

The Challenges of Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Between Farmers and Pastoralists in North East Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict resolution and peace building are important instruments for de-escalation and transformation of conflict no matter how complex it may be. Yet the duo concepts are most elusive and challenging in conflict situations. Lack of deploying effective conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms by successive governments and other independent groups and organizations in Nigeria provides a congenial space for some conflict to thrive and protract across ages as the case with farmer-pastoralists in North-eastern region and Northern Nigeria in general. The paper utilized secondary sourced data through content analysis of the existing literature and reports by traditional leaders and local council officials who are directly involved in the local resolution of these conflicts. The paper argues that the long-standing vicious circle of conflict between farmers and pastoralists is attributed to flaws and feeble institutional and communal framework for conflict resolution and peace building. This development has continued to threaten Nigeria's aspirations to achieving sustainable peace and development. The paper concludes that, Low level of awareness and education; inadequate capacity building for traditional institution and other local officials to be proactive and fully understand the dynamics of conflict management. These approaches among others things are some of the major challenges of conflict resolution and peace building in farmer-pastoralists conflict.

Keywords – Conflict, Farmers, Pastoralists, Peace-building and Resolution

Introduction

Nigeria is a post-colonial state that has witnessed plethora of conflicts before and after independence in 1960. Some of these major conflicts include political instability, coup and counter coups, the Nigerian civil war, ethnic and communal conflicts, religious intolerance, separatist and secessionist threats and most recently the menace of insurgency and terrorism, resurgence of cattle rustling and banditry, farmer-pastoralists conflict among others. However, in recent years conflict between farmers and pastoralists has been problematic and often a knotty issue that is bedeviling Nigeria in the last two decades. The lingering conflict generated several security concerns by not only the parties to the conflict but also from many Nigerians. Though, farmer-pastoralist conflict is as old as agriculture, however, the existence of the conflict is not in question, but the escalation and transformation of the conflict from its traditional ebb to a modern warfare using dangerous small arms and light weapons resulting to several loss of lives and properties as well as threats to national security has been worrisome. More threatening is the climax of violent killings, arson, rape, kidnapping maim, ransacking of villages and towns, displacement of people and communities among other vices which presupposes the feeble structure and capacity for conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria. Despite the extant challenges of violent attacks and counter attack between farmers and pastoralists, yet there is less or no proactive and efficacious conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms that could mitigate the veracity of the conflict. What seems to be dominant are the relentless blames and conflict of attrition with less or no solutions from the elites which tantamount to vicious circle of farmer-pastoralists conflict at the detriment of

sustainable peace. Since the Nigerian civil war conflict resolution and peace building remained feeble and fragile which allows some existing conflicts to thrive and new contemporary conflicts emerge. Conflict resolution and peace building are not ordinary package but a painstaking process that requires addressing fundamental remote and immediate triggers of conflicts whether violent or otherwise.

From the available literatures on farmer-pastoralists conflict that flourished in the last two decades focuses on the causes, trajectories and historical evolution of farmer-pastoralist conflict (See Shettima and Tar, 2008; Abbas, 2012; Bello, 2013; Okolie and Atelhe, 2014; Akinyemi, 2016; Chinwoku, 2017; Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018; Ahmadu, 2019). Little or no scholarly attention has been dedicated to understanding the challenges of conflict resolution and peace building in an aged long conflict between farmers and pastoralists. Against this scholarly gap, this paper seeks to explore the inherent challenges of conflict resolution and peace building in farmer-pastoralist conflict with reference to North-east Nigeria. In doing this, the paper seeks to unravel the inherent challenges of conflict resolution and peace building between farmers and pastoralist. In view of the above objectives, discussions for the paper are centered on:

1. Challenges of achieving effective and efficacious conflict resolution mechanisms that addresses the root causes of farmer-pastoralists and end the vicious circle of violent conflict
2. Challenges of constructive post conflict peace building initiatives to prevent further re-enactment of existing conflict and promote peace building on sustainable basis.

The primary essence and quintessence of conflict resolution and peace building is predicated on the critical desire for enduring peace and prevention of further conflict by addressing the fundamental causes and negative consequences of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, political and economic policies that creates sustainable peace and development. Therefore, the importance of conflict resolution and peace building cannot be over emphasized. Indeed the lingering conflict between farmers and pastoralist in Nigeria today, is not unconnected to the challenges of conflict resolution and peace building initiatives.

