smaller scale than what they have cultivated before. This is leading to low agricultural product, which support their existence at a subsistence level. Their economic well-being is thus, tempered with because of this conflict.

The low level quality of education has been noticed. Their unhealthy looks were also visually observed. The conflict has led their children to be out of school for about one year, as their parents cannot afford the school fees. The low capital base leads them to poor health.

Environmental dilapidation has been found to be high particularly in areas where the Internally Displaced Persons are staying. Refuse disposal heaps, human wastes create environmental degradation as drainages were blocked due to poor sanitary conditions and above all potable water is found to be lacking during the dry season.

Some of the herdsmen do not know their bearings. This is because there are Encroachment on grazing tranches, most herdsmen graze into farmland just to cause havoc on to the crops but the response by the farmer's results into violent conflicts, which lead to wanton destruction of lives and properties.

Conclusively, the major findings of this study, include the followings: Conflict of interest over scarce resources (land) put pressure on the available resource, Pastoralists need land for grazing purpose, farmers equally need land for farming activities, Herders/Farmer conflict is polarized due to the porous borders, The absence of grazing reserves and routes facilities herders/farmers conflict, Encroachment on grazing tranches, herders/farmer conflicts affects quality education, effective health service delivery and lack of sufficient water and securities of lives and properties led to poor sustainable development in Agatu Local Government area of Benue state.

Human and livestock population growth with no corresponding increase in land mass caused the frequent crisis in Agatu area. So far, the high rate of unemployment by youths is another cause of mischievous activities between farmers/herdsmen and the effects of climate change cause exodus movement of herder.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conflict with different host communities by Fulani herdsmen is a survival strategy that is perpetrated by scarce resources. The only reason why Fulani herdsmen migrate long distances to communities whose indigenes would eventually challenge and oppose their legal right is because of the search for green pastures, water and effect of tse-tse fly. Their immediate environment is bereft of these pasture because of desertification and other environmental challenges. Most Fulani communities in the north Nigeria, has been taken over by desertification thereby compelling the Fulani herdsmen to migrate towards those areas in search of pasture and water.

Those areas Fulani herdsmen migrated to are not completely protected; because the host communities always compete for scarce natural resources (land). The situation is aggravated by the fact that natural resources are scarce, therefore, seeking for alternative quality pasture in the area, led to encroachment on farmland. This degenerates into communal conflicts.

The paper recommends that government should make laws to cushion the effect of desertification in the northern region and other Fulani communities. Government should also come up with policies to create grazing reserves and dams for pasture and water in states that are predominantly Fulani so that they don't stray long distances in search of pastures.

Government as a social component need put in place some measure to control instrument of violence and institution that guarantee social justice. Therefore, farmer/herders component should also avoid character of seeking for self help; rather the aggrieved parties should rectify their grievance in the judicial institutions.

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