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THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA: AN APPROACH TO PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

By

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ABSTRACT

Benue State has witnessed various forms of attacks from the herdsmen on different occasions which have caused farmers and their family members to leave their communities thereby settling in Internally Displaced Persons' camps at different parts of the State. These farmers left their farm lands, their houses, and other belongings to the camps for safety. The main objective of the paper is to examine the various ways on how to find lasting peace by way of resolving the conflict between the farmers and the herdsmen in Benue State. The paper made use of both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Through the primary data, internally displaced persons where interviewed at the Makurdi camp. The findings of the research revealed that, the herders who attacked the farmers are not from Benue State. It was also revealed that the farmers can only go back to their communities when the issues are resolved since it affects the security of their lives and property. The herders took over the farm lands thereby making it difficult for the farmers to return to their communities. This research therefore, recommends that the government of Benue State and the Federal government should jointly work together on the issues affecting both the herders and farmers in order to find peace and to resolve the said conflict for lasting peace.

Keywords: Herdsmen, Framers, Internally displaced persons, Peace and conflict resolution.

Introduction

Conflicts in Nigeria have created tension among diverse parties from different parts of the country. The country over time had witnessed conflict in the Niger-Delta region where the people agitate for resource control, addressing oil spillage, community development, cases of environmental degradation, and youth empowerment in the region (Dibua, 2005; Nana, 2020; Bassey, Ahaneku, Ogar, Usen, & Ubi, 2020). Thus, such conflict has being witnessed right from the military rule to the time of the fourth republic of Nigeria's current democratic dispensation. Until the administration of President Yar'Ádua, the Niger-Delta was tensed and his administration introduced the amnesty programme where the Niger-Delta militants handed over their weapons and surrendered to the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2009 (Tobi, & Adesanmi, 2020). That brought peace and restoration of security to the region.

In the same 2009, another group in the Northern part of the country waged war against the Federal Government of Nigeria in the North-eastern part of the country (William & Funmilayo, 2020). According to Terwase, Abdul-Talib, Zengeni and Terwase (2015), the group known as Boko Haram has traumatized the people of the North-east where many of them found themselves in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno and Yobe States as a result of the conflict between the government and the said group. The Nigerian State in the democratic dispensation has witnessed a lot of conflicts from Niger-Delta conflict, to Boko Haram, to Bandits, to herdsmen and farmers conflicts.

Over time, as a result of these conflicts, men, women, children and youths found themselves in the IDPs camps, haven become homeless, they left their farm lands, houses, and property in search of shelter where they could camp and have a means of survival. As such, in the situation of the herders/farmers conflict, armed-herdsmen attacked targeted communities where the occupants dispossess their lands and property which are in turn possessed by the herdsmen upon the farmers/victims fleeing their communities.

Thus, the situation of herdsmen and farmers conflict has spread across the six geopolitical zones of the country. Attah, (2011) opined that one of the major challenges of the Nigerian State is that of agricultural failure. In view of this, herdsmen/farmers' conflicts equally contribute to challenges of food security in Nigeria. Attah (2013) asserts how the new wave of land grabbing in Nigeria is through possession by dispossession. Agbu, Musa and Zhema (2020) attribute also the dimension where the victims of armed-herdsmen tend to dispossess their land which is later possessed by the herdsmen as the cause of the increased conflicts.

The focus of this work is on possession by dispossession with a view to understanding the issues surrounding herdsmen possession of this farmer's land and property as well as the victims of the conflict staying in the Internally Displaced Persons camps in Benue State of Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The general objectives of the study are to find ways of resolving the conflict and bringing lasting peace between the farmers and the herdsmen whereas the specific objectives are:

i. To examine why and how the farm lands, houses and other properties of IDPs were appropriated by some of the herdsmen.
ii. To examine the scenarios in relation to land possession by dispossession.
iii. To study the impact of the conflict on food security in Benue State.
iv. To bring to the fore, the way forward on land, housing and property restitution and to make possible recommendations on how to bring about lasting solutions to the conflicts therein.

