

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Resource conflict among farmers and Fulani herdsmen: Implications for resource sustainability

Tenuche Marietu S<sup>1</sup> and Ifatimehin Olarewaju O<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geography and Planning, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria.

Accepted 17 January, 2010

This study describes the traditional relationship between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in the incessant resource conflict witnessed in Kogi State, Nigeria and how it affects livelihood security of those involved and resource sustainability for the communities. These conflicts are most responsible for the unsustainable utilization of land and water resources as the trampling by the hooves of herds of cattle compacts the soil of farm land, destroy farm crops by the herdsmen, places restraint on effective utilization of arable farmland among other destruction of available resources. It is understood that these conflicts have their roots in the land tenure system, settlers are indigenes contest over land and misplaced development strategies of the government. The study relied extensively on a research conducted in the Benue valley region in 2006 which identified the major causes of conflict in the area of study. The study concluded that there is the need for state resolution of the critical issues that are at the roots of the conflict i.e. land tenure system and provide a clear policy on grazing land. These are constitutional matters that would involve all stakeholders if a peaceful and lasting solution is to be evolved.

**Key words:** Conflict, farmers, herdsmen, land, resource, sustainability, water.

## INTRODUCTION

The incessant resource conflicts witnessed in the tropics have resulted in loss of lives, properties and environmental degradation as also witnessed in some developed countries such as Balkans (Hellstrom, 2001; Niemella et al, 2005). The Fulani Herds men have borne a large proportion of the blame for most conflict and environmental degradation in policy statements in the Guinea Savannah region of West African states (Thebaud and Batterbury, 2001).

The production potential of grassland and livestock in the arid and semi arid region is constrained by low and variable rainfall (Thebaud and Batterbury, 2001; Ifatimehin, 2008). Therefore, there is a need for grazing movements to access pasture resources across regions in order to ensure food security for the herds. Hence, pastures, woody vegetation, water resources and land are taken as a common property resource as reported by Berger (2003). But the complex land-use system that has

changed markedly over time, has culminated in the present day tension and conflicts between herds man and host communities. Jibo et al. (2001) reported that the Benue Valley region in Nigeria 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 a society (Schama, 1996). The Fulani herdsmen livelihood strategies had resulted in conflicts over the destruction of crops. The environmental degradation is perceived to be contributing enormously to the deterioration in ecosystem services to the environment of various communities.

The increased provision of social services in towns, such as health centers, schools, and food aid as well as the increased economic opportunities has led to settlement and concentration of grazing in areas around such towns (Haro and Doyo 2005). These new unplanned settlements, together with their foreseen and unforeseen implications, are providing the basis for us to painfully learn that environmental resources are finite as human economy (population and resource utilization) has

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [lanreifa@yahoo.com](mailto:lanreifa@yahoo.com).

exceeded them and are becoming limited as unsustainable utilization affects human, social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Economically viable land have been a major cause of conflict between communities in Nigeria and specifically (Areola et al., 1992; Gbehe, 2007:146) in the Benue Valley region of Nigeria. Otite and Albert (1999:3) pointed out that the pursuit of access to a variety of limited resources which include chieftaincy position, power and status, grasslands, markets, water spots for animals, rival claims to land, government policies, leadership of political parties etc. by individuals differentiated by different categories in defined socio-physical environments give rise to conflicts.

A study of major sources of conflict in the Benue Valley revealed that land matter accounted for the highest percentage (42.9) of conflicts followed by political (32.08%) and chieftaincy matters (28.3%) respectively. A high percentage of conflicts arising from land disputes have to do with land matters and conflict between Fulani herdsman and farmers over grazing land. The State has played a key role in the conflicts over land from three critical levels, viz: (i) The State inability to address the indigene are settler phenomenon in the Nigerian Constitution; (ii) The unresolved issues on grazing land and water spots that are central to the economic survival of both the herds men and the farming communities; (iii) The Nigerian land tenure system which has had serious implications for land acquisition by the peasants and the lower class.

