JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 - ISSN Online: 2992-4618. /vol 1, No 3 / September, 2023.
Https://www.jopd.com.ng

VIOLENT CONFLICTS OVER LAND RESOURCES AND DECLINING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN BENUE STATE: ANY LINK?

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ABSTRACT
The paper argued that the incessant violent conflicts over land resources by herders and farmers are responsible for the decline in agricultural productivity in Benue state of north-central Nigeria between 2015 and 2022. To support this argument, the paper deployed Human Needs Theory (HNT) as a theoretical guide and generated data using mixed methods approach with quantitative dominance. Research hypotheses were tested at 5% level of significance using non-parametric statistics (chi-square). From the test of research hypothesis, the paper revealed that the incessant violent conflicts over land resources were responsible for the decline in the level of agricultural productivity in Benue state. Based on this finding, the paper concluded that agricultural productivity of farmers in the state may further decline as long as these violent conflicts are not amicably and permanently resolved for the restoration of peace in the various agrarian communities in the state. Based on the finding and conclusion drawn, the paper recommended that open grazing of cattle, which has been identified as the major trigger of the conflict should be discouraged through a legislation; cattle ranching should be encouraged by governments at all levels. However, the herders should not be compelled to abandon their traditional practice of transhumance but convinced to do so and encouraged to embrace modern methods of animal husbandry which are less laborious and more profitable. Also, there is an urgent need by the federal government to provide more security across Nigeria's land borders to guard against the influx of armed criminals posing as herders into the country.
Keywords: Agriculture, resource conflict, farmers, herders, productivity

Introduction

Agricultural crop growers and nomadic cattle herders are the primary sources of the food consumed in Africa, particularly for the urban areas of most countries including Nigeria. Historically, the two agricultural land user groups had enjoyed a cordial relationship probably because the competition for land and water resources was not as stiff as it is today. However, the competition for these ecological resources became so stiff in the last decade as a result of the shrinking nature of these resources consequent upon change in climatic conditions. Thus, the conflicts have become more violent in the last decade with attendant losses of human lives and destruction of property. What is even more worrisome is the fact that recently these conflicts have metamorphosed into full blown wars with very horrifying consequences. Also, the conflict assumed a very dangerous dimension with the infusion of ethnic, religious and political factors into it in the last decade (Yusufu, 2021)

Contestation for fertile land has been a major source of conflict between communities in Nigeria, specifically in the north-central geo-political zone of the country. The tensions between nomadic cattle herders and sedentary crop farmers have intensified in recent time with dwindling natural resources and land availability greatly contributing to the ongoing, escalating conflict in the country. Cattle rustling, influx of illegal nomadic herders from neighboring African countries such as Chad, Niger, Ghana and Cameroon among others into Nigeria; availability of dangerous weapons of warfare, conflicts among cattle herders,

mercenary elements and availability of dangerous drugs have all added to the combustion. Consequently, north-central Nigeria has become vulnerable to the antecedents of what Kaplan (1994) described as the *coming anarchy*. Herders'-farmers' conflicts are among the basic manifestations of this anarchy and this is connected with the region's socio-economic and political ecology (Shettima & Tar 2008; Ahmadu, 2011)

Herders who hitherto go about their daily businesses carrying sticks to control their cattle and machetes for the purpose of scaring away dangerous animals in the course of cattle grazing, now go about with sophisticated weapons such as AK-47s in the name of self-defense and the protection of their cattle from any attacks orchestrated by cattle rustlers and rural bandits among other criminal elements (Tativ & Zasha, 2020). While justifying the carrying of sophisticated weapons by these cattle herders, Bagudu (2017, p.37) citing Professor Jibril Aminu said "the herders are carrying weapons for self-defense and they have been doing that for a long time. But as the sophistication of society increases, the sophistication of their weapons increases. Before now it was sticks"

The possession of sophisticated weapons of warfare illegitimately acquired makes the herders battle ready and could confront anybody who stands on their way, including crop farmers whose crops are usually destroyed whenever their cattle are not properly controlled. When cattle herders are allowed to move around with sophisticated weapons and are not arrested let alone arraigned, even after they have orchestrated lethal attacks on apparently innocent farming communities, one can only come to a conclusion that the attackers are being provided implicit support by the Nigerian State to intensify killings of the inhabitants of these communities (Genyi, 2019). These tendencies encourage a pervasive culture of impunity, a development that aggravates feelings of discrimination and engenders social divisions as well as underlining suspicion of law enforcement agencies and the government itself (Bagu & Smith, 2017).