Research Questions

i. What are the issues relating to the conflict and dispossession of land?
ii. What were the scenarios in relation to land possession by dispossession?
iii. What is the impact of the conflict on food security in Benue State?
iv. What is the way forward on land, housing and property restitution?

Research Method

The work made use of qualitative research design with the conduct of interviews at the Internally Displaced Persons camps located in Benue State. About fifteen respondents were interviewed for the purpose of the study, using Focused Group Discussions Format (FGD). Part of the method used in this study was observation and the work employed research assistants in the course of the field work. The work equally made use of relevant literature through the review of journal publications, and newspaper reports as cited by different scholars.

Conceptual Clarifications

Herdsmen

These are people who take care of animals by way of providing food for the animals to eat and feed on. In Nigeria, the concept of herdsmen is mostly refers to people who move about with their animals traveling across different states in search for greener pasture for their animals to feed on. These animals are mostly cows and sheep, the herder's way of moving about with animals could also be refers to as a form of business for the owners.

Farmers

In the context of this work, these are people who engaged in farming activities such as producing/cultivation of yams, beans, maize, rice, groundnuts, soya-beans and other related farm products. Some of the farmers, they engaged in large scale of production which could be used in form of commercial quantity. There are some farmers who farm on small scale just for their families to feed on but not for commercial consumption.

Internally Displaced Persons' Camps

These are camp where people who are placed as a result of the conflict between the herdsmen and farmers in various communities in Benue State as regards to this research work. Those people who were attacked by the herders left their farm lands and their homes in other to get a place where they could stay for safety of their lives and properties. As such, they occupied the IDPs camps where they are mostly fed by the government of Benue State and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Peace and Conflict Resolution

The concept of peace in this work is refers to as the absence of violence and attacks on the people of Benue State and her environs'. Peace here is also refers to as peaceful co-existence between the people, farmers and even herders who are doing their businesses in Benue State and the neighboring environments. Conflict resolution in this work implies the ability to seek and understand the roots causes of the conflict on why the herders and the farmers are crashing, the means to which the said issues could be resolved and the applicability/mechanism to be used in resolving the conflict thereby bringing lasting solution to the affected communities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Findings

The Conflict and Dispossession of Land: In Benue State, there are three (3) senatorial zones known as zone A, B & C. All these three zones have being affected by herders/farmers conflict. In zone A and B senatorial constituency, places like Kwande Local Government Area, Buruku Local Government Area and Logo Local Government Area were mostly affected by the herders/farmers conflict. As a result of the conflict in this zone, there was a migration of Cameroonians into Benue State, Nigeria, where refugees numbering up to 6,000 were said to have relocated to Ikyogen Cattle Ranch which is owned by the state government (Ibrahim, Audu & Anloho, 2020; Vanger & Nwosu, 2020). In zone B Senatorial constituency, Guma Local Government Area, Makurdi Local Government Area and Gwer Local Government Area are mostly affected by the conflict. However, in zone C, Agatu is the most affected area where the herdsmen turned out and brutally killed people over the quest for grazing land (Mbah, Jiriko & Amah, 2020). Given the explanation, a respondent concurred that,

> *We are here in the IDPs camp because of the conflict between us and the herdsmen. We were on the farm doing our usual business of*

> *farming and the herdsmen attacked us and we had to leave the land, but before then, it first started when they came at night, surrounded some of our houses and they set them ablaze. The houses were burnt into ashes and we lost properties. There are cases such as killing of our loved ones and destruction of properties that we cannot account for, which remains challenging to us. We cannot protect ourselves, it is the responsibility of the Federal Government of Nigeria, because, they control the police, the military and other forces in the country. In Nigeria, the police are not controlled by the state government. The attack on us is by the herdsmen. Some people managed to escape and some could not. Some were killed. We thought it has ended, but they came back. We were forced to vacate the land. As such, that is how they possessed our dispossessed land and property. They came with*

This issue of conflict here is basically on farmland and grazing of grasses by the cattle owned by the herders. Benue people are known for farming many different crops. As such, the land is valued since it also serves as an environment for the production of food for commercial and subsistence use. Thus, when herders invade the farmland with their cattle in the name of grazing, conflict emanates and becomes the order of the day. In the course of the farmers fighting back, it always results to killings. Without the intervention of the law enforcement personnel, such conflicts escalate to a point where the farmers leave their farmlands, communities, possessions, and the herders take possession of their disposed lands.

