Communal Conflicts in the North Central States and Food Insecurity in Nigeria: The Chinese Ranching Model as an Antidote

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Abstract

Nigeria is richly endowed with both human and vast natural resources with an estimated population of about 170 million people who need food for their daily survival. The favorable climatic and topographic conditions of the North central states of Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba and Plateau place them on a good position that can enable them to provide the much needed food for the entire country. The perceived poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria is not only as a result of a cumulative consequences of general failure of agricultural policies and implementation over time, but also resultant effect of the incessant communal conflicts and clashes mostly between the Fulani herdsmen and the host communities. The thrust of this paper is focused on the challenges these communal clashes portend for Nigeria in terms of food security and the various steps taken by the various governments to curtail these conflicts. This paper therefore attempts toproffer approaches to address the downward trends in agricultural production in Nigeria as a result of the various communal conflicts by mirroring the Chinese example, in order to reposition Nigerian agriculture as the pillar and bedrock of her general economic development and to ensure food security for every household in Nigeria.

Keywords: Food, Food insecurity, Conflicts, Communal clashes.

Introduction

Land, an indispensable factor of production, is always at the core of most communal conflicts in Nigeria. Land holds both cultural and material significances for the people in most African communities. Grazing land scarcity is an unpleasant phenomenon that affects both farmers and pastoralists' negatively in north-central states of Nassarawa, Benue, Kogi, Plateau and Taraba states of Nigeria and induces conflict on so many occasions. There are two major agricultural practitioners in north-central Nigeria; farmers who produce crops and pastoralists who carry out livestock production.

The farmers and pastoralists who have co-existed peacefully or with minimal conflicts for several centuries are finding themselves in serious deadly conflict in recent times due to competition for access to farmland and grazing land[1]. Indeed, the incessant resource conflicts witnessed in the tropics have resulted in loss of lives, properties and environmental degradation as also witnessed in North-central Nigeria. The production potential of grassland and livestock in

the arid and semi-arid region is constrained by low and variable rainfall[2]. Therefore, there is a need for grazing movements to access pasture resources across regions and for the non-destruction of the farmlands in order to ensure food security for the Nigerian population. Hence, pastures, woody vegetation, water resources and land are taken as a common property resource as reported byBerger[3]. But the complex land-use system that has changed markedly over times, has culminated in the present day tension and conflicts between herdsmen and host communities. The region under review had witnessed violent conflicts enough to attract both State and National attention.

Crops, livestock's, water resources and other vegetal resources played key roles in the development, maintenance and projection of socio-economic strength of asociety[4]. The Fulani herdsmen's livelihood strategies had resulted in conflicts over the destruction of crops and farmlands. The environmental degradation is perceived to be contributing enormously to the deterioration in ecosystem services to the environment of various communities.

This paper explores the phenomenon communal clashes as a result of land disputes and the threats it portends in five parts. The first serves as the introduction. The second part discusses the nexus between grazing land scarcity and food security. The third part examines the reality of communal clashes as it affects farmers and pastoralists in their vocations highlighting some specific famers-pastoralists conflicts in northern Nigeria in recent times. The fourth part will look at the China experience using it as a panacea for Nigeria situation. The fifth part forms the conclusion.

Causes of Communal Conflicts in the Various States

The increasing conflicts between farmers and pastoralists may be attributed to many key factors among which may be the irrigation schemes instituted by the government. The irrigation schemes become more effective during the dry season which makes water more precious to both farmers and herders. Blench[23] is of the view that competition for access to this precious resource increases conflict. The schemes allow farmers to take water and more of the river banks for dry season farming. They come into conflict with the other users, especially the cattle herders who have been using same location for many years as grazing and water points. In a field work carried out by Olabode and Olajide[24], they found that where there is competing use of resources, conflict may emerge. They highlighted the following as causes of farmers-pastoralists conflict.

i. Water scarcity: The only source of water for the cattle during dry season is to lead them to any available water point, which is an often low-land area. Farmers at this time, often engage in nursing their crops at the same water points because of dryness in the upland areas.

ii. Control over scarce resources: The struggle by different parties to appropriate perceived scarce resources in order to guarantee self or group survival often engenders conflict. Pastoralists for example, do move away from locations that lack sufficient pasture to more favorable locations. The most frequent cause of conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the study area is the destruction of crops by cattle. This is often a result of herdsmen leaving cattle unattended to and thus, making them to wander to cultivated fields.

iii. Incompatible values: It was observed that the crops grown by the farmers are at the feeding path or stock route of the cattle; this causes interference of cattle on crops, especially those ones

at the nutritious value of the cattle. In most cases, this results into crop destruction and thereby engenders conflict.

iv. Search for Grazing Land: Cattle herders look for where there is sufficient grass or crop residue for their animals to eat. In a situation where leftover crops get eaten it creates conflict with the farmer.

v. Proximity to Stock Routes: Farmers who have their farms very close to the road or animal path are liable to have their crops destroyed whenever there is a loose control on the cattle. This shows that such closeness often leads to real threat on farming system.