As already noted in the paper, the various conflicts that ensued between Fulani herdsman and farmers arose from the destruction of farm lands by herds of cattle. Government at various levels (federal, state and local) have not addressed the issue of adequate provision of grazing reserves to accommodate the interest of herdsman who are always on the move to secure food and water for their herds. The socio-economic lives of both the farmers and the herdsman revolve around land and therefore, land matters become easily conflictual.

Another critical issue that is related to land is the phenomenon of indigeneship in Nigeria. The factor of indigeneship confers on individual the right to own land. Boh (2007) and Gbehe (2007) in their separate works pointed out that Land in most communities in Nigeria such as among the Tiv people in the Benue valley, is freighted with symbolic meaning, it is sacred and considered as an ancestral and historical sphere of influence. On the strength of this, therefore, conflicts over land are usually fierce with massive destructions of lives and properties.

Studies have shown that conflicts arose in the Benue Valley as a result of loss of land which the people considered as the basis of their social, economic and spiritual existence. Attempt to discount the people from this ancestral heritage usually resulted in large scale conflict. Similarly, in the studies carried out by Egwu (2009) it is the author's opinion that the 1999 Nigerian

Constitution is deficient in the provisions dealing with indigeneship/settler phenomenon. The author proffered a review of the Constitution with specific attention on the interests of immigrants ensuring that they possess rights and privileges as the indigenes.

Essentially, the land tenure system in vogue in Nigeria is a precipitation of conflicts. This is because this process has created acute shortage of arable land thereby engendering disputes over the little that is available. To correct this anomaly and ensure effective utilization of arable land in Nigeria, Agricultural development agencies like River Basins, Agricultural Development Projects (ADP), Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Agricultural Land Development Agencies (NALDA) etc. were introduced as panacea for improved Agricultural projects. It is important to stress the activities of the upper class in the society who have fallen advantage of the flaw in the 1976 Land Use Decree to appropriate large parcels of land to themselves. This development created peasants' revolts in the different parts of Nigeria. The consequence of the peasants reaction was massacre as endured in the Bakolori Massacre of 1976 (Ker, 2007: 112,113; Alkali, 1997).

## STUDY AREA

Kogi state is located between latitude 6°30'N and 8°51'N and longitude 5°51'E and 8°00'E. The state is structured in to 21 Local Governments Areas with a total landmass area of about 30,354.74 km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1) and a population of 3,278,487 (NPC (2006)). It has an average temperature of 28°C. Annual rainfall ranges from 1016 to 1524 mm and humidity is 69%. The state is endowed with both human and physical resources. It hosts the confluence of the two largest rivers (Rivers Niger and Benue) in Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

The study relied essentially on a research conducted in 2006 and laid emphasis on the reported cases of conflicts between farmers and herds men in some Local Government Areas of Kogi State. The in-dept interview method adopted in the study identified causes and status of the conflict and the interventions and responses from Governmental and Non- governmental organizations. While the relevant published texts such as Articles, book and reports (secondary) consulted, provided the leverage for the study. The data collected was analysed with view of bringing to the fore the implications of incessant conflicts between herds men and farmers on resource sustainability and its effects on the economic development of the communities studied.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the responses of the stakeholders, four (4) types of conflicts were identified with their frequency of occurrences as shown in Table 1.

