

Beyond flooding: Exploring the implications of Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict for sustainable development goal 2 in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The continuous prevalence of undernourishment, hunger and starvation in Nigeria has raised a serious question about the effectiveness of measures adopted by the government at all levels in tackling these challenges which will result to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 2. The prevailing elucidation for these challenges around SDG 2 in Nigeria is drawn on "flooding" theory whose proponents suggest that the factors undermining various strategies adopted to achieve SDG 2 in the country are traceable to flooding and recommend for spatial planning as a suitable FRM method, to elicit more decisive actions by the government in order to mitigate the flooding threat. However, this article goes beyond this dominant view to interrogate the impact of Fulani pastoralists/ farmers conflict on SDG 2 in Nigeria. The article shifts away to a reasonable extent from the above common perspective and argues that the Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict is a prominent security threat in Nigeria which has the most far reaching effect on Sustainable Development Goal 2. The flooding thesis proponents ignore the centrality of peaceful atmosphere in every society which is most critical to any agenda such as Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, this article contends that solving the problem of flooding alone in Nigeria would not result to the realization of SDG 2; that the conflict between Fulani pastoralists and farming communities is the topmost priority which requires urgent attention in order to achieve SDG 2 in Nigeria. As a panacea, the article recommends among others for decentralization of security governance by way of devolution.

Keywords:

Conflict, Fulani pastoralists, Farmers, Food security, Sustainable Development Goal 2

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1. INTRODUCTION

In nearly every region of Africa and South America, undernourishment and severe food insecurity appear to be on the rise. The high number of people who suffer from hunger, malnutrition and undernourishment globally gave rise to several efforts and strategies put in place to address this global challenge. Resultantly, Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) among others came into being in 2015 with the primary aim of solving this global problem. By 2030, the SDGs, precisely the Goal 2 aims to eradicate all types of hunger and malnutrition, ensuring that everyone, especially children, has access to adequate healthy food. This entails encouraging sustainable farming, helping small-scale farmers, and ensuring that everyone has access to markets, technology, and land. One of the targets of this Goal is to significantly increase the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists, and fisher men and women, through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value-adding and non-farm employment by 2030 (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Nigeria is one of the countries of the world with very disturbing issues around Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger). As naturally endowed as the country may seem, it has not translated to consumption of healthy food among majority of her citizens. According to United Nations Children's Fund in Independent (2022), Nigeria is one of the countries whose citizens precisely children are faced with malnutrition. In Nigeria, 14.5 million citizens are acutely malnourished. In a similar vein, National Bureau of Statistics (2022) revealed that the rate of food insecurity in North-east, North-central and South-south geopolitical zones of Nigeria stood at 79%, 71% and 74% respectively. This suggests that despite making efforts in reducing the prevalence of malnutrition among other food related issues, the country is still faced with challenges in achieving SDG2. Consequently, the theory of "flooding" has been invoked to illuminate the reason for the

deteriorating condition of activities for SDG2 in Nigeria. There have been continuous cases of flooding in Nigeria resulting to the destruction of crops, livestock and seeding stores etc. That of 2012 remained the most destructive in the history of the country until the unprecedented flooding of 2022 happened. Therefore, the perspective is hinged on the premise that the fundamental problem undermining various strategies adopted towards SDG 2 in Nigeria is flooding. The argument is further driven by one of the SDG 2's fundamental targets which center on improving capacity for adaptation to climate related events such as flooding. In view of the forgoing, the proponents of this theory believe that the surest way of achieving SDG 2 in Nigeria is by effectively solving the problems of flooding. For instance, Echendu (2020) argued that the significant problem of recurring floods hinders Nigeria's progress toward accomplishing Sustainable Development Goals such as Goal-2 and recommended for spatial planning as a suitable FRM method, to elicit more decisive actions by the government to mitigate the flooding threat. Additionally, Osabohien et al. (2018) observed that food and agriculture are crucial to ending hunger, but flooding in Nigeria has a significant impact on this vital sector.

