

Climate Change, Environment and Armed Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract: Climate change has become a major cause of conflicts in Nigeria, which directly causes multiple forms of insecurity in the country. In different parts of the globe, it manifests as earth quake, hurricane, tsunami, etc. Nigeria has received its share of climate change both in two opposite forms. In the southern coastal states of Lagos, Bayelsa, and Rivers State, the ocean and overflowing waters continually threatens to wipe away the people. However, this study focuses on the north and parts of southern Nigeria, where the impact of climate change has generated armed conflict. The study which used qualitative methodology traced how climate change and the emergence of drought, famine and other forms of environmental changes leads to resource competition over land, mineral resource, water ways and by extension generating armed conflicts in many parts of Nigeria. It found that climate change caused mass migration and the settler versus non-settler conflicts that manifested in different as herdsman-farmer conflict, as well as the armed conflict among the Ezza and her neighbours and also contributed to the Ife-Modakeke crisis in the country. Finally, the study documents multi-dimensional road-map to environmental peace and adaptations for sustainable societal development.

Keywords: Climate change, desertification, land conflict, environmental management & Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Global warming, caused by the emission of greenhouse gasses has become another critical threatening environment issue across the globe. The rapid depletion of the ozone layer is the consequent effect of greenhouse gas emission, which causes the concentration of chemical emissions to be trapped in the atmosphere, thereby leading to global warming and the consequent climate change that follows (Ani & Onyebukwa, 2016). This is a growing existential threat due to the negative effects of industrialization and globalization. Apparently, the deadliest effects of global warming and climate change cut across countries of the world including Nigeria. Obviously, global warming has drastically increased the spread of diseases, natural disasters, increased probability and intensity of droughts and heat waves (Ani & Onyebukwa, 2016). Reports of desert encroachment, drought and heat waves has continuously led to loss of lives and property in the northern part of the country and it is already assuming a very dangerous dimension, which requires urgent attention. This of course manifests with high economic consequences, namely, huge financial loss (Ani & Onyebukwa, 2016).

Ironically, climate change has become a major factor that forces mass migration and search for conducive environment for settlement in Nigeria thereby causing heavy competition over resources and in many cases manifesting as armed confrontations.

For instance, as the climate in the Lake Chad and North-East becomes drier, herdsman were forced to embark on Southward migration from the Lake Chad and North-east zone towards the South in search of water and pastures for their livestock, thereby creating pressures on available land and water resources (Degri, 2017:544). The prevailing reality in Nigerian environmental history is that climate change gives rise to certain factors, which often precipitate conflict and this couple with the struggle over scarce resources and the lack of government policies to maintain grazing reserves are directly responsible for the conflict. If there are grazing reserves, the herdsman will be limited to it and as such conflict will be minimized (Achoba & Apine, 2017: 273). Unfortunately, the Fulani herdsman in Nigeria tends to be anti all forms of grazing reserve development.

In many parts of Nigeria, non-adherence to the traditional grazing reserves for cattle, which have continuously been encroached by farmers is one of the environmental based causes of farmers-herders conflict in northern Nigeria. Ironically, while the crop farmers accuse the pastoralist of destruction of their crops; the pastoralist in turn, accuse the crop farmers of denying them access to grazing areas and occasionally rustling their cattle (Achoba & Apine, 2017: 268).

Reports of killings by both parties to the conflict in the riverine boundary between Nasarawa, Benue and Kogi States, known as the 'hot spot' are almost on a weekly basis. Conflict in these areas has become intractable because of the evergreen vegetation around the Niger and Benue Rivers, which attract pastoralists

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right across the Nigerian borders, especially from neighbouring Chad and Niger Republics. It has also been alleged that pastoralist cross over to Agatu in Benue State from Loko waterside in Nasarawa State frequently and destroy the crops of the farmers, which they turn into food for livestock in their bid to access green vegetables. On the other hands, the pastoralists have also been accused of rustling the cattle of the herdsmen in a bid to access meat (Achoba & Apine, 2017: 268).