Conflict over political control accounts for 32.08%: and

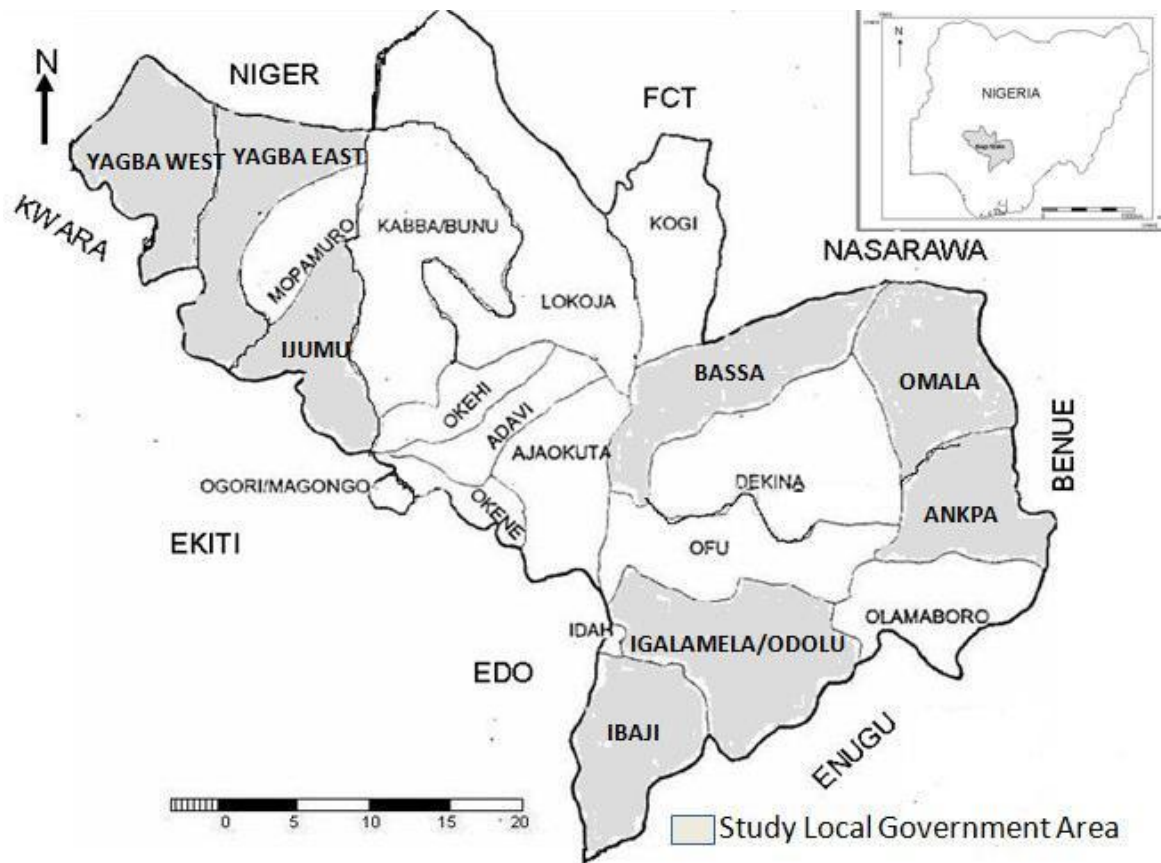


Figure 1. Nigeria showing the study areas. Source; GIS laboratory, Kogi State University Anyigba, 2009.

Table 1. Identified conflicts in Kogi State.

Conflicts	No. of occurrences	Percentage
Political Control	17	32.08
Chieftaincy matters	15	28.30
Land Matters	21	49.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Adapted from Tenuche et al., (2006).

Table 2. Farmers and herds men conflicts in Kogi state – location.

Local government area	Place
Ankpa	Ogodo, Onupi, Ogbagbala
Bassa	Bassa Nge, Mozum and Bassa Komo Areas
Ibaji	Ibaji
Igalamela/Odolu	Ogbogbo, Odolu and Okpakpata
Ijumu	Egbeda-Egga
Omala	Opada and Icheke
Yagba-East	Isanlu
Yagba-West	Ejiba

Source: Adapted from Tenuche et al. (2006).

this is preponderant, conflict on chieftaincy matters accounts for 28.30%. Conflict in land matters accounts for 49.42%. The farmers and Fulani herds men conflict account for 38.10% of the conflict under Land matters, and this will be the major conflict for discussion as it involves two heterogeneous ethnic groups – The indigenes and the pastoral Fulani.

The farmer and Fulani herds men conflict is concentrated in fifteen (15) communities in eight (8) Local Government Areas of the state (Table 2).