Frequent eruption of violent conflicts between herders and farmers in Benue State of North-Central Nigeria in the last decade has adverse implications for food security of farming households in the State. Able bodied crop farmers who are expected to produce food crops are killed, disabled or displaced as a result of incessant attacks orchestrated by nomadic cattle herders. Thus, farming in Benue State is no longer business as usual as most of the crop farmers can no longer go back to their farms as a result of insecurity arising from herders' attacks. Some of the crop farmers displaced as a result of these frequent attacks are now living at the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps where basic social amenities are either lacking or insufficient, while others have relocated to places within and outside the State where there is relative peace.

The constant clashes between cattle herders and crop farmers have not only threatened national security in the country, but have also reduced its economic productivity, and deepened food crisis (Okwor, 2016). According to a report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an estimated 7,000 Nigerians died between 2015 and 2019 in the persistent violent conflicts over land resources in Benue and Nasarawa states of north-central Nigeria (Kunle, 2019). Similarly, it is estimated that between 2001 and 2018, an estimated 176,000 persons were displaced in Benue state, 100,000 were displaced in Plateau state, 100,000 persons were displaced in Nasarawa state and 19,000 persons were displaced in Taraba state as a result of violent conflicts over land resources (Agency Report, 2021). With the persistence of these violent conflicts, the status of Benue state as the *food basket of the Nation* is thus threatened. It is against this backdrop that this paper interrogated the nexus between the incessant violent conflicts over land resources by herders and farmers and the decline in the level of agricultural output in Benue state from 2015 to 2022

Hypotheses

H0: The incessant violent conflict over land resources is not responsible for the decline in agricultural productivity in Benue state

H_1: The incessant violent conflict over land resources is responsible for the decline in agricultural productivity in Benue state

Literature

In 2014 when the number of people killed as a result of deadly attacks orchestrated by Fulani herders in North-Central Nigeria alone got to one thousand two hundred and twenty nine (1229), the Global Terrorist Index (GTI) was left with no other choice than to describe the Fulani Militants as the World's forth deadliest terrorist group after ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq & Syria), *Al-Shabbab* and *Boko Haram* (Ihua, 2017). In the same way, the Institute for Economics and Peace (2017) reported that, between 2010 and 2016, the Fulani herders' insurgency was responsible for about 92% of the 466 terrorist incidence rates and 3,068 casualty rates in selected African countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic with 92% of the casualties happening in Nigeria. The description of the Fulani herders as a terrorist group by the GTI notwithstanding, the administration of Muhammadu Buhari deliberately refused to ban the herders' extremism on patronage grounds, finding a justification in the herders'- farmers' conflict narratives (Vanger, 2021).

However, the expressions that equate the Fulani ethnic nationality with terrorist groups are unnecessary and have the capacity not only to worsen the conflict but also a recipe for violence (Bagu & Smith, 2017). Thus, it has been observed that the violent disposition of the Fulani herders has given rise to anti-Fulani comments in some parts of the country and has equally continued to encourage hatred against them (Idowu, 2017). This should however not be the case because not every nomadic cattle herder is violent; there are some of them that are peace loving and accommodating. This was probably what Ladan, Agidi and Benjamin (2020, p.46) had in mind when they said: "Whereas every nomadic Fulani is a cattle herder, not every cattle herder in Nigeria is Fulani. Moreover, while every nomadic Fulani is a cattle herder, not every nomadic Fulani herder bears weapons and assaults the crop farmers"

Worried by the spate of killings and destructions allegedly perpetrated by the Fulani herders, Bagudu (2017, p.27) said:

> Their impunity and recklessness have raised so much concern and consternation that Nigerians indisputably are troubled that another variation of *Boko Haram* insurgency may be determined to overrun Nigeria; Fulani herdsmen are moving with AK 47 assault guns, killing and mutilating innocent people while their cattle destroy farm crops. What are cattle herders supposed to be doing with AK 47s?