In Northern Nigeria, the Myetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) has maintained that the encroachment on traditional livestock migratory routes that was promoted by the Fadama projects of the Federal Government as well as the land-grad culture of the Nigerian power elite has led to competition over land resources in the country. In the face of the competition, the rich and those that have political affiliation largely occupies the greater parts of the land, thereby forcing both the livestock farmers and crop farmers, whose land has been dispossessed to migrate to wherever they can find land for the grazing of their livestock while the peasant farmers keep migrating. Unfortunately, when the land that can be grazed-on and those that can be cultivated upon has been fully occupied by the combined competition between the Fulani herdsmen, livestock farmers and the political elite; intense confrontation become the only option left, leading to armed violence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the theory of human needs. The theory of human needs was expounded by John Burton. In his study, Burton (1979) and Burton (1997) has maintained that human needs are insatiable and grows in form and nature. Unfortunately, when the need of a particular being to survive becomes permanently opposed to the need for survival in any environment, conflict become the final determinant of events. Ironically, there are those human needs that man can manufacture and those that are not within the powers of men to manufacture. The natural environment is an aspect of the universe that is beyond the reach of man to manufacture as he can only maintain and improve on what has being deposited by the Creator. In the relations between the herdsmen and the farmers, the need to preserve their physical environment ironically has also eluded them as desertification often destroys the environment and push the pastoralists to migrate. To the pastoralist, pasture is

what he cares for and land like air and rains cannot be owned. This is unlike the farmer groups who have to till the land and have deep cultural, ethnic and political attachment to it (Achoba, & Apine, 2017: 273). This opposing perception of land as a form of resource naturally leads to confrontation amongst the two competitors for the environmental space called land.

Women for Environmental Programme (2012) study, which specifically targeted critical actors and stakeholders in the Fulani-Farmers conflicts in Benue State in their study found that the origin of the conflict was the struggle over the 'materials' needed for 'existence'. The struggle between the two groups was because each was struggling to survive or exist and each group depends on the same material called the 'green of the land' (i.e. the soil and its pasture).

Ogwola (2017) which examined Fulani-Agatu conflicts in Benue state showed that the geographical location of Benue State, which provides favourable climatic conditions for all-year-round livestock grazing, made it attractive to nomadic Fulani, thereby turning it into a long standing source of conflict arising from encroachment of cattle on the farm lands, which often leads to damage of crops. Anyebe, Sunday and Ahtehe (2017) studied Fulani-farmers conflicts in the South-South of Nigeria and found that the increasing statistics of violence associated with herdsmen and famers conflict in Nigeria is attributed to the increased desperation of the herdsmen and farmer's competing for both farming and grazing lands, coupled with the practices of corrupt political and traditional leaders who tend to benefit more from the conflicts.

This study is a qualitative research that used primary and secondary materials in developing the research. The primary data were gathered through observations by one of the researcher that visited largely all the conflict settings to get firsthand information on the development and impact of these conflicts that have been driven by climate change. The researcher engaged in focus group discussion with four to six persons in each of the groups and noted the disparity in environmental perceptions. The interviews conducted were carried out randomly in a face to face interaction at Atakwu, Nimbo of Enugu State and Ugwulangwu, Izzi, Isu and Ezza of Ebonyi State. The researcher used telephone communication to collect data in the cases of Agatu, Benue State, Jos North and South of Plateau State as well as in the Ife-Modakeke conflict in Yoruba land. The information collected were interpreted chronologically and thematically.

CLIMATE CHANGE, FULANI HERDSMEN AND FARMER'S CONFLICTS

Environmental degradation is said to have contributed enormously to the rise of conflicts in different parts of the globe. Tonah (2006) maintains that the increasing farmer-herder conflicts include the outward movement of pastoral herdsmen into the humid and sub-humid zones. It should be recalled that in the pre-colonial era, the low settlement density in parts of northern Nigeria prevented the chances of widespread migration as the grasses from nearby settlements provided the needed grazing areas.

Unfortunately, as the population of the masses continued to expand, there was lack of grassland to use and feed the livestock due to the fact that human settlements have overtaken many of the places that were meant to be used for grazing, thereby pushing the livestock farmers away to places that has low habitation density. Similarly, there is the rapid depletion of natural fodder in the Northern States that are sharing borders with Niger as well as Chad Republics and they had been compelled to seek for pasture outside their traditional ecological zones in the Sahel and Savanna (Achoba, & Apine, 2017: 270).

In Nigeria, the migration of herdsmen due to unfavourable or changing climatic conditions has forced them to encroach into the places settled by indigenous Middle Belt people. The encroachment into their soil and subsequent exploitation of their farms as well as destruction of agricultural resources has led to multiple forms of armed confrontation. That has been the case in Eggon, Tius and Alago in Nasarawa State; Riyon, BarkinLadi, Mangu, Jos North and Jos South of Plateau State; Bassa, Olamaboro, Misa, Okene and Idah in Kogi State; Guma, Logo, Gwer East and Gwer West communities in Benue State.