The table shows the Local Government Areas and settlements that are in conflict with the Fulani herds men. These areas have very good vegetal resources for grazing as they are located on the fringe of the rainfall forest and the guinea savanna zones of the country (i.e. Ogodo, Onupi, Ogbagbala, Ogbogbo, Odolu, Okpakpata, Egbeda-Egga, Opada, Icheke, Isanlu and Ejigba villages) while Bassa Nge, Mozum, Bassa Komo and Ibaji areas are located on the flood plains of the river Benue and the Niger. The natural and physical endowment in terms of vegetal and water resources is most responsible for the choice of the areas for grazing.

In these villages where grazing occurred, the damages by the herds reported (Table 3) included destruction of crops and farm lands; over grazing of economic plants;

**Table 3.** Reported damages and their consequences.

<b>Damages</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Destruction of crops	Loss of crop yields
Unsustainable and over grazing of vegetal resources: economy plants	Loss of economic plants
Destruction of major sources of domestic water	Pollution of drinking water
Hardening of soils, rendering them infertile and difficult when tilling for agricultural practices	Increased labour in pre-farming activities; Loss of soil fertility
Destruction of ponds and fishery resources	Loss of fish resource

Source: Adapted from Tenuche et al. (2006).

**Table 4.** Present status of conflict communities.

<b>Local government area</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Status</b>
Ankpa	Ogodo, Onupi, Ogbagbala	Re-occurring
Bassa	Bassa Nge, Mozum and Bassa Komo Areas	Re-occurring
Ibaji	Ibaji	Re-occurring
Igalamela/Odolu	Ogbogbo, Odolu and Okpakpata	Re-occurring
Ijumu	Egbeda-Egga	Transformed
Omala	Opada and Icheke	Re-occurring
Yagba East	Isanlu	Transformed
Yagba West	Ejiba	Transformed

Source: Adapted from Tenuche et al. (2006).

and destruction and pollution of sources of water, ponds and fishery resources. The destruction has direct impact on the peoples' livelihood as their economic activities are tied to these environmental resources like water, land (soil), vegetation (herbs, food and cash crops) and fish.

In some of the villages, sources of water for domestic purposes have either been destroyed or polluted. The resultant effect of this is poverty. This therefore informs the reaction of the affected communities to the invasion of the herdsmen. The Fulani herdsmen saw these resources as common resources, to which they could also lay claim and therefore refused to be restrained. This reaction generated into conflicts, with its effects on economic and human activities, as well as the sustainability of environment in terms of socio-political and economic development.

However, the involvement of the government and other parties to getting these conflicts resolved has greatly influenced the current status of conflicts in the communities studied (Table 4).

The economic and human effects of these conflicts do not encourage government in the provision of a sustainable economy and infrastructure to its citizens. Conflicts in areas such as Ankpa, Bassa, Ibaji, and Igalamela/Odolu are re-occurring. The implication of this too continuous conflict in these areas, is the illusion of developments. Basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, cloth, security and right to life are mortgaged. Of all areas in similar conflict situation only Ijumu, Yagba-

East and Yagba-West are transformed as a result of state and community intervention, which allowed for relative peace and continuation of active economic activities in the area.

### **Policy implications**

The unsustainable grazing of vegetal resources and wanton destruction of other resources such as water and fish, with the re-occurrence of these conflicts is surely having considerable effects on the economy of the two parties (herdsmen and farmers) involved and the government. Agriculture, which is the mainstay of the economy of the local people is been disrupted by these conflicts, making livelihood difficult at both the immediate locality as well as the larger societies that are dependent on the produce from the warring communities. Therefore, food supply is affected in both quantity and price. The pollution of available safe drinking water has serious implications for healthy living. Attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) becomes problematic in affected the rural community with obvious implication for the prevalence of water borne diseases. This unresolved crisis has grievous dimensions in its effect on the policy of government in providing development opportunities to its citizens. If these conflicts are not resolved in good time, sustainability of both the economy and environment would become problems to tackle. However, we suggest

that the following should be adopted:

1. Identification of flashpoints of possible conflict;
2. Demarcation of grazing reserves for Fulani herds men on their various grazing tracks;
3. Provision of water through either boreholes or wells along 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.