The dimension that herders'-crop farmers' conflicts have taken in the last decade, coupled with the increasing devastating attacks orchestrated by *Boko Haram* terrorist group in Nigeria, has consequently earned the country the position of the third most terrorized country in the World (GTI as cited in Amadi, Igwe & Ukachikara, 2019, p.53)

> As a matter of fact, the entire North-Central region and some parts of Southern Nigeria have been at the receiving end of frightening killing by Fulani herders which many government spokesmen often claimed are foreigners. For instance, the former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Chief Audu Ogbe, claimed that most of the Fulani herdsmen that are killing Nigerians are actually not Nigerians but Malians, Chadians and some Shuwa Arabs who are armed with AK- 47s and killing Nigerians in their fatherland (Bagudu, 2017). Similar narration was given in May 2016, by the then Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari while speaking on the Fulani Herdsmen Terrorism (FHT) phenomenon in London admitted to the presence of the Foreign Fighters, saying they came into Nigeria from Libya. In the same vein, a former National Chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje said the Fulani herdsmen accused of killings and destruction of property across the country are not Nigerians. In his words:

The Fulani herdsmen who are involved in criminal activities are not from Nigeria. The Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria do not carry guns. They only have machete which they use to clear the bush as they migrate with their cattle and a stick to direct the animals. Those who carry weapons of warfare about are mere criminals who took advantage of the porosity of Nigeria's borders and came in without cattle. To hide their intention, they first began with cattle rustling in the North-West region so as to acquire cattle and assume the status of herdsmen. This went on for quite some time in the Northern region of the country alone. It is now that the nefarious activities of these criminals spread to the South that the awareness and denunciation became very prominent and loud (Akinyemi, 2021)

The argument that the Fulani herdsmen who have been killing innocent people in this country are not Nigerians is tantamount to a search for an alibi where none actually exists (Bagudu, 2017). To say that the Fulani herdsmen attacking and killing Nigerians are foreigners means that the government is not capable of protecting the lives and property of its citizens which is its primary responsibility as contained in the 1999 Constitution as amended" (Tsaaor, 2016, p.5). The gathering of weapons by violent non-state bodies such as the Fulani Herdsmen Terrorists (FHT) will inevitably lead to self-help strategies among farming communities in the face of appalling failure on the part of the government to protect them.

A major motivator of the influx of cattle herders into Nigeria is the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocol on transhumance (1998), which made ECOWAS member States to realize that migration of herders and their cattle across national boundaries in the West African sub-region is a lucrative economic activity and specify a regional framework for regulation of such movement across national boundaries based on the ECOWAS principle of free movement of persons. The cattle herders also justify their migration into Nigeria on the basis of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of goods and persons in West Africa, the regulations of transhumance between ECOWAS Member-States of 2003, and the ECOWAS strategic plan for the development and transformation of the livestock sector (Lenshie, Okengwu, Ogbonna & Ezeibe, 2020)

Given the apparent failure and/or prejudiced position of the Nigerian State to promptly and fairly intervene in violent confrontations between these agricultural lands user-groups, farming communities are indirectly being encouraged to seek self-help, an option that constitutes a threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria as a country (Genyi, 2019). Similarly, Ishaku (2017, p.191) notes further that:

> The result of government's dubious counter terrorism measure is simply confusing, several years after the establishment and deployment of the Special Task Force (STF) to the conflict prone areas, not even a single so called "unknown gunman", "militia" "bandit" "terrorist" or "herdsman" has been arrested and successfully convicted and no military operation has so far been able to interdict or even take out any member of the armed group.