It is indisputable that there is a clear nexus between flooding and challenges around Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Nigeria and a concerted as well as collective effort is needed to address this challenge. But the most critical issue of Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict which endangers food security and by extension immensely hampers SDG2 in the country has not been given the attention it deserves. As similarly, Adisa & Adekunle (2010) in Dimelu, Salifu & Igbokwe (2016) observed that there has not been sufficient analysis and debate on the relationship between agriculture and conflict. This is still true given the persistent and pervasive herdsman-farmers' conflict across several states in Nigeria and its developing complex features marked by the employment of advanced weapons, communication technology, and the mass killing of people. It activates feelings of doubt about the suitability and efficacy of changes,

procedures, and tactics used to handle or settle such conflicts. Therefore, moving away from the prevailing perspective of “flooding”, this article argues that the dangerous dimension of Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict, leading to killing of people as well as cattle and inability of the farming communities to go to their farms is the most fundamental issue that needs in-depth examination so as to establish its impacts on Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Nigeria. Principally, this article contends that achieving SDG 2 in Nigeria goes beyond addressing flood-related challenges to most importantly include finding lasting solution to Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict. Given the above, this article is thematically organized in the following manner: The first section centres on interrogating the conflict between Fulani pastoralists and farming communities in Nigeria; and bringing out its causal impacts on SDG 2. The second section of this article explores measures adopted by the Nigerian state to resolve the conflict. The last section focuses on conclusion and way forward. The data for this article was drawn from secondary sources consisting of journal articles, government publications, books, conference speeches and newspaper articles.

2. FULANI PASTORALISTS/FARMERS CONFLICT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 IN NIGERIA

The economy of countries in of sub-Saharan Africa particularly those of rural communities rely heavily on small-scale livestock rearing. Additionally, it is critical to the production of food and livestock products' protein. Globally, there are 120 million pastoralists with 50 million of them living in sub-Saharan Africa where they make up 12% of the rural population (Rass, 2006). In Nigeria, the Fulani are major pastoralists with a population of about 15.3 million. They first settled in Jos of present day Plateau state upon their arrival into the Nigeria in 1910 (Blench, 2004), but they are currently located in the Northern part of Nigeria mainly North-east, North-west and some parts of North-central geopolitical zones. They have in the recent time moved in numbers with their cows to various states Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria which has resulted to the violent disagreement with the local farming communities that are predominantly Christians. Simply put, the dispute between the herders and farmers, whose crops are being damaged by the herds while they graze on their host's farms, has been attributed to the movement of Fulani herdsmen towards the southern part of the country. Adisa (2012) submitted that farmers-herders conflict continues to be Nigeria's most pervasive resource-use conflict, occurring in almost every part of the country. Currently, this conflict poses a number of challenges to livelihood of both farmers and pastoralists. It has become a great source of insecurity and a food crisis, particularly in rural communities where most of the crises are localized, with widespread repercussions (Wudaba & Ishaku, 2017). The picture displayed below explains some of the consequences of the conflict between the farming communities and Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria.



Fig 1: Picture showing the mass Burial of victims of Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict in Benue state. Source: Hameed Sadiq in Lenshie, Okengwu, Ogbonna & Ezeibe (2020).