In explaining the causes of conflicts, Kimani[25] saw as key factors population pressure and competition over resources especially during droughts, vicious cycles of settling of scores in attacks and counter-attacks and poor dialogue between the different over range resources, mainly water and pastures. According to him, the pastoralists see the survival and well-being of their livestock as paramount because they represent more than just economic assets but are also social, cultural and spiritual assets that define social identity. A Fulani herder was quoted by Abbass as saying: "Our herd is our life because to every nomad life is worthless without his cattle. What do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment of grazing fields and routes by farmers is a call to war.[26]"

The Nexus between Grazing Land and Food Security

According to The World Food Summit of 1996, food security is defined as existing "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life"[5]. Food security is also defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences. Individual who are food secure do not live in hunger of fear of starvation. Food insecurity on the other hand, is a situation of limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) [6]

In many countries, health problems related to dietary excess or insufficiency are an ever increasing threat. e.g.; malnutrition and food borne diarrhea have become double burden. It is a condition related to the ongoing unavailability of food. Concerns over food security have existed throughout history. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), food security "exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. *Chronic* food insecurity is a persistent lack of "sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life," and is generally caused by extreme poverty[7]. *Acute* food insecurity refers to temporary gaps in access to food, and can result from a variety of factors ranging from high prices to disruptions in delivery systems, recessions, natural disasters and extreme weather events, political turmoil, and violent conflict. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that there are three pillars that determine food security: food availability, food access and food use.

How Conflict Affect Food Security

There is substantial empirical evidence that conflict has a negative impact on food security. The impact may be minor, as when spontaneous protest demonstrations over rising food prices take place in or around food markets and disrupt or close down vendors' operations. At the other extreme, there are food wars— "a concept which includes the use of hunger as a weapon inactive

conflict and the food insecurity that accompanies and follows as a consequence," according to Ellen Messer et al[18]. Because of limited farmland and grazing land, the pastoralists and the farmers are constantly competing for the scarce resources as a result of several intense and recurring droughts[19], especially on the Benue Valley zone between the north-central states. Periodic droughts take a heavy toll on livestock where they die from thirst, hunger, and exhaustion[20].

The same concerns were recorded by Murray from opinion leaders who lament the encroachment of the desert as a threat to the farmers in the region. Recent findings showed that approximately 3,500 square kilometers of Nigerian land turns to desert each year, forcing both farmers and herdsmen to abandon their lands[21]. This was corroborated by Oyetade[22] who reported that in 10 northern states of Nigeria, each year the desert advances another 600 meters further south. According to him, this has resulted in displacing thousands of both farmers and pastoralists from their communities.

The Link between Food Security and Conflict

"Hunger anywhere threatens peace everywhere." Poverty and deprivation are seen as underlying causes of endemic conflict and civil violence. "Persistent poverty and oppression can lead to helplessness and despair. When governments fail to meet the most basic needs of these people, these failed states can become havens of terror.

These kinds of conflicts are not easily addressed with traditional instruments, such as diplomacy or military means. The drivers of violence often include a wide range of factors, such as political, economic, social and environmental issues. They can include socio-economic inequalities, perceived or real injustice, a lack of jobs, conflict over natural resources and the distribution of their benefits, human rights abuses, political exclusion, and grievances over corruption. In many cases, it is difficult to define clear causes, and the roles of different factors are interrelated, possibly morphing into each other and changing over time.

As the 2011 *World Development Report* notes, conflict comes in many forms. While the traditional security paradigm has focused attention on interstate and major civil wars, other forms of political violence – such as rioting, communal conflict, and violence linked to organized crime – can pose threats to human security and diminish government capacity to respond to protracted crises[27]. While we eschew mono-causal explanations of conflict (because parsing drivers of conflict is difficult, as most conflicts have multiple causes), acute food insecurity can be a motivation for popular mobilization and a risk multiplier. A nuanced relationship between food insecurity and violence emerges: while (increases in) food insecurity can be a source of grievances that motivate participation in rebellion, acute and severe food insecurity has a dampening effect on conflict behavior. Communal conflicts tend to occur against a backdrop of chronic food insecurity, though the effects of rapid changes in food access are less clear.