As it has become obvious that Nigerian State cannot control the reciprocal coexistence of its citizens in the harmonious sharing of the resources in contention, the parties involved may have to resort to struggle among themselves with none of them ready to neither retreat nor surrender and for the survival of the fittest in an environment of resource scarcity (Abbas, 2012). The failure of the State for example to resolve the settler/indigene identity as well as resolving the question of territoriality and the inherent struggles over scarce available resources can be adduced to have brought dangerous dimensions of economic and political elements in the herders'-crop farmers' conflict (Fiki & Lee, 2004; Egwu, 2009). Conflicts which arise from the conflicting interpretations of the status of who should be regarded as an indigene of a place and who should not be regarded as an indigene of a place have bloody, bitter and highly divisive implications in the Nigerian society (Viashima, Ilim & Ogoh, 2014, p.114).

No doubt herders'-farmers' conflicts in North-Central Nigeria in particular and the country at large has negative implications for food production. Alarmed by the skyrocketing prices of food stuff in the country sometimes back, the former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Chief Audu Ogbe, expressed the fear that more Nigerians may go hungry except something is done to forestall the alarming

food crisis (Bagudu, 2017). Dimelu et al (2017, p.643) carry this viewpoint further when they said: "herders'-farmers' conflict in Nigeria has persisted and stands as a threat to national food security, production of livestock and eradication or alleviation of poverty". The conflict, in the words of Tativ (2022, p.157) has led to the "destruction of agricultural proceeds, displacement of farmers and inaccessibility of their farm lands for cultivation and loss of lives and property" Nigeria is believed to have been losing $14 billion annually since herders'-crop farmers' conflict became exacerbated in 2011 (Amaza, 2016). This is largely due to the destruction of farm lands and farm produce in Nigeria's most fertile agricultural belt-North-Central zone (Genyi, 2019). Strategically, these conflicts have hampered the development of markets and certainly economic growth by the orchestrated destruction of productive assets, obstruction of trade, constriction on investment and the erosion of trusts between market actors (Mercy Corps, 2015)

Guided by the theory of the tragedy of the commons, Apenda (2016) evaluated the impact of herders'-farmers' conflict on food production in Benue state. Data for the study were collected using questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and oral interviews. The study found that, so many human lives were lost, farmlands, residential buildings and educational institutions among others were destroyed as a result of the conflict; leading to decline in farm produce thus causing food insecurity.

Similarly, Owolabi, Oladimeji, Ojeleye & Omokore (2016) examined the effects of herders'-crop farmers' conflict on food security in Giwa and Sabo Local Government Areas of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Logit Regression Model (LRM). The study found that factors such as inadequate grazing land, climate change, and suspicion were responsible for the conflict. The study equally found that conflict has positive and significant effects on food security.

In a related study Babagana, Madaki, Ibrahim, Adamu & Gujja (2019) examined the impact of herders'-crop farmers' conflict on food production in Gujba and Tarmuwa Local Government Areas of Yobe State, Nigeria. Data were collected using close ended questionnaire and structured interview guide were and analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square. The found that lack of grazing fields, indiscriminate bush burning, crop destruction; and *Boko Haram* insurgency were the major causes of herders'-crop farmers' conflict in the study area. Further findings showed that loss of crops, reduced productivity; increase in the price of agricultural products, and increased poverty were the major impacts of the conflict.

Theory

Human Needs Theory (HNT) was first introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943. The theory is based on the assumption that human beings have basic needs that have to be met in order to maintain stable societies. As Burton (1979) explains:

> It is believed that the human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling in their respective institutional environments at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs such as security, identity, recognition, and development. They strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs. This struggle cannot be curbed; it is primordial (p.72)

This struggle for primordial needs is theoretically related to the Frustration-Aggression Theory which is based on the stimulus-response hypothesis. The frustration of not satisfying these needs leads to aggression and subsequently, conflict. What distinguishes Human Needs Theory from the Frustration-Aggression Theory is that the former is concerned only with absolute requirements (needs) while the latter is concerned with wants and desires. Burton (1990) further states:

