

Chapter Fifteen

HERDSMEN/FARMER'S CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS ON ECOLOGY

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Executive Summary

This paper examines farmers and herders' crisis and its effects on ecology in the contemporary society. It employed the qualitative research design where data were sourced from books, articles and journals to examine farmers and herders' crisis and its effects on ecology. In line with the above, descriptive method was employed to establish that farmers. Herders and ecological crisis in our society have become very paramount and should be recognized and appropriate measures have to be taken to tackle it. The researcher observed in his findings that many have different conceptions about the issue in place and how the crisis has affected the ecological system in our society. The significance of the work would be for those with misconception about this crisis and how it has affected the ecosystem to understand and be able to manage the environment in the right perspective. The aim of this study is to philosophically examine the effects of the crisis to the environment, or the society and propose recommendations necessary for the need of the people and the society. The work, therefore, concludes that, there is need for more enlightenment about the destruction and a possible encouragement about the things around us.

Keywords: Herdemen, Farmers, Crisis, Ecology, Eco-system, Eco-spirituality

Introduction

Conflict gives meaning to one's experience as well as actions. The conflict between the herdsmen and farmers has brought in some experience and thoughts from many Nigerians. People have been affected directly or indirectly from one form of conflict or the other and this has to do with the experience of this crisis. According to Elaigwu 2005, Conflicts often rise out of mistrust, hostility and polarization of relations among groups at times in a competitive setting (59). For Joseph and Tanko, edited by Obanure, it is the product of antagonistic interests between two or more opposing forces or groups within the society. It is a struggle for the control of the socio-economic, ethnic, religious, cultural, racial, and gender differentiation within the context of scarce resources (152). In the recent years, the issue of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers has become so alarming in Nigeria and in Benue state in particular. This has to do with the richness and fertility of land in the state. It is observed that some of the herdsmen migrated from Chad, Niger, Cameroon and other African countries into Benue state all in the name of cattle grazing. Indeed, the conflict has become very difficult and it is spreading between the host farmers and their guests, who are herdsmen and this has resulted in killings and destructions of lives and property (Ikpanor, 1).

Findings have revealed that the major factors that trigger this conflict between the herdsmen and farmers are the destruction of crops by the cattle of the guests (herdsmen), the injuring and rustling of cattle by the hosts (the farmers) in the course of trying to prevent them from destroying their crops, and most importantly, lack of adequate conflict resolution mechanisms in the community, or the belligerence by members of the two groups to avail themselves of same before resulting into self-help in settling conflict (Tor et al. 3). This conflict is characterized with killings, dislocation of people and their means of livelihood,

destruction of both private and public property as well as massive displacement of people in some communities, especially in Guma and Gwer West local government areas of Benue state. This conflict also has to do with the use of deadly weaponry such as daggers, machetes, military parade assault weapons and even chemical weapons as was the case in Sengey village of Gwer West local government area (4). The conflict has gone a long way in destroying our environment, the ecological system has been affected by polluting the water that is taken by both human beings and animal by chemical weapons and cattle contaminating the streams thereby resulting to diarrhea and other life threatening diseases. Another effect of this conflict to the ecological system is the destruction of trees, trees that are very important for making of herbs for the betterment of the society. This destruction has led to global warming which causes unbearable heat to humans and other organisms. Conflict itself is just but a reality of life, we find ourselves in such conditions at the different stages of life. it could be at home, at work places, individual understanding, and among others, even in the ancient times, people were often in conflict with each other because of various reasons best known to them. The trend has continued up to this present moment. And since this trend has never changed and the government in power appears to be unable to find a possible solution to it, this has caused more damage to our ecological system. It is in view of this that this paper would address the issue of herdsmen and farmers' crisis and its effects on the ecosystem and how the government and traditional rulers would be able to put an end to this ugly situation or malady.

Definition of Terms

Herdsmen: These are people, usually the Fulani nomads who always move with their cattle from one place to another in search of greener pastures for feeding their cattle. They are seen as people whose life, survival and tradition are embedded in the

value attached to the herds and the capacity they retain to protect their way of life. Historically, it must be taken into consideration that herdsmen in africa have always played an important role in islamic jihad (holy war). In the same vein, fulani herdsmen or fulani pastoralists are nomadic or semi-nomadic. They have the raising of livestock as their primary occupation. The pure fulani pastoralists engage in random movement of cattle while the semi-nomadic make transhumance migration and return to their camps or homes (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>>. Wiki). According to abdulbarikindo and alupsen, herdsmen are people who are constantly going about in search for greener pasture for feeding their herds (8).