Possession by Dispossession: Mbah, Jiriko & Amah (2020) agree that in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, there are some communities that were taken over by the herdsmen. In those communities, most of the inhabitants are farmers and are basically self-employed. The people living in those communities had to run for their dear lives leaving everything so as to escape from death by their opponents, the herdsmen. Terwase, Terwase, Puldu & Abdul-Talib (2018) reveal that unemployment causes trauma in the unemployed individuals when the main issue is not addressed, most of these people who are dispossessed of their land and property become unemployed. Terwase & Madu (2014) opined that Nigerian rural people are mostly farmers. The same case is applied to Benue rural people. A group of respondent who opposed to going back to their community said:

> *We do not have anywhere to go. We do not have the security to secure our lives. The herdsmen came to our community not in peace but in a violent manner. They came and they possessed our land. We cannot go back because there is no security. Who will protect us? Who will help us? We are not the government. It is the government that can arrange security for us. We are afraid because we do not want to be killed by the herdsmen. If the situation continues like that, we do not have a choice but to remain in the IDPs camp here in Makurdi. We are not happy with the current situation where fear has taken over us as a result of the insecurity in our land. The government needs to pay close attention to our problem.*

-Talib, & Zengeni (2014) noted that, Nigeria became Africa's largest economy, whereas, South Africa came second and that shows how rich that country is. Agriculture was part of Nigeria's economic growth and some of the States that contributed to this growth are Benue State, Kogi State, Taraba State, Nasarawa State and Plateau States. Nigeria through the ECOWAS formation has contributed in resolving conflict in other countries especially in West Africa States such as Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leon (Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni, 2015; Terwase, Adesina, Puldu & Abdul-Talib, 2018). Thus, there is need for the Nigerian

government to resolve the conflict between the herdsmen and farmers in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Another respondent posed that:

> *We do not understand why our military is not protecting us like they did during the military. You will remember that, during the military rule, especially in the days of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha as Heads of State, Nigeria was part of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) where our soldiers were sent to Liberia for peace keeping operation. That means, our soldiers were good because they restored peace in that country. Let the present government headed by President Buhari send the military to protect us if the police cannot handle the situation on ground*.

Furthermore, Okoro (2018) assert that there are four camps located in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State as a result of the conflict between the herdsmen and the farmers. Thus, their communities were under attack and they could not stay in such communities. Hence, the farmers need to stay in the camps for the purpose of shelter and for their protection.

The Impact on Food Security: As a result of the displacement situation in such communities where the attacks occurred, it has negative impact on food security. This is as a result of the fear of the unknown where the farmers tend not to go back to the said communities for farming activities. Most people who are affected by the conflict find it difficult to go back to their villages. When the farmers can no longer cultivate their farmland, it has negative affect on food security. Ekhuemelo, Tembe & Abah (2020) are of the opinion that, doing business in the affected areas where the herdsmen attacked the villagers is risky especially in Guma and Makurdi Local Government Areas. Their work opined that, businesses such as charcoal production became difficult to produce. Agbu, Musa & Zhema (2020) also agrees on how several communities in Guma Local Area were attacked by armed-herdsmen killing 22 people.

A Table on Selected Attacks by Armed-Herdsmen in Benue State

S/No.	Date	Location	Nature of Attack & Consequences
1	Feb 2013	Agatu LGA of Benue State	Communities attacked by armed-herdsmen in military uniform, killing about 500 persons, several injured, houses and food items burnt down.
2	09/11/2013	Guma LGA of Benue State	Several communities in Guma LG were attacked by armed-herdsmen killing 22 persons & property worth millions of Naira destroyed.
3	20/02/2014	Gwer West LGA of Benue State	Attacks on farmers in 6 wards by armed-herdsmen killing 35 & displacing many.
4	23/03/2014	Gbajimba, Guma LGA of Benue State	Attack by armed-herdsmen, killing 25 persons & injuring 50.
5	24/05/2015	Ukura, Gafe, Per & Tse-Gusa in Logo LGA of Benue State	Attacks on these communities by armed-herdsmen, killing 100 persons & displacing many.
6	31/12/2017 to 02/01/2018	Benue Communities of Gaambe Tiev,	The attacks on these communities by armed-herdsmen, killing over 50 persons, several

		Ayilamo, & Turan in Logo LGA; Umenger, Tse-Akor & Tomatar in Guma LGA.	others injured & displaced. Property (houses) & farmland were destroyed.