> Now it is a known fact that there are fundamental universal values or human needs that must be met if societies are to be stable. That this is so thereby provides a non-ideological basis for the establishment of institutions and policies. Unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies, unless in every social system there is distributive justice, a sense of control

> and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability and conflict are inevitable (p.27)

According to Burton (1990) the struggle between groups or individuals cannot be curbed. This is because instability and conflict are inevitable. These are contentious statements with far reaching implications. If the hypotheses of this theory are correct, if there are certain human needs that are required for human development and social stability, then the solution to conflict must be the ability to create an environment in which these needs can be met by all segments of societies. This is where Human Needs Theory agrees with Burton's Conflict Resolution Theory (CRT).

Abraham Maslow identified physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness; love need, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1970). Maslow, a psychologist (1970) approached the whole question of human motivation in work situation with the development of widely acclaimed theory of human needs which he classified hierarchically into five stages in a definite order of priority. Under his arrangement, the more basic needs or wants which have the greatest influence must have to be gratified in an individual before he would strive to meet the higher needs.

John Burton lists response, stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, need to appear rational and develop rationality, need for sense of control and the need for role defense. He refers to some needs as basic and these include food, shelter, sex, and reproduction among others (Burton, 1979, p.72). Edward Azar names some basic needs like security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity and effective participation in the process that shape such identities (Azar, 1994). For Stephen Faleti, basic human needs comprise physical, physiological, social and spiritual needs. According to him, to provide access to one (for example, food) and deny or hinder access to another (for example, freedom of worship) will amount to denial and could make people to resort to violence in an effort to protect these needs (Faleti, 2005, pp.51-52).

Citing Burton (1979), Faleti (2005, p.52) identified a nexus between frustration that forces human beings into acts of aggression and the need on the part of such individuals to satisfy their basic needs. According to him, individuals cannot be taught to accept practices that destroy their identity and other goals that are attached to their needs and because of this, they are forced to react against the factors, groups and institutions that they see as being responsible for threatening such needs. This is similar to the argument of Gurr's (1970, p.24) Relative Deprivation Thesis (RDT) that, "the greater the discrepancy, however marginal, between what is sought and what seem attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result"

No doubt, human needs for existence, survival, security, protection, affection, participation, creativity, understanding and identity are irrepressible and are shared by all people irrespective of social status. No matter how a society or system tries to frustrate or suppress these needs, it will either fail or cause far more damage in the long run. Just like Gurr's RDT, citing Max-Neef, Faleti (2005, p.52) believes that the tension between actual deprivation and potential deprivation are main issues addressed by the Human Needs Theory (HNT) because when important needs are not sufficiently satisfied, economic and political problems will continue to grow. This was probably what Nnoli (2006) had in mind when he argued that "political exclusion, economic marginalization and social discrimination threaten the security of citizens to such an extent that they regard the state as the primary threat to their survival" (p.9). In desperation, the victimized citizens take the laws into their own hands as a means of safeguarding their fundamental values from the threat of unacceptable government policies.

As applied to the purpose of this paper, the HNT recognizes and legitimizes both cattle herders and crop farmers' needs in Nigeria. The farmers need the arable land and water points for crop production whereas the cattle herders also need the same land and water points for grazing of their cattle as well as providing water for their animals to drink. The needs of both must be met, not the needs of one at the expense of the other. This helps to move the conflict from zero-sum to win-win situation. The notion of 'human needs

help to eliminate the sense of mutually exclusive goals. Rather than fighting over the constitutional future of the grazing routes, with the mutually exclusive goals of maintenance of peace, the situation shifts to one in which both communities seek to fulfill their needs such as security, identity, recognition and development. These needs are not satisfied at the expense of the other community but are realized along with the other community's needs. These needs are not mutually exclusive or gained at the expense of another; they are universal and apply to both groups.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Benue state of north-central Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to consummate the study. The sample size was determined using Yamani (1967) statistical formula. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 3 LGAs in Benue state, namely Agatu, Guma and Logo. Convenience sampling technique was used to administer questionnaire to target respondents. Data generated from the field survey was analysed using tables while research hypotheses were tested using non-parametric statistics (chi square) at 5% level of significance.

