

Demographic Implications of Violent Herdsmen Attack In Benue State, Nigeria.

¹ Ushie, Michael Anake

² Egidi, Stephen Achuen

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³ Ushie, Christiana Aloye

¹ Department of Social Work, University of Calabar,
Cross River State, Nigeria.

² Department of Sociology, University of Calabar,
Cross River State, Nigeria.

³ Department of Environmental Education, University of
Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Correspondence, E-mail: ushiemike@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348037341163

Abstract

The main thrust of the paper is to evaluate demographic implications of violent herdsmen's attack in Benue State, Nigeria. The emerging security and demographic challenges in most developing countries of the world has midwived the emergence of violent attack between the farmers and the herdsmen's. This has become a global security concern. Violent conflicts between farmers and nomadic cattle herders have become a common feature of livelihood in West Africa and Nigeria in particular. The demographic implications of this violent attacks manifest in forced migration, depopulation, displacement, loss of livelihood, source(s) of income, loss of lives and properties among other demographic implications. Data obtained for the paper were from the secondary sources and analyzed through qualitative technique. Frustration Aggression Displacement theory by John Neal and Leonard, Orval (1939) was used as a theoretical framework. The findings revealed that the herdsmen's attack has demographic implications on the society especially the flash point zones. Hence, it was recommended that they should be government legislation to check both the farmers and herdsmen'. The work also recommends the establishment of ranches for grazing to avoid open grazing among other recommendations.

Key Words: Demographic, Violent Attacks, herdsmen, frustration, aggression.

Introduction

Before the discovery of oil in Nigeria, the mainstay of Nigerian economy was agriculture. The paradigm shift in the economy has affected agriculture, but some states in Nigeria still consider farming as her mainstay of the economy. The farming has boundary either between crop production, pastoral farming or animal husbandry. Farmers regularly compete with nomadic herders for farmland, pastures, water, trees and the use of rangeland in general for their agricultural activities (Akpaki, 2002). There have been violent clashes between nomadic herdsmen and farmers in several parts of Benue State because of competition for space, this has a serious demographic implications in the area.

Benue State is a state in the Mid-belt region of Nigeria, named after the Benue River and was formed from the old Benue-Plateau in 1971, the State has a population of 4,253,641 as recorded in the 2006 Census, and it is inhabited predominantly by the Tiv, Idoma and Igede people, who speak Tiv, Idoma and Igede languages respectively. Farming is their main occupation which justified It as the "food basket of the nation" It is a state blessed with abundant mineral

resources, these are distributed in the Local Government Areas of the State. It also boast of the largest stretches of river system in the country with a great potential for viable fishing industry, dry season through irrigation. The vegetation of the southern part of the state is characterized by forest, which yield tress for timbers and provide a suitable habitat for rare animal. Thus, the State possess potentials for the development of wildlife and forest reserves. Benue State is the ninth most populous Nigerian State by population and has agriculture as its economy mainstay as over 70% of the State's populations is engaged in farming (Filip, 2017).

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed series of violent communal clashes arising from the activities of the nomadic herdsmen and farmers, who move about on a daily basis with their cattle in search of green pastures, they are found on the streets in most cities and could also be found operating in the remotest of villages in various states of Nigeria. Nzeh (2015) maintained that in their culture, tradition and occupation, nomadic herdsmen have not owned land or have any permanent abode. In Nigeria, most herdsmen do not own land but graze their livestock in the host communities (Awogbade, 1987). While a few have adopted the more sedentary type of animal husbandry, the increasing crises between farmers and nomadic herdsmen presupposes that grazing is a major means of animal rearing in Nigeria. The sedentary type of animal husbandry also proves to be more expensive, difficult to manage and inefficient for the rapid growing market of an ever increasing Nigerian Population. However, over the years, the presence of the nomads and their cattle has provoked violent clashes in several communities across the country. Apart from the language and cultural barriers which usually spots out the nomads as strangers, the audacity with which they shepherd their flocks to graze on available vegetation on their routes has often attracted protests from host communities. This scenario has given rise to an unhealthy rivalry between farmers and herdsmen leading to violence clashes and result to loss of lives and properties.