Theoretical Background

Theories are most often used in social science oriented research as a foundation for analysis which serves as a focal guide and for purposes of validating our variables. Therefore, Elite theory forms the theoretical alignment for this paper in order to provide a lucid explanation for better understanding of elite's power relation and interplay in conflict resolution and peace building particularly in agrarian societies where farmer-pastoralists conflict is most common and characterized by violence and other crimes. Over the years elite theory has been subjected to several progressive reassessments by political scientists, sociologists and historians because of its prominence in social science research domain. Contemporary enquiries has precipitated a sudden departure from the original elite interpretation developed in the classical literatures of the Greek by some of the major proponents of the theory such as, Robert Mitchels; Pareto Mosca; Ortega and Gasset; Right Mills among others. They posit that decision making that translates into public policy basically protects and portrays the interest and image of the few elites. Therefore, in order to understand the workings of public policy and decision making, there is the need for a holistic analysis of socio-economic status and power relations within a community. Classical elite theory tried to situate their explanation on the apparent domination by the emerging few powerful elites otherwise referred to the upper class who allocates values for the society and perpetually descends power and influence from top to bottom approach. Not only that the elites always strive to not only maintain status-quo but also continuously preserve and exerts their undue advantages over the majority masses.

However, contemporary elite theorists went further by reassessing the theory from its strengths and weaknesses. Mohammed and Yalwa, (2018) summarized some of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory as posited by the contemporary elite theorists. (a) Elite theory de-emphasized the involvement of large number of people in policy and decision making that may culminates in time consuming and complexities (b) It narrowed the study of politics to power relations (c) Elite try to provide moral and legal justification for its being a strong believer of power as necessary consequences of norm and values that are generally recognized and accepted. Despite the strengths of elite theory within the context of power relations is not far from its weaknesses. Some of its weaknesses includes: (a) Elite always wants to maintain status-quo and avoid radical or revolutionary change at all cost (b) The theory creates a wide disconnect between the masses and those in power which tantamount to conflict (c) Because the proponents of the theory are non-Africans, hence the orientation is Eurocentric rather than Africa-centric. Therefore base on the above understanding of the elite theory it is pertinent to discern that the current impasse of violent conflict between farmers and pastoralists has been lingering for decades can be linked to the elite politicization of the conflict. For instance the politicization of certain pastoral policies, such as the aborted introduction of pastoral colonies, to disagreement over ranching and the current livestock development programs across states. This development presupposes the elite inability to disassociate politics from serious business of conflict resolution and peace building resulting to more blames and counter blames with less solution while the challenges of conflict resolution and peace building between farmers and pastoralists remains a nightmare.

Root Causes of Farmer-Pastoralists Conflict

Several studies that flourished in the last two decades tried to analyze factors responsible for the aged-long violent conflict between farmers and pastoralists (See Shettima and Tar, 2008; Abbass, 2012; Bello, 2013; Baidoo, 2014; McGregor, 2014; Muhammad, Ismaila, Bibi, 2015; Fasona et al, 2016; Chinwokwu, 2017; Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2019; Ahmadu, 2019). The conclusions arising from these studies have generally attributed some major predisposing factors that are responsible for fuelling conflicts between farmers and pastoralists to the following:

1. Influx of foreign pastoralists from other countries within the Sahel due to deteriorating conditions of pasture arising from the consequences of desertification, land degradation, unstable rainfall and other climatic factors which compelled some of them to abandon their respective traditional ecological range in the Sahel to most parts of Northern Nigeria. The eventual decrease in the quality and quantity of pasture led to increase competition over access to land, water and grasses between farmers and pastoralists resulting into conflict over rights and access to those limited resources.
2. Encroachment into grazing reserves and blockage of cattle routes – most of the cattle routes and grazing reserves established in the 1960s and 1970s were blocked and the reserves converted to farmlands. However, pastoralists are left with limited or no grazing space. Base on 2009 official report of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Nigeria has officially demarcated 4125 grazing reserves and cattle routes. Currently only few of these reserves are functional, whereas the rest have been cultivated by farmers.
3. However, the deliberate attitude and behavior of both farmers and pastoralists alike cannot be under scored in analyzing the root causes of the conflict. For instance, pastoralists contaminate water by taking their cattle into ponds while farmers poison the water ponds with harmful insecticides intentionally orchestrated to kill herds and

deter pastoralists from contaminating their source of water. The farmers on the other hand burn forest because pastoralists need grasses and fodder for their herds.