Yamani (1967) statistical formula was employed to get the exact sample size for the study as shown below:

$$n = N/1+N\,(e)^2$$

Where N represents population size
n represents minimum sample size
e represents the degree of error expected (0.05)
$n=647{,}000/1+647{,}000\ (0.05)^2$
n is approximately=**400**

Table 1: Projected Population Size of Sampled LGAs in Benue State

Sampled LGAs	Population, 2016	Sample Size
Agatu	156,000	96
Guma	262,100	162
Logo	228,900	142
Total	**647,000**	**400**

Source: Authors' own computation from the 2016 NPC projected population

Results

This section presents the results of data generated from the field survey. The focus of this section is the testing of the research hypotheses of this study. Thereafter the results were discussed from the perspective of the HNT and corroborated by findings of similar studies.

Table 2: Observed Frequency Table (OFT)

Options	Male	Female	Total
Agree	25	19	44
Disagree	259	97	356
Total	**284**	**116**	**400**

Source: Authors' own computation, 2022

Table 3: Expected Frequency Table (EFT)

Male	Female
284*44/400=31.24	284*356/400=252.76
116*44/400=12.76	116*356/400=103.24

Source: Authors' own computation, 2022

Table 4: OFT & EFT

OF	EF	OF-EF	$(OF-EF)^2$
25	31.24	-6.24	38.94
19	252.76	-233.76	54,643.74
259	12.76	246.24	60,634.14
97	103.24	-6.24	38.94
Total	**400**		**115,355.76**

Source: Authors' own computation, 2022

X^2=115,355.76/400
X^2= 288.39
Calculated X^2 = **288.39**
Critical Value (X^2) = **3.84**

Decision Rule: Reject H_0 if Calculated X^2 is greater than Tabulated X^2 (Critical Value). Since Calculated X^2 is greater than Tabulated X^2 (Critical Value) H_0 is therefore rejected. This implies that the incessant violent conflicts over land resources were responsible for the decline in agricultural productivity in Benue state between 2015 and 2022. This finding is consistent with the findings of Apenda (2016); Owolabi et al (2016); Babagana et al (2019) and Tativ (2022) among others who in their separate studies found that herders'-farmers' conflicts negatively affected food productivity, and this by implication, threatens the prospects for food security in Nigeria.

This finding also has theoretical implications. The finding is consistent with the basic assumptions of the HNT in explaining herders'-crop farmers' conflict in Benue state. In line with the assumptions of this theory, the incessant violent conflicts between herders and crop farmers' is basically over an economic resource (land) which is sine qua non for meeting of their respective needs (agricultural produce). The persistence of this violent resource conflict also threatens the realization of the needs of both groups (farmers and herders). It therefore becomes imperative for this conflict to be resolved for agricultural output to increase beyond the present level.

Conclusion

This paper interrogated the nexus between violent conflicts over land resources and the decline in agricultural productivity in Benue state between 2015 and 2022. The paper deployed HNT as a framework of analysis and adopted mixed methods approach in data collection and analysis with quantitative dominance. Findings of the study revealed that the incessant violent conflicts over land resources are responsible for the decline in agricultural productivity, which is an indication that the persistence of this resource conflict has

the capacity of threatening the prospects for food security in the *food basket* state in particular and the country at large.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian government should come up with policies that would guarantee continuous improved agricultural productivity in the country.
2. The government needs to be more proactive in managing violent conflicts over land resources by herders and farmers in the country
3. Also, there is an urgent need by the federal government to provide more security across Nigeria's land borders to guard against the influx of armed criminals posing as herders into the country

4. Open grazing of cattle should be prohibited nationwide, since destruction of crops by stray cattle is the major cause of violent conflicts over land resources by herders and farmers

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