Source: *Agbu, Musa & Zhema (2020).*

The issue of food security as argued by Agbu, Musa & Zhema (2020) that, more places/communities which were affected by the armed-herdsmen attacks, made the people to flee from such areas in search for secured environment. As such, the issue of food security also tends to be affected as a result of the conflict. More so, some respondents posit that:

> *We lost everything. We lost our farm land, and we lost the food that was preserved in stores. Our animals such as goats, chickens, were deserted as a result of the attacks on us. This conflict has affected food security and we are suffering here. It is difficult to take care of our families, our people and our children here in the camp. Normally, the food that we do produce from the farm contributes to the growth of the country and not just Benue State alone.*

Land, Housing and Property Restitution: In view to resolving the conflicts between the herdsmen and the farmers, Pinheiro (2005) opined that, the land where the herdsmen possessed as a result of farmers who fled from their communities should be legally allocated to the real owners of such lands. The need for genuine restitution should be applicable in this situation. There are many people who left their property in order to secure their lives and such people are also traumatized due to the fact that the herdsmen possessed their dispossessed land. Balogun, Salleh, & Ahmad (2020) connote that, those who are affected by conflict turn to stay or reside in IDPs camp where they can find shelter. It is of note that, most of them find it difficult to move with their properties, hence, they are traumatized. Explaining the issue of land, housing and property restitution, about five (5) respondents in a group suggest that:

> *We want to go back to our community since we can no longer farm here in the Internally Displaced Persons' camp. This is not our land; we are here because of the conflict between the herdsmen and us. Let the government act quickly so that the conflict could be resolved. Let there be restitution where our land will be restituted back to us, so that we can continue farming which we are known for as our occupation. Since we left our communities, we lost our properties, our land and some of our people were killed by the herdsmen. They have taken over our land.*

More so, another group of respondents in airing out their views on the issue of dispossession of land concurred that:

> *Our forefathers were here and they farmed on our lands which have been taken away from us as a result of this conflict with the herdsmen. We are in the camp now not because we want to be here but it is as a result of the said conflict. It is not in our making, we want to go back to our communities and possess our land so that we can continue farming. We are actually suffering here. When the rainy season started, we thought the government at the federal and state levels would work out modalities on solving this conflict. We know*

> *our land, how long shall we continue staying here? How long shall this injustice continue against us? Who are those going to resolve this conflict? These are questions that we want the government to sincerely address so that the conflict can be solved and we shall have a lasting solution. By so doing, we can rebuild our houses, possess our land and return to farming.*

Children and women suffer alongside with the men in the camp. The agony of thinking on what they have lost causes trauma and it serves as an obstacle to post-conflict justice, rehabilitation and reintegration. As long as justice is delayed and denied, the conflict could resurface over time. There is need for adequate attention on the issue of dispossession of land, housing and other properties that were lost as a result of the conflict. The work of Osuchukwu & Enemuoh (2020) narrates how the herdsmen tend to attack the farmers' farmland in different communities in dispute over grazing land. Such attacks are bedeviled by the fact that the herders want their cattle to graze on the said land of which issues like destruction of crops by the cattle could occur. These herders come from as far as the Republics of Chad and Niger where they attack farmlands and other communities in search for grazing land (Babatunde, 2020; Osuchukwu & Enemuoh, 2020).