Instances of the Fulani pastoralists and farmers conflict include the February, 2016 Agatu Massacre in Benue State. Over 300 members of the villages were murdered, and about 7,000 people were left homeless. There were also claims of rape, as well as the burning down of homes and other property in the affected communities. According to a leader of one of the communities, Agatu people were targeted in the attacks as retaliation for the 2013 murder of a Fulani pastoralist and cattle theft (Nigerianeye, 2016 in Udosen, 2021). Conflicts between farmers and Fulani pastoralists have led to the destruction of 664.4 (56.4%) hectares of farmland in Benue State between 2010 and 2014 in three local governments which include Agatu, Guma, and Logo (Abughyer, 2016). Benue state appears to be the epicenter of the conflict but there are other states of the federation where this violence is prevailing. For instance, in December, 2015, 22 people were killed and six homes set ablaze in an attack on Kwata village in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau state. Also, there were attacks in April, 2016 by highly armed Fulani herdsmen in the communities of Nimbo Ngwoko, Ugwujiro, Ekwuru, Ebor, Umuome, and Ugwuachara in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu state. 40 persons lost their lives together with the destruction and burning of buildings, a church, cars, motorcycles, and domestic animals. Similarly, there were attacks against the people of Dori and Mesuma villages in Taraba State's Gashaka Local Government Area which resulted to the death of 15 people and destruction homes (Nigerianeye, 2016 in Udosen, 2021).

In May 2018, herdsmen in Demsa Local Government Area of Adamawa state attacked and killed about 21 people (Premium Times, 2019). On February 2, 2019, 11 people were killed when suspected Fulani gunmen attacked the Adara village known as Ungwar Bardi. In a study of 27 communities in North-central Nigeria, Nyong & Fiki (2005) revealed that over 40% of the families examined had experienced agricultural land-related disputes, with respondents remembering conflicts that occurred as far back as 1965 and 2005. In Kogi State, there have been instances of conflicts between herders and farmers in the local governments areas of Igalamela/Odolo and Ibaji/Ofu, among other local governments resulting to destruction of crops by cattle, and the death of both herders and farmers. Olabode & Ajibade (2010) observed a significant loss in agricultural output in Oke-Ero of Kwara State due to the abandonment of farmlands by farmers. Ofuoku & Isife (2009) opined that more than 40 million naira worth of crops is often destroyed each year owing to cattle invasion in the south-south region of Nigeria, particularly in the Delta and Edo states. Farmers-herders conflicts usually result in widespread farmer displacement from their farms after the farms are destroyed by the encroaching pastoralists. This leads to a decline in farm produce as farmers leave their more fertile farmland for fear of being attacked (Olabode & Ajibade, 2010).

These violent crises in Nigeria especially in Benue State can substantially be considered as direct attacks on SDG 2 in Nigeria because the state (Benue) is the “Food Basket of the Nation”. Farmers in the state are now reluctant to return to their farms even during farming season. In every attack, there have been significant losses in terms of both human life and property on both sides. While Benue farmers measure their losses in terms of homes and agricultural output, Fulani herders measure their losses in terms of cattle. Weeds have taken over farms in the afflicted areas, and those that were ready for harvest have been neglected. According to studies conducted by Mercy Corps between 2013 and 2016 on the causes and consequences of ongoing conflicts between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria which was funded by the British Department for International Development (BDID), the attacks on farming communities have a significant impact on food security and have resulted in a loss of \$14 billion over three years. Local farmers who lived close to Makurdi abandoned the area, leaving their farmlands untended and unharvested thereby exposing them to unjustified grazing by the Fulani herdsmen. Farm produce in the state has been drastically reduced, which is a phenomenon that has made people more afraid of going hungry. Majority of farmers in the affected local government areas have given up cultivation as a result of fear of being attacked by the pastoralists. Farming is no longer a regular source of income for the largely agrarian people of Benue and the bordering communities of Nasarawa and Taraba states (Udeh, 2018). This does not in any foreclose the presence of this existential threat in other states of the country as at least two states in each geopolitical zone have witnessed this conflict. Chronic food insecurity fueled by the conflict between local farmers and cattle herders has plagued communities in various parts of the country especially in the Middle belt regions (World Food Programme, 2019). More than 300,000 people have been displaced since the violence started and this has led to food scarcity and an exponential rise in food

prices (Ojo, 2020). Ejiofor (2022) argued that pastoral terrorist operation in Nigeria is a consequence of absence of employment opportunities and social facilities such as school, good road and electricity among others.