4. Poor resource governance and inequitable distribution of land - There is lack of effective laws governing land ownership and access leading to capitalist allocation of large expanse of fenced forest to wealthy individuals at the detriment of the poor which contributed in shrinking lands for both pastoralism and farming. Inadequate and over-stretched grazing reserves, feeble laws governing land and other renewable resources among others. This brings them into close contact with consequences of conflict.
5. More often, the institutions of the state are reactionary in approach towards conflict resolution and peace building rather than proactionary in responding to major triggers of farmer-pastoralists conflict from the bud.

The cumulative impacts of these developments led to cases of crop damage, attack on herds, killings, arson, displacement of communities, maim among other criminalities. Today farmer-pastoralists conflicts remain an unresolved issue in Nigeria.

Concept of Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: An Overview

Conflict Resolution is a total termination of conflict or the conflict has ended and does not exist any longer. Miller, (2003) defined conflict resolution as a “variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict”. He further stressed that conflict resolution is achieved when the root causes and sources of conflict are addressed and resolved. The behavior over that conflict has changed and is no longer violent or hostile any more. Mitchel and Banks (1996 cited in Best, 2006) defined conflict resolution as “an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive, new positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries and any processes or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved”. Central to any conflict resolution is the finality of the issues in conflict.

Since early 1990s several frantic efforts have been made particularly by UN to provide an elaborate meaning of peace-building. For instance, the Brahimi Report presented to UN in 2000 defined peace-building as “activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war.” In 2007, the Secretary-General’s Policy Committee has defined peace-building as “A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. Peace-building strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.”

The Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy argues that there are three broad types of peacebuilding, (The Commission, 1997)

- a. Political peacebuilding is about agreement and legal issues, and includes formal negotiations, diplomacy, etc.
- b. Structural peacebuilding is about infrastructures and includes building economic, military, social and cultural systems that support a culture of peace through activities such as voter education, disarming warring parties, police training, building schools, and good governance.

c. Social peacebuilding is about relationships and includes dealing with feelings, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values through dialogue processes, community-building activities and training.

The common understanding of the duo concepts is that they are all activities geared towards achieving peace both in the short and long-run in a sustainable manner.

Peace Building and the United Nations Global Agenda for Peace

In 1989 when the Cold War is ending-up, United Nations launched its first ever major peace building mission in Namibia, after the country's peace negotiation to end their ten years civil war. Few years later the mission was extended to not less than 13 other countries emerging from internal conflicts in order to provide "technical assistance" to local actors in the areas of conflict prevention and sustainable peace. The concept of peace building became a global agenda under the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his 1992 report, titled "An Agenda for Peace," It was a deliberate plan of action by UN aimed at developing structures both at institutional and community levels in response to the proliferation of arm conflicts and global threats of insecurity since 1990s. In order to prevent fragile states from relapse into conflict, UN identified five priority areas for international assistance to enhance not only peace building but also go side by side with state building. These areas are: Legitimate (inclusive) politics; People's security; Access to justice; Employment generation and livelihoods support; and Accountable revenue management and service deliver

Peacebuilding requires a range of approaches in which many actors engage in multiple categories of with unique goals of different approaches. It is a process of building relationships and institutions that support the peaceful transformation of conflict. Therefore peacebuilding according to Schirch, (ND) revolves around these four cycles as follows:

Advocating for Change: Advocates and activists seek to gain support for change by increasing a group's power to address issues, and ripen the conditions needed to transform relationships.

Reducing Direct Violence: Intervenors seek to reduce direct violence by restraining perpetrators of violence, relieving the immediate suffering of victims of violence, and creating a safe space for peacebuilding activities in other categories that address the root causes of the violence

Transforming Relationships: Intervenors aim to transform destructive relationships with an array of processes that address trauma, transform conflict and restore a sense of justice. These processes give people opportunities to create long-term, sustainable solutions to address their needs.