Regarding urban unrest, the picture is somewhat more straightforward: higher consumer prices, particularly for food and fuel, are associated with increases in urban protest and rioting, which can have adverse effects for institutions and influence policy decisions that affect the whole country. However, it is usually not the most food-insecure that riot, but rather those with comparatively better access. This is partly because of interactions with other variables, such as political regime (which affects the likelihood that demonstrations or riots are repressed) and incentives for the government to shield consumers from higher international prices. Equally important is the role of weak institutions, whose presence implies that there are few mechanisms

through which conflicts can be managed. Likewise, lower costs to collective action faced by urban populations can play a part in accelerating conflict. The resulting instability can itself cause further price increases, contributing to a vicious cycle and protracted crisis.

If food insecurity can be a threat multiplier for conflict, improving food security can reduce tensions and contribute to more stable environments. Yet, food security interventions – both in the form of national level programs and international efforts to address acute insecurity via emergency assistance or chronic insecurity through support programs – can also become a source of conflict and, if they are not designed and implemented correctly, further distort food markets and suppress local production. But if done right, the vicious cycle of food insecurity and conflict can be transformed into a virtuous cycle of food security and stability that provides peace dividends, reduces conflict drivers, such as horizontal inequalities[28], enhances social cohesion, rebuilds social trust, and builds the legitimacy and capacity of governments. In many cases, these results are generated through the process of interventions themselves, for example, through the inclusion of various groups in community-driven programs.

Food insecurity as a result of communal clashes in the north-central states had motivated participation in armed civil conflict at the individual level. Local militia organizations, rebel and warring factions recruit fighters via ideological/political appeals, material incentives, and coercion. The lure of food and shelter (and protection from both rebel and state violence) is often perceived as a cause for joining violent groups.

Communal Conflicts: The China Experience

China with a population of over one billion no doubt has several ethnic groups that made up the country. China's ethnic composition is largely homogeneous with 91.9% of the population being Han Chinese, other ethnicities areMongols, Zhuang, Miao, Hui, Tibetans, Uyghurs and Koreans[29].Some ethnic groups are more distinguishable due to physical appearances and relatively low intermarriage rates. Many others have intermarried with Han Chinese, and have similar appearances. They are therefore less distinguishable from Han Chinese people, especially because a growing number of ethnic minorities are fluent at a native level in Mandarin Chinese. In addition, children often adopt "ethnic minority status" at birth if one of their parents is an ethnic minority, even though their ancestry is overwhelmingly Han Chinese. There is a growing number of Europeans, South Asians, and Africans living in large Chinese cities. Although relatively few acquire Chinese citizenship, the number of immigrants belonging to different racial groups has markedly increased recently due to China's economic success. There are concentrated pockets of immigrants and foreign residents in some cities.

Just like Nigeria, China had had her own share of communal and ethnic clashes, but they were able to come out of it very strong and are still united despite their huge population. A peep into the Chinese history shows that pejorative statements about non-Han Chinese can be found in some ancient Chinese texts. For example, a 7th-century commentary to the Hanshu by Yan Shigu on the Wusun people likens "barbarians who have green eyes and red hair" to macaquemonkeys[30].Some conflicts between different races and ethnicities resulted in genocide. Ran Min, a Han Chinese leader, during the Wei–Jie war, massacred non-Chinese Wu Hu peoples around 350 A.D. in retaliation for abuses against the Chinese population, with the Jie people particularly affected[31].

Rebels slaughtered many Arabs and Persian merchants in theYangzhou massacre (760). The Arab historian Abu Zayd Hasan of Siraf reports when the rebel Huang Chao captured Guang

Prefecture, his army killed a large number of foreign merchants' resident there: Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Parsees, in the Guangzhou massacre[32]. Foreign Arab and Persians residing in Quanzhou were massacred in the Ispah Rebellion.

In the 20th century, the social and cultural critic Lu Xun commented that, "throughout the ages, Chinese have had only two ways of looking at foreigners, up to them as superior beings or down on them as wild animals.[33]"Partner merchants and non-Mongol overseers were usually either immigrants or local ethnic groups. Thus, in China they were Turkestani and Persian Muslims, and Christians. Foreigners from outside the Mongol Empire entirely, such as the Polo family, were welcomed everywhere.

Despite the high position given to Muslims, the Yuan Mongols discriminated against them severely, restricting Halal slaughter and other Islamic practices like Circumcision, as well as Kosher butchering for Jews, forcing them to eat food the Mongol way. Genghis Khan directly called Muslims "slaves"[34]. Toward the end, corruption and persecution became so severe that Muslim Generals joined the Han Chinese in rebelling against the Mongols. The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang had Muslim Generals including Lan Yu who rebelled against the Mongols and defeated them in combat. Some Muslim communities had the name which in Chinese means "baracks" or "thanks". Many Hui Muslims claim it is because they played an important role in overthrowing the Mongols and in thanks by the Han Chinese[35]. The Muslims in the semu class also revolted against the Yuan dynasty in the Ispah Rebellion but the rebellion was crushed and the Muslims were massacred by the Yuan loyalist commander Chen Youding.