Literature review

Some causes and consequences of nomadic herdsmen attack in benue state

The rainy season has been identified as the intense period of clashes between herdsmen and farmers over arable land for farming and grazing. Some researchers have related the cause of conflict to the global climate change and the contending desertification and aridity that has reduced arable pasture for their livestock. (Okoli, Enyinnia, Elijah & Okoli, 2014; Odoh & Chigbzie, 2012, Abbass, 2012). In a related studies, John (2014) asserted that the predicament of the pastoralists and farmers is associated with the climate change and demographic trend like migration and increased in fertility leading to overpopulation. Nformi, et'al (2014) revealed that farmer's encroachment on cattle routes is the real cause of clashes. Different factors have been identified by scholars which include climate change, the migration further south, the growth of agro-pastoralism, the expansion of farming on pastures, the invasion of farmland by cattle, assault on non-fulani women by herders, blockage of stock routes and water points, fresh water scarcity, burning on fallow land, defecation on roads and streams by cattle, ethnic stereotyping and breakdown of conflict intervention mechanisms as the root cause of such violence in rural areas (Folani, Ofuoku & Isife, 2009).

Adekunle and Adisa, (2010); Blench, (2010) asserted that the major source of tensions between pastoralists and farmers is economic and land related issues accounting for majority of the conflict. The socio-economic consequences of agro-pastoral conflicts has brought misery on the population because of forced migration leading to internally displaced persons of the inhabitants. Adekunla and Adisa, (2010). Another study revealed violent conflict between the

farmers and herdsmen has ethnic undertone. (Pelican, 2000). The nefarious activities of these herdsmen have caused a great threat to National Food Security by their brazen and deliberate destruction of crops resulting in food shortage. Crops farmers across parts of Benue State are increasingly becoming apprehensive over the negative attitude of the nomadic herdsmen who unleash their herds on crops, destroying them to points of no redemption. As a result, farmers of rice, cassava, maize, guinea corn and groundnuts now incur extra cost to put hedges around their farms to fend off the marauding cattle whose owners have grown most insensitive to the plights of the average farmer (Hameed, 2014).

Demographic implications of herdsmen and farmers violent clashes

In every violence conflict, there are demographic implications such as force migration, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, mortality, morbidity, depopulation, loss of ancestry homes and food shortage. Everyman needs food for his sustenance and so do animals. This is why Nations across the globe strive to invest in food production through extensive cropping and animal husbandry. There is no doubt that the variety of food crops cultivated in Nigeria has been what has made the country less dependent on importation of most of its staple food items except rice which local production has not been able to match with local demands due to high consumption rate of the staple food by local consumers. Some researchers have linked the issues of food crisis to the theory of eco-violence, where environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources lead to conflict and violence, this may explain the dwindling grazing resources (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014, Adisa, 2012). The nomadic herdsmen crisis remains a major issue in Nigeria. So far, thousands have been killed and many more have been displaced. In the same vain, Ushie and Odey (2018) maintained that the increasing population and the search for development has given rise to movements which comes with insecurity for survival.

The Nigerian population is dynamic and ever increasing compared to land that is relatively static. Nigeria's population, currently the seventh largest in the world is growing rapidly. The population growth rate of Nigeria per year is 3.2% (National Population Commission, 2012). Therefore, more and more people will continue to compete for land. The level of intolerance among the nomadic herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has deteriorated to an unimaginable level of arms struggle resulting in countless deaths among villagers with attendant reduction in the population of the peasant farmers and residents. Hence, it is important to note that these violent attacks by herdsmen have a direct impact on the lives and livelihood of those involved and lead to the displacement of economic productive population of the community. In most cases, the incessant violent clashes lead to reduction in output and income of crop farmers as a result of the destruction of crops by cattle. Most farmers and rural dwellers in Benue state communities have been forced to flee their homes and farms for fear of being killed by armed herdsmen, with the worst hit being women and children. This loss tends to affect their savings, credit repayment availability, as well as the food security and economic welfare of urban dwellers that demand on these farmers for food supply. Hence, discourages the farmers and stifles rural/agricultural development.

The herdsmen and farmers clashes disrupt and threaten the sustainability of pastoral farming and crop production in West Africa (Moritz, 2010). These clashes reinforce circles of extreme poverty and hunger, destroys social status, food security and affect mostly the most marginalize groups that include women and children of a teeming population like Nigeria. This has created a vicious cycle of poverty in such communities and affected the education of children leading to obstacles in their development and mass displacement. A lot of killing by the nomads and reprisal killing of nomads by the host communities takes place during the conflicts. This has

reduced some women in the communities in some areas of Benue State to the status of widows. Most disturbing is the dimension of killings where women and children and slaughtered heartlessly which could be interpreted as genocide with gross effects on the population and other demographic indicators.