There is therefore, need to put in place structures that could lead to the protection of all Nigeria's citizens where lives and properties shall be protected by the government of Nigeria. Babatunde (2020) agrees that, unless structures are put in place to protect the people, if not, the destruction of churches, seizure of lands and properties and brutal killing of people shall not stop. Law enforcement will serve as a critical tool in managing the herders' farmers' conflict in Nigeria. The duty and primary responsibility of the government is to protect the people and their properties. Some indigenes of Benue State sees the government of President Buhari as not doing well in both responding to the conflict and protecting the people of Benue State. In this regard, there was voter mobilization against Buhari in Benue State during the 2019 general elections seeing the President's re-election as a continuation of seemingly/allegedly supporting the herders against the Benue farmers towards seizure and possession of their farmland and to Islamize the people (Ugbudu & Buter, 2020). The work of Ugbudu & Buter (2020) further disclosed that, the damage carried out by the herders against the peoples' property was worth over 100 billion in Naira. In relation to the above suggestion, responses from the field by a respondent suggest that:

> *All we want is peace and not conflict, we do not want conflict because conflict does not solve the problem but peace does. How can we continue to fight one another in this country? We should be one. God has blessed Nigeria with abundance. Let us leave together as one irrespective of our different religious beliefs and ethnic differences. There shall be grazing land separate from farmland. Let us follow the international standard as done in Europe, North and South America as well as in Australia where cattle do not move about from one state or region to another. Rather, they are restricted to a degree of coverage where they can be served and left to graze. Or do we value cattle, animals more than human beings in Nigeria? The federal government of Nigeria needs to answer this question. We can only have peace when we place more value on human beings more than animals. Go to Brazil and see how cattle are restricted even if you want to place value on cattle rearing as a business, your business should not create crisis where people are killed in order to prosper in business. Let love and peace reign. We can solve this conflict where cattle are restricted to a defined environment instead of moving about from one state to another.*

Continuous living in IDPs camp causes men and women to be traumatized and in some cases, the idea of being homeless, loosing loved ones, and possession of dispossessed land by the herdsmen creates more

challenges for them (Halima & Mohammed, 2020; Shindi, Caleb, James, & Terwase, 2020). In relation to possession by dispossession, Nwokafor, Obasi & Ejinwa (2020) assert how conflict will ensue in a situation where strangers violate the right of an indigene to possess his or her land and property. The possession of land which is a vital natural resource, land also serves as a host and it sustains as a place for both human beings and living things. Hence, there is urgent need for peaceful resolution of conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State and indeed, Nigeria.

Conclusion

This research work examined the issues that face the people in various communities in Benue State of Nigeria, where herdsmen attack the rural dwellers. In such situation, thousands of people were affected by the attacks. Thus, this work discusses the nature of conflict and dispossession of land given an understanding of the conflict. The herdsmen in search of grazing areas for their cattle tend to travel across the country from one state to another and in the course of their grazing activities trespass on different lands. In view of the trespasses on such lands, some are cultivated by farmers while some are not. It then creates tension between the herdsmen and the farmers where the lands that are cultivated are tempered with by the cattle. As a result of conflict therein, some farms tend to be destroyed by the herdsmen. This conflict therefore, leads to mass movement of these people to the camps and they become internally displaced persons (IDPs). Their lands, houses and properties which are dispossessed are sometimes possessed by the herdsmen if not completely burnt down. This takes us to suggested measures on how to resolve the conflict herein.

Recommendations

The work therefore, recommends the following as panacea to the conflict between the herdsmen and the farmers in Benue State:

i. There is urgent need for the Federal Government to address the current situation that would change the situation of the Internally Displaced Persons living in different camps in Benue State. The Government through the Ministry in charge of housing should re-build the housing facilities that were destroyed by the herdsmen across different communities in Benue State. This would enable them to return to their various locations.
ii. There is also the need to address the issue of possession by dispossession of land and property within the areas that were affected as a result of the conflict. By so doing, the issue of restitution would be in place where lands that were taken over by the herdsmen shall be restituted to the rightful owners.
iii. Adequate security measures should also be put in place by the Federal Government to protect the people of Benue State and other localities where such conflicts are affected.
iv. The Federal Government should apply international best practices on handling the herders business of cattle rearing where in the developed world, the movement of cattle from one state to another is prohibited. Open grazing should not be allowed, those who are in such businesses should be made to restrict the cattle to a defined environment which is known as ranching as practiced in other countries.

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