Uyghurs have also exhibited racism as well. The Uyghur leader Sabit Damulla Abdulbaki made the following proclamation on Han Chinese and Tungans (Hui Muslims):"The Tungans, more than the Han, are the enemy of our people. Today our people are already free from the oppression of the Han, but still continue under Tungan subjugation. We must still fear the Han, but cannot fear the Tungans also. The reason we must be careful to guard against the Tungans, we must intensely oppose, cannot afford to be polite. Since the Tungans have compelled us, we must be this way. Yellow Han people have not the slightest thing to do with Eastern Turkestan. Black Tungans also do not have this connection. Eastern Turkestan belongs to the people of Eastern Turkestan. There is no need for foreigners to come be our fathers and mothers...From now on we do not need to use foreigners' language, or their names, their customs, habits, attitudes, written language, etc. We must also overthrow and drive foreigners from our boundaries forever. The colors yellow and black are foul. They have dirtied our land for too long. So now it is absolutely necessary to clean out this filth. Take down the yellow and black barbarians! Long live Eastern Turkestan!"[36]

American telegrams reported that certain Uyghur mobs in parts of Xinjiang were calling for White Russians to be expelled from Xinjiang during the Ili Rebellion, along with Han Chinese. They were reported to say, "We freed ourselves from the yellow men, now we must destroy the white". The telegram also reported that "Serious native attacks on people of other races are frequent. White Russians in terror of uprising."[37]

During the late 19th century around Qinghai tensions exploded between different Muslim sects, between different ethnic groups, with enmity and division rising between Hui Muslims and Salar Muslims, and all tensions rising between Muslims, Tibetans and Han[38].The "Encyclopædia of religion and ethics, Volume 8" stated that the Dungan and Panthay revolts by the Muslims was

set off by racial antagonism and class warfare, rather than the mistaken assumption that it was all due to Islam and religion that the rebellions broke out[39].

However, the lesson that Nigeria need to draw from China is that despite the huge population of China and the many ethnic groups that the country is made up of, they have been able to overcome the ugly challenges of ethnic clashes and have continued to live together. China would not have gotten the height she is today if the country was always plunged in communal clashes.

Conclusion

The fight for peace in the north-central states, the fight against social insecurity and conflicts, must comprise determined action against food security, poverty, inequality, injustice, and against the most extreme and most dependence-inducing form of poverty - being hungry, insecure of today's and tomorrow's food. Access to land is a major cause of conflicts in this region. Central to the discussion in this paper isthe need for the State to review the existing laws as itrelate to accessibility to land by members of community. This issue is key to resource sustainability in Nigeria asmajority of its citizens require land for farming andgrazing. Government should ensure that there is equityand accessibility to arable and grazing land to avertconstant conflict.

There are genuine concerns by discerning Nigerians on the need to review the existing constitution in the country. Issues such as indigeneship and settlers' rights in communities are review of the land use acts which have been abused largely by the upper class should be in the front burner in the constitution review process. The paper concludes that it is in the interest of the State to end the rhetoric on the demarcation of grazing land and take concrete steps to address the genuine needs of herdsmen for availability of grazing land, resolve the re-occurring conflicts in the agricultural sector which currently provides employment to over 80 % of the country's population.

Peace is a cherished good of humanity. But it is a good that many people have not enjoyed for decades. Millions of people have been deprived of peace for much of their foreshortened life, while an even greater number - possibly all humankind - can feel the threat of being severed from peace and stability - if not for themselves, for their children. Good in itself, peace - true, lasting peace - is also a symptom of well-being, a symptom of people living in harmony with themselves and others. Otherwise peace can be no more than elusive, an appearance maintained through repressed violence, undermined by the sense of frustration and impotence, and which will eventually be threatened by revolt.

A learning agenda that integrates food security more clearly into an analysis of conflict would contribute important insight for future work. A deeper understanding of linkage between conflict and food security would help to build a better foundation for interventions aimed at both conflict prevention and recovery

Policies need to be put in place to promote growth and distribute its benefits broadly across society. Agricultural development, as part of economic and social changes that give the poor greater power over the productive resources and the social factors that shape their livelihoods, is indispensable to the enhanced food security of the rural population and to a more peaceful and stable environment. Equitable growth and pro-poor policies are critical not only to prevent the outbreak of conflicts but also in immediate post-conflict situations.

However, we suggest that the following should be adopted:

1. Identification of flashpoints of possible conflict;

2. Demarcation of grazing reserves for Fulani herds Menon their various grazing tracks;

3. Provision of water through either boreholes or wellsalong the tracks;

4. Participation of all stakeholders at all levels of conflict resolution and Resource management and;

5. Government should be firm and fair in its resolution and implementation of decisions.

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