By 2030, SDG-2 seeks to eradicate all types of hunger across the world (Gil et al. 2019) but the chances of achieving that in Nigeria seems to be very slim in the face of this existential threat. Food and agriculture are critical to ending hunger which is the focus of SDG 2, but the Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict in Nigeria has a significant impact on this vital sector. Making food especially the essential items readily available and affordable is an effective way of ending hunger but this is not the situation in Nigeria due to conflict between critical stakeholders (farmers and herders) in the sector. This explains the understanding that the country is far from achieving food security and by extension SDG 2 (Matemilola & Elegbede 2017; Osabohien, Osabuohien & Urhie 2018). The impact of this crisis on SDG2 is monumental as it has made the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral output which is critical to the realization of SDG 2 a mirage. According to Ibrahim, Ismaila & Umar (2015) in Udosen (2021), farmers-herdsmen crises have resulted in a sharp and significant increase in the cost of essential agricultural crop exports such as cowpeas, maize, millet, rice, and sorghum. Ikezue & Ezeah (2017) inferred that the herders/farmers conflict has exacerbated cycles of extreme poverty and hunger, undermines social status and food security, and mostly affects the most disadvantaged populations, such as women and children. It increases the level of poverty and food insecurity. For the communities who depend on subsistence farming, the instability brought on by the ongoing hostilities between herders and farmers have resulted to food shortages (Udosen, 2021). Coincidentally, the aforementioned most affected categories of people (women and children) are major targets of SDG 2. Hence, considering the achievement of SDG2 in Nigeria in 2030 in the face of this prevailing threat is a mirage. The thematic report by Assessment Capacity Projects (ACAPS) (2017: 12) elaborates this ugly trend:

Approximately 132,818 are said to be facing IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) levels of food insecurity in Benue, 167,561 in Plateau and 212,348 in Kaduna states as at December 2016, with 12,063 in Phase 4 in Plateau state. 46,000 are projected to face Crisis food security conditions in Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau states from June to August 2017, according to the report. The majority of IDPs have identified food as their most pressing need. They have limited food access as their stocks were looted and there is little access to replenish farm stocks. Staple food and cash crop production is below average in Plateau state. Prices remain extremely high around the country and are expected to continue increasing due to current inflation and recession. Conflict affected households thus face additional strain in accessing staple food due to their reduced purchasing power. Any food assistance has been inadequate and irregular. Members of the Goska district in Southern Kaduna made up of about 156 households, report receiving food assistance once, and enough for only 30 families.

The Fulani pastoralists are indisputably relevant stakeholders in the country's food agenda including SDG 2. They are the principal cattle breeders, the primary producers of meat, and the most widely accessible and affordable source of animal proteins used by Nigerians. Over 90% of the country's livestock population, which makes up one-third of the agricultural GDP and 3.2% of the overall GDP, are owned by the Fulani. The contributions of Fulanis to the food system of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized (Eniola, 2010). International Crisis Group (2017) observed that the majority of pastoralists are Fulani, a sizable ethnic group that is spread throughout numerous West and Central African nations. The projected national herd of 19.5 million cattle, 975,000 donkeys, 28,000 camels, 72.5 million goats, and 41.3 million sheep is owned by Fulani pastoralists to the tune of nearly 90%. Between 20 and 30 percent of all agricultural output and 6 to 8 percent of global GNP are accounted for by livestock (GDP). Nigerian pastoralists import about 30% of the live animals used for slaughter from foreign nations. Therefore, this situation of their inability to continuously engage in this critical component of the food system and maximize production owing to conflict such as the ongoing crisis is antithetical to what SDG 2 stands to achieve in the country. Meat production is a critical segment of food security which is akin to the SDG 2. Hence, the reprisal attack by farming communities resulting to the

killing of pastoralists and their cows is inimical to the achievement of the Goal 2. Nomadic pastoralist activities in Nigeria are under serious attack as a result of conflict with farming host communities among others (Ejiofor, 2022).