The North Eastern part of Nigeria has also been over-whelmed by the Fulani and farmer's conflict, which was precipitated by the inability of the herdsmen to continually access grasses and water to feed their livestock. That was the case in April, 2016, when about 44 people were said to have been killed in Angeri, Dashole, Dori and Mesuma villages, in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba State. The lists also include the ransacking of several farming communities in Taraba south, particularly Wukari, Donga, Gasol, Mambilla and Tarkum Local Government Areas. Similar attacks were also observed in Fufore, Girei, Demsa, Numan, Lamurde, Yola South and Suyuk of Adamawa

State (Anyebe, Sunday & Ahtehe, 2017). Albert (1999) also revealed that Kano has received its fair share of farmers-herdsmen conflict. In Yoruba land, the people of Oke-Ogun has suffered similar cases of farmers-herdsmen conflict (Albert, 2010). In south east, Enugu State had also been caught up with herdsmen attacks. Communities attacked include Nimbo-Ngwoko, Enugu-Nimbo. In Ebonyi State, Ugwulangwu, Isu and Izzihhas also been negatively affected by herdsmen invasion and the violent killings that went with it. Land and its resources as well as religion and political inclinations have been the bane of the unending disputes between the herdsmen and the various communities (Duru, 2013).

Several studies have shown that pastoralist-farmers conflicts have been a recurring decimal; and yet it has adversely produced one of the most heinous effects on Nigerian societies in recent years, in terms of the loss of human lives and properties, both of which are highly strategic and *sine qua non* for sustainable development (Albert, 2010; Bello, 2015; Williams, Muazu, Kaoje, & Ekeh, 1999).

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND LAND RESOURCE CONFLICTS

Pressure on the land resources contributes to degradation of the environment, resulting in increasing incidence of clashes and armed conflicts (Degri, 2017). In a single attack, more than a hundred lives were reported lost and properties worth several million naira were also lost in Benue State in 2014 (BSGN, 2014). Land conflicts in Nigeria has been traced to a lot of factors. However, the place of environmental factors in the competition over a given space of land remains a fundamental part of the discussion on land. The focus of this part of the study shall be on Ife-Modakeke conflict as well as the Ezza conflict with her neighbours.

In the words of Asiyanbola (2007), the Ife-Modakeke crisis remains the oldest intra-ethnic conflict in Nigeria; thereby making it an evident case study with detailed intricacies that has undermined communal conflict resolution efforts. It is recognized that the causes of the conflicts between Ife and Modakeke people are many and varied. Historians generally trace the crisis to pre-colonial Nigerian era, especially during the Yoruba internecine wars of the nineteenth century. Scholars who have interpreted the conflict has some analysis of causes, traceable to but not limited to the two bloody battles of 1849 (Johnson, 1921); the

communal war of December 1882 (Manning, 1979); the Isakole (land rent) dispute of 1946 – 47 (Afolayan, 1998); the conflict over the establishment of Modakeke High School (Akinjogbin, 1992); the conflict over the establishment of Olorunsogo Plank Market (Agbe, 2001); and the opposition to self-help development projects by a Fund Raising activity of Modakeke in 1980 (Albert, 2001). It is worthy of note that these listed causes of the conflict are directly and indirectly connected to the preservation of the environment as well as the quest to initiate new approaches of maximizing the changing environment by either the original landlord or the later settlers, who moved from their original abode to the contested territory in their bid to escape the changing environmental challenge that they had hitherto faced.

In 1946, there was a resurface of this age-long crisis during the Cocoa boom. The Ife landowners started demanding for more royalties (Ishakole) than what they bargained before. Albert (1999) reported that Ife landowners started asking the Modakeke to pay them Ishakole (loyalties) as much as 10% of the harvested Cocoa. The Modakeke opposed it and took it as an exploitative measure and reported to the then Ooni Adesoji Aderemi. This crisis extended till 1949, which the Modakeke lost based on judicial rulings (Olayiwola & Okorie, 2010). Before the West African Court of Appeal hearing on the case, conflicts broke out in May 18, 1949 at Modakeke and this led to different factions among the Modakeke themselves (Albert, 1999). As a result of these factions, they became confused and later reversed to suggestion made by Egbe Omo Oduduwa that the *Ishakole* (loyalties) should be collected based on the number of harvested cocoa trees (Albert, 1999 & Babajimi, 2003).