## Conclusion

Access to land is a major cause of conflicts in the Benue Valley region. Central to the discussion in this paper is the need for the State to review the existing laws as it relate to accessibility to land by members of community. This issue is key to resource sustainability in Nigeria as majority of its citizens require land for farming and grazing. Government should ensure that there is equity and accessibility to arable and grazing land to avert constant 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.

## REFERENCES

Alkali RA (1997). *The World Bank and Nigeria: Cornucopia or Pandora's Box?* Baraka Press and Publishers Ltd, Kaduna.

- Berger R (2003). Conflict over Natural Resources among Pastoralists in Northern Kenya: A Look at Recent Initiatives in Conflict Resolution. *J. Int. Dev.* 15: 245-257.
- Boh A (2007). Interpersonal Communication as a Panacea for Conflict Management: The Study of Ukan versus Ipav Conflict in Benue State. In: *The middle-belt in the shadow of Nigeria*. Okpeh OO (Jr.), Okau A and Fwatshak SU (Eds). Oracle Bus. Ltd, Makurdi. pp. 113 - 131.
- Egwu S (2009). Ethnic citizenship and ethno-religious violence in Jos. *Distinguish Faculty Lecture Series*, 2. Faculty of Social Sciences, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria.
- Gbehe NT (2007). Geo-political perspectives on resource control in the middle belt regions of Nigeria: Periscoping agriculture in Benue economy. In: *The middle – belt in the shadow of Nigeria*. Okpeh OO (Jr.), Okau A and Fwatshak SU (Eds). Oracle Bus. Ltd, Makurdi. pp. 132 – 157.
- Haro GO, Doyo GJ (2005). Linkages between community, environmental, and conflict management: Experiences from Northern Kenya. *J. World Dev.* 33 (2): 285-299.
- Hellstrom E (2001). Conflict cultures- Qualitative comparative analysis of environmental conflicts in forestry. *Silva Fennica Monographs* 2: 1-109.
- Ifatimehin OO (2008). An assessment of water resource conflict management in the semi - arid region of Nigeria. Unpublished postgraduate seminar series presentation, Department of Geography and environmental management, University of Abuja.
- Jibo M, Simbine AT, Galadima HS (2001). Ethnic groups and conflicts in Nigeria: The north central zone of Nigeria. Vol. 4. *The Lord's Creation*, Ibadan.
- Ker AI (2007). Conflicts in Tiv land and their Implications for the Democratisation Process in Nigeria 1980 – 2004. In: *The middle – belt in the shadow of Nigeria*. Okpeh OO (Jr.), Okau A and Fwatshak SU (Eds). Oracle Bus. Ltd, Makurdi. pp. 108–114.
- Niemella J, Young J, Alard D, Askasibar M, Henle K, Johnson R, Kuttilla M, Larsson T, Matouch S, Nowicki P, Paiva R, Portoghesi L, Smulders R, Stevenson A, Tartes U, Watt A (2005). Identifying, managing and monitoring conflicts between forest biodiversity conservation and other human interests in Europe. *For. Policy Econ.* 7: 87-890.
- Otite O, Albert IO (1999). *Community conflicts in Nigeria: Management, resolution and transformation*. Spectrum Books Ltd. p. 378.
- Schama S (1996). *Landscape and memory*. Harper Collins, London. p. 231
- Tenuche M, Akor L, Ibrahim J, Aliu S, Iyaji A (2006). Benue valley conflict assessment, Kogi state of Nigeria. In: *Echoes from the Benue Valley*. Oga Ajene (Ed). p 23.
- Thebaud B, Batterbury S (2001). Sahel pastoralists: Opportunism, struggle, conflict and negotiation. A Case Study from Eastern Niger. *Glob. Environ. Change* 11:69-78.