

Insecurity in Agrarian Communities: Threats to Food Security in Nigeria in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper examined how the herdsmen/farmers clashes across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today poses a threat to food shortage and national survival. In the recent history of Nigeria, so many people have been killed, communities have been destroyed, and thousands of farmers and pastoralists have lost their lives and properties in the brutal and barbaric act of killings, massacre and attempt at ethnic cleansing and destruction. The evil act is not only continuously destroying livelihood but is also affecting and causing hunger, crisis, and posing challenges to agriculture, Agric-business, and small farmers, who are the drivers of the nation's agricultural value chain. Herdsmen/farmers clash hinders government ability to provide training, chemicals and other products needed to improve crop yield. Farmers need peace and stability for them to go back to their farmlands. The study adopted the descriptive design. It drew upon primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include oral information and testimonies. Newspapers and magazines reports were also used in conjunction with official records in government publications. Secondary sources include relevant books. The researchers made use of the direct observation method. All the pieces of information so gathered were subjected to critical historical analysis.

Keywords: Herdsmen/farmers clash, threats to food security, shortage and national survival

Introduction

The continual loss of lives and property to clashes between herdsman and farmers in the rural communities where food is produced is an issue of grave concern in the country. The efforts of the federal and state governments to stop the crisis have been largely inadequate. The massive financial cost of the clashes may result in food shortage and scarcity if the crisis persisted and lingered unchecked. Meanwhile, the Abdulsalami Abubakar Institute for peace and sustainable development, a research think-tank established by a former military head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, in collaboration with a group known as search for common

ground, has put Nigeria's annual financial loss to the clashes between farmers/herdsmen at about \$13.7billion (479bn). The economic loss only covers the clashes in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau States. The institute also said that about 2,500 people dwelling in the rural areas had been killed in the clashes nationwide, with about 62,000 people displaced in the affected states. As a way forward, the institute called for increased knowledge sharing and peace-building among the herdsmen/farmers to prevent food shortage in the country.

Already, the Global Terrorism Index ranks the marauding herdsmen in Nigeria as the "4th deadliest terrorist group in the world" after Boko Haram, ISIS and Al-Shabab. The continued deadly attacks of the herdsmen have scared away farmers from their farms and may lead Nigeria to suffer food scarcity if they are not controlled. So many farms in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, which are located mainly in Benue, Kogi, Taraba, Adamawa, Southern Kaduna, and Plateau states have been abandoned as a result of fear of being killed and raped since most of these farmers are women. It is alleged that most women are being abused, molested and murdered by herdsmen during attacks. Over time, states that are agrarian in the Middle Belt valley have continuously expressed worries over the incessant killings. If the continuous massacre of the farmers is not checked and stopped, the scary situation may lead to food scarcity very soon, so drastic action needs to be taken to resolve the crisis. (Steve Ogbota, 2018:24).

Meanwhile, some states in the Northern part of Nigeria are facing hunger and starvation as a result of activities of killer herdsmen/Boko Haram who disturb, dislodge and oust farmers from their farmland. The continual killings of farmers in the Benue valley, in the long run, will not only lead to hunger but will have economic implications on the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As Steve Agbota (2018:24) aptly pointed out, in 2017, some graduate commercial farmers at Oke Ako-Ipao axis of Ekiti State protested the alleged destruction of crops worth N35 million by suspected herdsmen grazing their cattle in their farm. They lamented that herdsmen operating in the Oke Ako-IPAO axis had destroyed their maize plantation covering over 30 hectares of land and cassava planted on an expansive land of over 20 hectares. The rates at which the herdsmen are committing these crimes have increased exponentially, and the crimes are thwarting the country's economic development and the incentive to plant a new dwindles with each attack. The Federal Government is not addressing the financial implications of the widespread conflicts.

It is important to note that states in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, such as Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, Taraba, Bauchi and Kaduna experience 40 percent decrease in grains production. Over 35 percent of local farmers have

been ejected and uprooted from their ancestral homes and farms. Unfortunately, Benue State, the “food basket of Nigeria” seems to be the hardest hit in recent times. Early January 2018, 73 people were massacred during the violent attacks on Logo and Guma communities by killer herdsmen. In the midst of the killings, the Federal Government proposed cattle colony as a way to end the constant clashes between herdsmen and farmers. Before this attack, Governor Ortorm of Benue State had earlier enacted the Anti Open Grazing law, which banned open grazing in his state. This was criticized by Miyetti Allah Cattle Rearer Association, but stakeholders in farming communities were saying only ranches can resolve the issues.

Despite the 73 victims of Benue people massacred by the alleged killer herdsmen in April 2018, within a space of three days, no fewer than 24 persons were allegedly massacred by suspected herdsmen in different communities in Benue state. It clears that most of the people killed as stated above are farmers. The President, Federation of Agricultural Commodity, Association of Nigeria. (FACAN) Dr. Victor Iyama, aptly explains that “for Nigeria to experience food shortage soon is a statement of fact if the disturbance, dislodging, displacement and misplacement of farmers by the killer herdsmen are not curtailed.” Yama (2018:24) explain further that, “there is no way Nigeria will not experience food scarcity because people who ought to farm and produce food are running away from their farm.”