Capacity Building: Longer-term peacebuilding efforts enhance existing capacities to meet needs and rights and prevent violence. These activities aim to build just structures that support a sustainable culture of peace.

Importance of Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

The significance of Peace-building in the 21st Century cannot be over emphasized considering the numerous challenges of violent conflicts particularly the long-standing conflict between farmers and pastoralist in Nigeria. Peace building starts when a substantive success has been achieved in conflict resolution processes. Some of the significance of peace building includes but not limited to:

1. Peace building contributes in building confidence in peace agreements and transitional processes towards achieving sustainable peace.
2. It contributes in restoring social contracts between the state and the people.

3. Peace building helps in strengthening of institutions and the delivery of services for inter- and intra-communal social cohesion. Social cohesion may include activities that facilitate inclusive participation, dialogue and reconciliation.
4. Peace building encourages access to justice and human security.
5. It promotes peace dividends in form of tangible results of peace that are delivered ideally by the state, that are accessible to communities in a manner that is perceived as addressing inequalities, marginalization and grievances.
6. Peace-building also create incentives for non-violent behavior, reduce fear amongst the general population and begin the process of instilling trust in institutions and the larger peace process.
7. It promotes good governance and provision of social services, delivered in an effective and equitable manner, can address grievances that underlie or trigger violent conflict
8. It serves as a platform for the state to reach out to society and rebuild its legitimacy and systems of accountability.

Challenges of Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Farmer-Pastoralists Conflict

- i. Uncontrolled influx of nomadic pastoralists from the Sahel and West Africa due to porous land borders around the North-east region of Nigeria. Currently there is no authentic and reliable statistical data on the population of nomads coming in and out of Nigeria. Hence lack of reliable data makes it difficult for successive government to distinguish between nomadic and sedentarized herders, as well as identify militia within pastoralists. As a result, conflict resolution and peace building becomes challenging and more often frustrated by incessant migration of pastoralists. Government and other interested parties may engage in dialogue with one group of nomads today, and tomorrow they may move to another place. Third party interveners have to start fresh dialogue and engage with another group who are ignorant of the earlier engagements. The migratory pattern of nomadic pastoralists is determine by availability or otherwise of pasture in a particular location. Nomadic livelihood makes conflict resolution and peace building difficult, always on-the-move hinders continues dialogue for conflict resolution and sustainable peace building. Example of these nomads is the *Udawa*, *Mbororo* among others.
- ii. Low level of awareness and education among the conflicting parties (rural farmers and pastoralists) - Low level of education in Northeastern Nigeria is not unconnected with the disdain for western education that has existed since colonial periods. This makes conflict resolution and peace building especially by government and other non-governmental organizations cumbersome and challenging. In order to cater of the educational needs of the socially excluded and disadvantage migrant groups such as the nomads, National Commission for Nomadic education was established in 1989 by the then military administration under the leadership of General Babangida to encourage them access basic education in their remote settlements. However, not much was achieved in that direction.
- iii. Proliferation of several pastoral associations and that of farmers for political reasons – The last two decades has witnessed the proliferation of several politically motivated pastoral and farmers associations across Northern Nigeria, each claiming political influence over its members. The cleavages and divisions created by this development among pastoralists and farmers alike have impacted negatively on conflict resolution and peace building initiatives. Example of such associations includes – Miyeti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN); Alhaya Cattle Breders Association; All Farmers Association of Nigeria; Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria and many others.