It is important to note that the first attempt to resolve the Ife-Modakeke crisis in 1847 was made by Ooni Abeweila, basically with the intent of resettling the Modakeke people in another location. Akinjogbin (1992) observed that this was premised on the assumption that if wide distance could be provided between the Modakeke and Ife people, it would likely put an end to the insurgence of the crisis. The second occasion was in 1886, when the Anglo-Yoruba Treaty was signed, the Modakeke leaders refused to be part to it because they felt cheated and neglected by the 1886 peace treaty. This was because the clause 5 of the treaty stated the reconstruction of Modakeke town will be made in a land lying between Osun and the Oba rivers (Balogun, 1985). This treaty was implemented by Ooni Adelekan Olubuse in 1909, which led to the

relocation of some of the Modakeke people, although they later returned after his death. Unfortunately, while the relocation to new environment failed, it was a modest move to use new environment adaptation to manage the conflict. Consequently, we shall be evaluating how the Ezza has faced violent confrontation with their neighbours due to change in environment.

The Ezzapeople are widely known as warriors and farmers in traditional Igbo society. They easily possess land in the north (Kogi and Benue States) and eastern parts of the country. What happened in actuality was that the Ezza in their earliest history found that their brothers, Ikwo and Izzi who moved first, had occupied almost everywhere leaving them no more option than to fight hard for their survival (Onuoha & Ani, 2016). Ezza migration and expansion out of their ancestral home arose only out of the need to settle members of their group whose number and population had shot up in a rather strait and stifling topography. Ever blessed in population growth and ardent farmers, they found themselves hemmed in, throwing up serious demographic and economic challenges (Onuoha & Ani, 2016). These challenges forced the Ezza to start migrating into different parts of Ebonyi, Enugu and Anambra states where they established colonies.

Ani, Nwali and Ojajorotu (2019) maintain that the inter-communal conflict that ravaged Okpoto and Ezza in pre-colonial times was principally driven by the changing nature of the environment and the quest to preserve their cultural heritage. The Ezza has a history of continuous migration to any place that they will encounter better environment for farming. The Okpoto-Ezza conflict of 1800s-1865 came as a result of social environmental problems between the two tribes. The Okpoto is an Ori sub-clan that originated from Okpoto Okum Eze. They revered totemic beings in their traditional religion. One of the most remarkable sacred animals amongst them was the *kibieyi* (fish) (Ani, Nwali & Ojajorotu (2019). Though not all fish was regarded as the sacred fish, it was believed that *kibieyi* (species of fish) were representative of human in the marine world and if harmed or killed it will affect its killer in the real world. Thus, large concentration of *kibieyi* in sacred stream were highly revered. It was widely acknowledged that fishing from such site is forbidden. But to Ezza people, though they also endorse the same belief on "*Eemah* (another species of fish) but no site was typically established for the *Eemah*" (Ani, Nwali & Ojajorotu (2019). For this, Ezza did not hold any respect to the Okpoto *kibieyi* site.

According to the sources, crisis started when "marauders involving Okpoto-Ezza nationals invaded the Okpoto totemic site at Inechi and killed the sacred fish-*kibiyei*. Okpoto responded violently, the armed conflict that followed was very destructive and was only resolved after the Treaty of Ishinjoku Egboji Itunro Amiara in the present day Onu-nweke Omege, Umuezeoka community in Ezza-North Local Government between Okpoto and Ezza (Ani, Nwali & Ojatorotu (2019). Unfortunately, the treaty ended with a decision to fetch out the perpetrators of the desecration of the Okpoto holy site and kill them.

The Okpoto people accepted the offer and danced to the tune of the ritual drum. The action was executed by the Okpoto people. However, according to some sources, the "Okpoto killed Ezza nationals and spared theirs; hence, the Ezza warriors got angry that the Okpoto people involved in the desecration were spared and planned a reprisal attack (Ani, Nwali & Ojatorotu 2019). More so, other source had it that on the process of fetching and killing Okpoto men who were part of those that desecration of the holy site, the security men on guard at Inechi, the sacred stream; engaged them in a fierce battle, that led to deaths of both parties and progressive armed conflict was triggered (Ani, Nwali & Ojatorotu, 2019).

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

The frequent farmers-pastoralist conflict leads to regular destruction of lives and properties. Thus, the depopulation of a group or groups of people with its attendant negative demographic implications for nation building and an untold hardship to the survivors of the crisis as well as displacement of such group from their ancestral homes. All of which leads to violent memories that sometimes causes the manifestation of recurrent conflict (Achoba, & Apine, 2017: 273).