Mr. Ishaku Joshua, a farmer in Irigwe community of Bassa Local Council of Benue State, said: "The cost of meat (beef) has risen from ₦700 to ₦1400 per kilo, because of scarcity of cows because the farmers want to protect their farmlands and the Fulani too want to protect their cows. That is where you have a clash of interests. The lives of the Fulani and their cows are not safe and the lives of the farmers too are not safe, because each time they cultivate a large acre of land, the herdsmen graze their cattle on this land and destroy the farmlands. "The cow milk, which used to be a good supplement for protein, is highly expensive now, because of the clashes. The death toll of both herders and farmers is also on the increase. Energetic youths who are supposed to be engaged in food production are being killed on daily basis as a result of the unhealthy clashes (The Guardian, 2018).

3. NIGERIA STATE RESPONSE TO FULANI PASTORALISTS/FARMERS CONFLICT

The conflict between Fulani pastoralists and farming communities in Nigeria is one of the major security threats facing Nigeria as a country. It does not only make the realization of SDG-2 a mirage but also have devastating impacts on every aspect of the Nigerian society because security is central in every human endeavour. The inability of the government to find a lasting solution to this security conundrum has warranted the need to examine the measures adopted so far in tackling this menace. In an effort to stop the violent conflict between farmers and herders, some state governments, including Benue, Taraba, Ekiti, and Abia, have passed laws outlawing open grazing of animals. The laws promote ranching as a long-term measure of resolving the conflict. However, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, the umbrella organization of Fulani cattle breeders, which has been blamed for the conflict's escalation (SB Morgen 2019) rejected the laws as well as filed a legal suit against Benue state government over the legislation (Kwaju & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017). Ojo (2020) maintained that a legislation banning open grazing was enacted in several states, including Benue in the North-Central area, as a result of the Fulanis' relentless attacks on the civilian populace. As effective and germane this measure appears, it has generated a lot of controversies and further fuelled the already tensed atmosphere of Nigerian society. For instance, Premium Times (2018) reported that the Federal Government blamed the recent killings by herdsmen in several states on the enactment of anti-open grazing laws in some states. Furthermore, the Fulani pastoralists and their kinsmen have viewed this legislation as an infringement on the fundamental human rights (right to freedom of movement) of the pastoralists and vowed to resist its implementation. Abia state government, in May 2016, reactivated the Bakassi Boys, a neighborhood watch group in order to resolve the conflict between farmers and herders in the state. Prior to the deployment of the local security personnel to rural communities, the Governor directed all community heads to nominate 10 young people for a two-week intense training with "reformed" Bakassi vigilantes. The foregoing measures by the state governments can at best be described as attempts "to be seen to be working to solve the problem" as well as giving the indigenes or people of the affected areas the impression that the governments have the capacity to protect them and their properties. The lack of political will by these sub-national governments to be evidently implementing these measures leaves much to be desired. This has further eroded the little regard the violent pastoralists among the Fulani herders have for these state governments. As Albert Einstein posits "Nothing is more destructive of respect for the government and the law of the land than passing laws which cannot be enforced".

Like various states in the country, the federal government has taken some steps aimed at addressing this security conundrum. The administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan established an inter-ministerial technical group on grazing reserves in April 2014 with the goal of coming up with solutions to the issues. In parallel, the government established a political committee on grazing reserves under the leadership of Gabriel Suswam, the then Governor of Benue state. The Committee recommended that the Central Bank of Nigeria should pay ₦100 billion (\$317 million) to the 36 state governments of the federation for ranch