Insecurity and Causes of Food Scarcity in Nigeria

Factors projected to cause food scarcity as a result of herdsmen/farmers clashes in the recent history of Nigeria include:

1. **Fear by women:** The fear by women farmers caused by killer herdsmen activities is a threat that may result in food scarcity in the nearest future in Nigeria. Even though, men are the owners of the many farms across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. A significant number of them are managed by women; so the fear of molestation, fear of being raped, fear of being killed by the killer herdsmen can dislodge the women folk from farming communities. By the time our women folk get scared to go to the farm, there is going to be a problem of food shortage in both the rural areas and the urban centres. Meanwhile, some states in Northern Nigeria are facing the menace of hunger as a result of activities of killer herdsmen/Boko Haram who dislodged farmers from their farmlands. (Steve Agbota, 2018:24).
2. **Increase in farmers’ death:** If the well-designed, orchestrated and approved a plan to systematically and methodically extermination of farmers’ continuous unchecked, food shortage will embarrass the ever-

increasing Nigeria population. It is reported that hundreds of Benue citizens (mostly farmers) are being killed on a daily basis by the killer herdsmen, one of the deadliest being the attack on the Catholic church in Gwer East, where two Catholic priests and its lay faithful were killed at their morning mass. Numbers, regarding deaths, no longer shock even the people of Benue and other states in Northern Nigeria. Indeed, hundreds of more farmers have been killed in Gwer West and East, Guma and the Logo Local government areas.

There is a seeming conspiracy of silence throughout the nation in the midst killings. Paul Angya (2018:47), if this social injustice had continuous as armed herdsmen and bandits have sacked and taken over all Tiv ancestral homes and farmland in Nasarawa State, comprising Obi, Awe, Kiana, Adudu, Nasarawa Toto, Aoma and East side of Lafia. Large groups of armed marauders camp in those villages, from where they move into Benue to plunder, maim and kill, with the government doing nothing to stop them. In Benue state, the killers have taken over and now occupy most of Guma, Logo, Giver West and East Local Government areas. The unrestrained slaughter of farmers and the plunder and occupation of their ancestral farmland by killer herdsmen points to the possible danger of food scarcity in Nigeria. (Paul Angya, 2018:48).

3. **Outbreak of Pest and Disease:** It is evident that the menace of herdsmen/farmers clashes can scare away farmers from their farmland; as farmers may feel reluctant to go to their farms to fight any outbreak of pest and disease with chemicals and insecticide. If this happens, food shortage and scarcity may hit our vast population. Today, farmers are now hamstrung between the devil and the deep blue sea; as the routine to go to farm every day to check and control pest and disease is a challenge. The many questions Nigerians are asking are where do farming communities go from here? Where do they run to? Where can they hide? Who can rescue the outbreak of pest and disease in our farms regularly? Who will encourage farmers to go back to their farms to fight pest and disease ravaging crops? These are the issues that challenged us following herdsmen/crop farmer clash in the recent history of Nigeria.
4. **Climatic Factor:** It important to note that the southward expansion of the Sahara desert, shortage and uneven distribution of rain and climate change in general, which has eaten up much of the grass in the Sahel Savannah belt and dried up a considerable portion of Lake Chad Basin and other freshwater bodies have been a major challenge to herdsmen. Consequently, they have been forced to move from far the North

towards the Middle Belt valley and southern region where they can get green pastures to feed their cattle. This desperate situation makes herdsmen to desperately trespass into crop farms and destroy people's crops along their route down south. The conspiracy of silence by the government and its agencies coupled with its failure to provide enabling security in the midst of killing and massacre of farmers by killer herdsmen is worrisome. Furthermore, the failure of the government to provide enabling ranches for herders in Northern Nigeria so that cattle should not graze openly on peoples farms in the Middle Belt region and down the southern part of Nigeria to prevent herdsmen/farmers clashes is the more reason food shortage and scarcity is eminent in Nigeria

5. The artificial and mass migration of farmers to urban centers and internally displaced persons centres for safety makes the challenges and problem of food shortage and national survival an issue of grave concern. If every youth in the rural areas migrate to the urban centres to look for white collar job for fear of the killer herdsmen, who will produce and provide the food to sustain the urban drivellers? Thus, the perennial clashes between farmers and herdsmen may result in food scarcity in Nigeria in the nearest future if the menace is not stopped and checked urgently.
6. **Low turnout of investors:** No investor would like to invest in a region infested by barbarous, slaughterers and warlike herdsmen that constantly lynch farmers brutally and ruthlessly. The Middle Belt region for a decade now had been bleeding and ravaged by scaring and fearful hair-raising killings and massacre that scare away flourishing investors who may want to rejuvenate agriculture and guarantee food security. Today in Nigeria, the low turnout of investors is the challenge confronting agriculture, Agric- business and smallholder farmers, who are the drivers of the nations' agricultural value chain in most agrarian states in Nigeria.