- iv. Climax of ethnicity in farmer-pastoralists conflict – pastoralism has been the livelihood of the Fulani ethnic group worldwide. By and large they are the largest pastoral group in the world. Therefore farmers-pastoralists conflicts are easily interpreted and portrayed as ethnic war between the Fulani pastoralists and other ethnic farmers. For instance, conflict between Fulani pastoralists and the Jukuns in Taraba State turned to be ethnic conflict between them. Same thing applies to the Fulani pastoralists and farmers, (Bachama ethnic group) in Adamawa State. The juxtaposition of resource conflict (farmer-pastoralist) with ethnicity poses a lot of challenges to the resolution of the conflict and sustainable peace building.
- v. Excessive claims over right to land by farmers – sedentarized farmers claims over rights and access to land makes them to be ‘super landlords. Therefore pastoralists are portrayed as strangers and landless due to their nomadic movements. While pastoralists see the state as bias and in close alliance with the agents of the state to frustrate their livelihood. Pastoralists interpret conflict resolutions by government agents as predetermine and cannot be guaranteed because there are more farmers in government than the pastoralists.
- vi. The existence of several ungoverned forest in Northeastern Nigeria – the topography and rural natures of locations where these conflicts exist are less governed by institution of the state at all levels. Therefore both farmers and pastoralists are left at their own mercy and resort to self-help devoid of legal encumbrances. This poses a challenge for conflict resolution and peace building because of the remote forest where such conflicts occur.
- vii. Acquisition and possession of illegal arms by non-state actors - The rebellion in Libya, Mali and other Sahel region led to the inflow of illegal arms into Nigeria through the unmanned porous borders. As a result acquisition of arms becomes easy and readily available to both farmers and pastoralists. This development has heralded a scenario for self-determination while arm violence is seen as an alternative to peaceful conflict resolution between them.
- viii. Government inconsistencies on pastoral policy – several attempts were made to provide a virile policy that can mitigate the incessant conflict between farmers and pastoralists. All these policies could not succeed because of politicization. Some of these policies and programs include – proposed establishment of Cattle Colonies; Ranches; Ruga, Anti Grazing Laws and the recent Livestock Development Program of the Federal Government. Some of the policy proposals were death on arrival while others elicited several criticisms and interplay of political undertone. This became a vital challenge to conflict resolution and peace building between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria.

Conclusion

At the time when Nigeria is facing numerous challenges of insecurity, effective and efficient conflict resolution and peace building mechanism are not only important but are necessary tools for ending or mitigating farmer-pastoralists conflict and several other conflicts in Nigeria. Feeble conflict resolution and peace building systems may render conflict to be vicious and protracted. Therefore, there is the need to deploy full potentials of conflict resolution and peace building initiatives to enhance unity and social cohesion between the parties in order to achieve sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. The apparent vicious circle of farmer-pastoralists conflict are substantially attributed to the failure of virile and formidable conflict resolution system and aggressive peace building programs that are anchored on inclusiveness, justice, human rights, accountability and good governance.

Recommendations

The following approaches are germane to promotion of conflict resolution and sustenance of peacebuilding in the north eastern Nigeria.

- a) *Provision of statutes and policies*: Where laws are not enacted or weak to deter other from embarking on certain behaviours that jeopardize the coexistence of communities such should be strengthened and respected e.g where grazing and lands are provide it should be respected and all parties adhere to the rules governing the operation of the same.
- b) *Governance*: Poor governance resulting from poor administration by governments at three levels (Federal, State and Local) in the past to date has either by omission or commission contributed to the proliferation of farmers versus herders' conflict in the geopolitical zone hence good governance is *sine qua non* to prevent reoccurrence of violent conflict between parties to the conflict.
- c) *CSOs CBOs and Youth engagement*: CSOs, CBOs and Youth Organisations need to advocate for peace and justice. Justice for all shall be their watch ward and advocacies to key figure and personalities within communities should be undertaken and sustained periodically.
- d) *Religious and traditional leaders*: Religious and Traditional leaders should improve on the methods adopted in promotion of peace within their domains. New approaches an strategies needs to be devised to prevent reoccurrence of conflict between farmers and Herders in the zone.
- e) *Communications and publicity*: The traditional approached adopted in reaching out to parties to the conflict needs to be reevaluated and changed for better results as well as new methods of communication that are conflict sensitive be adopted by stakeholders, security agencies, CSOs, CBOs, Government officials and parties to the conflict.
- f) *Sports and culture*: Peace education through sports activities and cultural tourism and concerts is employed to prevent recurrence of farmer and herders conflict periodically. This could create room for reconciliation and reunion and settlement.
- g) The institution of the state at all levels should create an enabling environment and build local capacities for traditional rulers and local authorities to effectively harness all the potentials for conflict resolution and peace building in their various domains. Farmer-pastoralists conflicts are mostly rural based resource disputes which also require rural based solutions to de-escalate its negative consequences in all ramifications. Premium emphasis should be geared towards preventive mechanisms that are focused on avoiding tendencies that will ignite conflict or re-enactment of existing conflict.

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