development. The Committee also recommended for the recovery and improvement of all grazing routes that farmers had encroached into. The National Executive Council (NEC) approved the recommendations, but Jonathan's loss in the presidential election of March 2015 resulted to partial implementation of the Committee's report. Despite the central bank giving state governments ₦100 billion, no ranches were built (International Crisis Group, 2017). These strategies did not yield any positive results as the conflict has continuously got worst. More so, the federal government under Muhammadu Buhari took an initiative in the direction of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements, which would entail the purchase and development of land in each state of the nation to accommodate livestock ranchers but many Nigerians including state governors vehemently opposed the proposal, alleging that the federal government was attempting to take state territory for the Fulani people (Egbuta, 2018). Also, the federal government's attempt to work with Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeder Association of Nigeria to assist the government in recovering firearms from the Fulani militants was conceived by the farming communities as a ploy by the federal government to pay the violent herdsmen to stop the killings. However, the claim by the farming communities was refuted by Mallam Garba Shehu, President Buhari's Senior Assistant on Media and Publicity. In another development, the federal government established Operation Whirl Stroke and Exercise Ayem Kpatuma (Cat Race) to recover guns and other operational weapons, but the farmers did not trust the government because they believed it was a plan to weaken them in order for the ferocious Fulani herdsmen to attack (Lenshie et al, 2020). In 2016, the federal government attempted to use the National Assembly to pass legislation to create the National Grazing Reserve Bill in North-central and southern states, but it was unsuccessful because the Land Use Act of 1978 only gives state governments the authority to control who owns, leases, acquires, administers, and manages the land within those states. Also, most state governments and their indigenes rejected these plans. Also, there was an attempt by the federal government to adopt the National Livestock Transformation Plan (2018-2027) but the approach equally generated controversy on the premise that the government had planned to settle the Fulani herdsmen through the programme (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The efforts of the federal government precisely under President Muhammadu Buhari have been shrouded in controversies apparently due to the government's approach in reacting to the conflict. The federal government's approach even in the face of slightly provoked attacks against farmers makes some people especially the farming communities to be skeptical about the sincerity of the government in handling the matter. For instance, Punch (2021) reported that the Buhari's government supported efforts by herdsmen to sue southern governors over the anti-open grazing law they enacted. The Special Assistant (Media) to the former Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, revealed this in an interview with the Punch. He said Nigerians could go to court to seek protection if their rights have been abused. Consequently, conspiracy theory was invoked to explore the correlation between the approach of federal government under President Buhari who is a Fulani and Fulani pastoralists. This stance of federal government on the issue between farmers and pastoralists in the country has made the farming communities to continuously question the sincerity of government in tackling the problem.

4. CONCLUSION

The viewpoint by the proponents of "flooding" perspective that overcoming flood-related challenges are critical to achieving SDG 2 in Nigeria is strong to a little extent. The recommendation for spatial planning as a suitable FRM method, to elicit more decisive actions by the government to mitigate the flooding threat is also apt in the context of this thesis. However, focusing on "flooding" alone in the face of the existential threat of Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict cannot guarantee the realization of SDG 2 in the country. Human security is the paramount importance in any society as well as any agenda. Instead of addressing the challenges of flooding alone, the political authorities in the country should take steps further to bring to an end Fulani pastoralists/farmers conflict that has greatly undermined various strategies adopted for the achievement of SDG 2. Accordingly, this paper recommends for decentralization of security governance by way of devolution not de-concentration. Most security challenges such as the conflict take place in the hinterlands. So, empowering the local political authorities constitutionally, financially and practically would go a long way in

addressing this menace and by extension achieving SDG 2. Ojo (2020: 100) rightly captures:

In the envisaged new order, states and local governments should not be reduced to peripheral players in policing and security matters. When local police structures are closest to the grassroots, emergency response will be more effective than the current unwieldy chain of command that renders local government chairmen ineffective when their people are under attacks.

Lastly, Nigeria state must control the proliferation of firearms and ammunitions in the country. To achieve this, the government must intensify efforts towards manning the country's borders effectively because most firearms and ammunitions used by these Fulani militants and reprisal attackers are made available through the country's porous borders. The implementation of these recommendations will guarantee the achievement of SDG 2 in the country.

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