Overcoming the Challenges of Herdsmen/Farmers Clashes and the Guarantee of Food Security and Assurance in Nigeria

One of the best strategies to overcome the challenge in Nigeria is that government and the security agencies to mount guards everywhere in farming communities so that farmers can plant without fear of molestation. The Ministry of Agriculture and rural development need to discourage open grazing while putting in place modern ranches to stop herdsmen/crop farmer's clashes. Moreso, the Ministry of Agriculture can also introduce communal farming system alongside farm settlements to encourage local

farmers and reduce tension in the agrarian state. The Ministry of Agriculture should revisit and revamp some silos and encourage storage while all stakeholders must mobilize local farmers and encourage cooperative structures. With farm settlement and communal farming, security would be guaranteed. (Agbota Steve, 2018:24). With the massacre and killings going on in the Middle Belt region, in states, such as, Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nasarawa, Kaduna and other parts of the country by the killer herdsmen. Their governors should continue to speak out, to shout to the high heavens until the world takes notice of the ongoing genocide and stop the killings. States that are hard hit by killer herdsmen, their governors should compile material evidence and organize lawyers to file charges against the Federal Government at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Federal Government through the Nigerian Army should begin "a cordon, search and rescue" farmland taken over by the killer herdsmen and give back to the rightful owners.

Furthermore, the Federal Government should permanently station security outpost in the recovered territories to check the activities of killer herdsmen; be they foreign militias and mercenary. The Federal Government should also offer compensation and ensure speedy return of the displaced to the affected farming communities. The government must prove itself responsible for the security of farmers across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Consequently, government should disarm herders and key into the Pan-African initiative known as the Great Green Wall to combat desertification within its jurisdiction. This would curb the wholesale southward migration of herdsmen and their cattle to a great extent. It would help to reduce the now worsened security situation between the herdsmen/farmer clashes in Nigeria which threaten food shortage and scarcity. (Itsede, 2018:39).

Furthermore, to ensure food security in Nigeria, the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development should undertake a critical assessment of the Great Green wall of Nigeria and various aspects of the grazing problems and come up with implementable short and long terms solutions. The relevant expertise is plentiful in the country for better ranching and modern cattle breeding techniques. Nigeria only needs the political will of its leadership and the vision to act so that we can save lives and properties and ensure food security.

The Federal Government should provide an enabling environment to support agricultural policy and regulatory framework by ensuring that the nation has standard laws that are comparable to what obtain in developed nations of the world. The Federal Government should provide enabling environment to support Agricultural Transformation Agenda for priority

value chains. The Federal Government should promote decent employment for youths and women to boost agricultural development. The Federal Government should employ the Root Cause Analytical Approach (RCAA), for lasting solutions. The government needs to hold a stakeholder meeting with traditional rulers, village heads, the military, policemen, local council chairmen, state governors, women leaders, and the youths to resolve the conflict. The Federal Government formation and training of 3,000 man force known as Agro-Rangers, to protect farmers and farm investment throughout Nigeria is a welcome development. Their assignment has become more urgent now to prevent the danger of food shortage and scarcity in the country.

Another way out of insurgency for Nigerian farmers so that we can be guaranteed of food security is for the federal government to recruit and train more police, civil defense corps, state service officers, to meet the current challenges the country is going through to encourage farmers not to run away from their farms. The government also need to positively change the mindset of farmers to believe and trust the army and the police that they can protect them in their farmlands without been killed by the marauders. Nigerian farmers and herdsmen are hostile to each other, they both need complete mental and behavioural re-orientation to enable them to perform their assigned functions better.

Conclusion

The perennial and continual clashes between herdsmen and crop farmers have kept many Nigerians worried. The rate of food production is increasingly dwindling as a result of this development. For instance, researches have shown that between 1991 and 2015 there was a shortfall in domestically produced food in Nigeria, while the growth in population was at the rate of 3.2% that of food production has been less than one percent. As of 2009, Nigeria was ranked as one of the food-deficit countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, though it is arguably better regarding production than others. As at then, "it had not suffered any major catastrophe like Boko Haram insurgency and killer herdsmen menace that could precipitate scourges of famine, mass hunger and therefore food crisis. But with the atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram and killer herdsmen on farming communities, Nigeria faces the imminent risk of food shortage and scarcity. There is an urgent need for stakeholders meeting to fashion a credible way forward. Such a meeting should have in attendance, representative of local farmers, herdsmen, food processors, machinists, research institutions, ministries of science and technology, agriculture, trade, and development, etc. The federal government must protect farming communities in the country against

marauding herdsmen. Appropriate response should be given to the enormous security challenges which the herdsmen and rustlers pose to the farming communities without further delay. Stronger measures are needed in the rural areas and other places that have been attacked by killer herdsmen in the past. Nigeria needs to attain food security and self-sufficiency for her to feed a population of about 180 million people.

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