One of the demographic challenges of herdsmen’s attack is population reduction. Conflict between farmers and herdsmen’s in the middle belt of Nigeria has led to the depopulation of the area (Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwande, 2018). Depopulation is a demographic trend that relates to the reduction of human numbers in a particular area(s) which is sometimes linked to communal or violent attacks. Cause of reduction could be social cultural and economic (Filip, 2017). Below is a table showing victims of farmers-herders-attacks from 2014- 2018.

Table 1: The violent killing and population reduction in Benue state linked to farmers-Herdsmen attack from 2014 – 2018 as shown below.

Date	Villages	Mortality
5-4-2014	Okokolo village in Agatu Local Govt Area of Benue State	200 persons
18-2-2016	Galadima village	5 persons
8-3-2016	Alla, Akwu, Adagbe, Okokolo, Odugbento, Ogbaulu, Egba Obagansi communities in Agatu Local Government Area	500 persons
12-5-2017	Two villages in Gashka Local Govt. Area	15 persons
25-5-2017	Benue/ Nassarawa Road	23 persons
25-5-2017	Gboko Local Govt. Area	40 persons
16-6-2018	Ugondo, Turan and Gabo communities in Logo	59 persons

Source: compiled by the authors as obtained from secondary sources.

Thus, the protracted farmers- herdsmen’s attack has resulted to several death and destruction of lives and properties in Benue state and other flash points. Also, Herdsmen attack has a serious implication on the agricultural activities in the area. It has caused formidable challenges to crop farming and pastoral activities. The resultant increase in competition for arable land has often times led to serious manifestation of hostilities and social friction among the farmers and herdsmen’s in Nigeria (Kughur, Daudu and Lorenege, 2017) asserted that conflict have not only aggravated the degree of insecurity but has also led to food storage or insecurity.

Theoretical Framework

Frustration Aggression Displacement Theory

The theory was propounded by John Neal and Leonard Orval (1939). The basic assumption of the theory is that aggression is the consequences of frustration and displacement which may be socially, economically, psychological or residentially. The frustration creates anger, which may in some people generate aggression. The theory also assumed that when people perceived that they are being prevented from achieving their socio-economic benefits and goals, their deprivation and frustration turn to practical aggressions. The theory is relevant to the work because the farmers see the malicious damage on their crops and farmlands by the herdsmen

as a frustration and the herdsmen see the killing of their animals as a frustration. Hence, both parties manifest their frustration on aggression and violent attacks. The short fall of the theory is that, the theory did not specify frustration and aggression management skills since is an emotional trait. But however, the theory is still relevant to the work; hence it has been adopted as a framework to the study.

Methodology

The work is a position paper on demographic implications and violent herdsmen's attack in Benue State, Nigeria. The work is qualitative in nature. Data are obtained from secondary sources and analyzed through qualitative approach.

Conclusion

Access to land control and ownership, struggle for survival, competition and tensions have been identified as the propelling force of conflicts in Benue State because of its richness in vegetal resources, and location on the fringe of rain forest and the guinea savanna zones of Nigeria. In line with modern methods of cattle rearing, it is advisable to follow due process and institutionalize ranching through binding legislation with respect to the sovereignty of the state in the common interest of both the farmers and herdsmen.

Recommendations

Bases on the findings, it was recommended that stereotypes and prejudices among farmers and herdsmen should be eschewed and brotherhood and national unity show be upheld. However, there is need to establish grazing routes and reserves across the states of Nigerian, communities in conflict and those on the verge of conflict may be given this opportunity to come to a negotiation table where government representatives and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs.) may participate and mediate in the peace process. More so, considering the growth rate of the country's population, a symbiotic relationship between farmers and nomadic herdsmen should enhanced. Entrepreneurial values be internalized to encourage both farmers and herders to invest in their businesses such as land acquisition, inputs and other sustainable practices as means of diversification.

There should be compensation in case of loss and deliberate destruction either by the herdsmen or farmers. In line with modern methods of cattle rearing, it is most advisable to embrace ranching which guarantees security, better productivity and profit for the farmers and the State. This however cannot be achieved unless there is a positive will by Government to provide a legal framework to enforce ranching as a practice of cattle rearing.

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