On the other hands, over-grazing leads to soil degradation, notwithstanding that animal droppings serves as farm yard manure that enhances soil fertility at minimal grazing level. Unfortunately, overgrazing by the herdsmen creates the problem of erosion and the growth of gullies in many parts of Northern Nigeria, leading to the rise of desertification. When erosion becomes the order of the day or desertification reigns, it will be difficult for plants to grow. When a combination of desertification and erosion destroys the soil due to climate change, the emission of oxygen and chlorophyll from trees and

plants becomes largely reduced, if not totally eliminated. There will be increasing emission of carbon dioxide into the air thereby increasing the degree of intense heat in many parts of northern Nigeria due to change in ozone layer resulting more to desertification, and increased competition over green land by farmers and pastoralists.

The lack of rainfall similarly leads to increased hunger as the soil no longer supports the planting of multiple crops by subsistence farmers. In many parts of Jigawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Bornu States etc, there is less than three full months' rain, thereby weakening the chances of growing deep tuber crops, hence they only survive mainly from the cultivation of cereals.

The negative effect of climate change and conflicts in Nigeria leads to the direct destruction of lives and properties within the country. Between 1st January and 20th May, 2013; at least three hundred lives were lost in farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria (Degri, 2019). In 2014, it was alleged that Fulani herdsmen killed 1,200 farmers in the country. In 2016, over three hundred people were said to have been killed in GadanBiyu, Ninte, Akwa'a, Angwan, Ardo, Gadogado, Jaginji, and AkwaMagari in Jema'a Local Government Area of Kaduna. In February 2016, herdsmen- farmers clash in Agatu led to the death of 300 people and later 40 persons were killed in Nimbo. Very disturbing is the fact that in Plateau, Nasarawa, Benue, Kaduna and Adamawa States, the number of lives that are constantly lost to the conflict remains largely undocumented. Similarly, the Fulani herdsmen crisis had taken the lives of 1,061 people in about 106 attacks between January and April 2018 (Akinloye, 2018) and just a few weeks ago, precisely on 3 October 2018, another 19 lives were lost in another attack in Plateau State (Olorok, 2018). Land conflict has claimed thousands of human lives and orchestrated higher magnitude of destruction of properties worth billions of naira (Ogwola, 2017; Anyebe, Sunday & Atelhe, 2017).

Other dangerous impact of the climate change and armed conflict is the challenge or growing cases of internally displaced persons (IDP) across the country. In 2013, 50 persons lost their lives in Benue State and 10,000 persons were forcefully turned into internally displaced persons (Degri, 2019). IDP camps became a major factor that was gulping part of the Nigerian national treasury. Climate change causes widespread trauma, fear and anxiety, which leads to mass migrations from the North and conflict zones to other

parts of the country. It also leads to the proliferation of arms and light weapons in those conflict endemic areas. There is also the growth in inter-ethnic hatred. Those who migrated to new settlements because of the change in the climate of their original setting often settles in new locations where they will begin to compete with their landlords over resources thereby leading to conflicts. When such conflicts also escalate, it would begin to threaten internal security, which further undermines national unity and weakens the country's quest for sustainable governance. When climate change problems manifest, it creates the challenge of environmental governance and enormous resources are often diverted in managing the multiplier effects of climate change.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focuses on the link between climate change and armed conflicts in Nigeria. It presented the Fulani herdsmen conflict with Nigerian farmers in different states of the federation (Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Ebonyi Enugu etc) as well as the place of changing environment in the Ife-Modakeke as well as the Ezza conflicts with her neighbours. The study found that the conflicts that has followed due to climate change and environmental challenges has led to the destruction of lives and properties in Nigeria. The environmental implications of climate change as well as its negative effect on nation building process was documented.

The study recommends that government should ensure that they develop green zones, especially in all the local governments of northern Nigeria. Those green zones will aid the rise of plants and trees that could be of great support in managing the challenge of climate change. Again, communities and government should also clearly demarcate forests and grazing reserves at local, regional and national levels to avoid encroachment into farming space and the clashes that follows it. Finally, the inter-communal land conflict should be squarely- managed using multiple peace building strategies that will involve the traditional rulers, the political elite in government, non-governmental organisations as well as peace ambassadors from the conflicting communities and groups.

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Received on 16-06-2020

Accepted on 18-08-2020

Published on 21-09-2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.44>

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