Farmers: these are individuals whose primary job or function involves livestock and agriculture. A farmer takes all the necessary steps to make sure that he/she raises items and sells them to purchase other items (ngbea, 2).

Ecology: it is the scientific study of the distribution and abundance of organisms, the interaction among organisms and their abiotic environment. Ecologists try to understand the inner workings of natural ecosystem and the species they contain (<https://biology.duke.edu>>major>e). Furthermore, it is the study of the relationship between living organisms, including humans and their physical environment. It seeks to understand the vital connection between plants and animals and the world around them. Ecology also provides information about the benefits of ecosystem and how we can use the resources of the earth in ways that leave the environment healthy for future generation (www.esa.org).

Herders and farmers' crisis and its effects on the ecosystem

The fact that herdsmen and farmers are always clashing over vegetation can be directly or indirectly linked to climate change.

The indiscriminate felling of trees without replanting, illegal mining, etc., are all part of man's activities that are taking a toll or affecting our environment. The impact of these activities resulting to climate change has given birth to high exposure to heat stress and ultraviolet radiation, the absence of clean air, a shortage of potable water, desertification, unpredictable weather, etc.

Our land is polluted due to improper or lack of available dumpsites for domestic waste and wrongful or excessive use of agro-allied chemicals, our different sources of water are polluted by direct dumping of refuse in them or other waterways thus causing blockage of such waterways which results in flooding and contamination of water. Crude oil drilling activities of the oil producing states are another aspect of water pollution. Improper chemical waste disposal by industries is also not left out of this (www.vanguardngr.com).

According to nwachinemere emeka who lost over four hectares of cassava farm, said the level of destruction of life in the wake of the grazing was more than had been witnessed in a long time. He said they lost about two hundred hectares of cassava on the whole. In order to protect their farms from being grazed upon, some farmers decided to take action by spraying ddt, i.e. Dichlorodiphenyl-trichloroethane on their farms and forty-five cattle died as a result of the poison. This of course created acrimony between the villagers and the herdsmen who vowed to retaliate. The farmers are aggrieved that when their farms are destroyed and they report to the authorities, no one is brought to book; so they seek means of protecting themselves (www.vanguard.com). The chemical used above did not only affect the cattle alone. It went a long way killing other micro-organisms and polluted the environment and water which in turn affected human beings as well. The above example is just

one of such that farmers employ with a view to scaring the herders away from grazing in their land or farms but such measures affects both micro-organisms, macro-organism and even plants and human beings. Thus, the ecosystem is affected in the long run.

In the same vein, the destruction of our trees that are used for traditional medicine is so alarming that the traditional medicine specialists go out with difficulty in search of crops or herbs they can use for their concoctions. This destruction is usually carried out by both farmers and herdsmen. Farmers often do that to prevent herdsmen from entering their farmland to cut such trees down to feed their cattle while herdsmen do same to feed their cattle. This destruction of trees has led to excessive heat which affects our ecosystem. These and many more are some of the ways the conflict between herdsmen and farmers have affected our environment.

The role of government and traditional rulers

In dealing with conflict, the government and traditional rulers have to play some roles that are very important both to the herders and farmers here. One of such roles has to do with the method of Thomas Kilmann on conflict resolution. With his method, we can make a way forward to stop the destruction of our ecological system. These methods are:

Accommodation: it involves dealing with the problem with an element of self-sacrifice. The individual sets aside his own concerns to maintain peace. The person tries to see the problem of the people and what they want, displaying a form of selflessness (ikpanor, 14).

Avoiding: here, one withdraws from the problem in question or the conflict. It deals with the problem through a passive attitude.

It is used mostly when the negative end outweighs the positive outcome. In doing such, the individual ignores the problem, that the conflict will resolve itself (14).

Collaborating: it is a means of cooperating with the other parties involved. Here, communication is an important part of this strategy. In this mechanism, effort is exerted in digging into the issue to identify the needs of the individuals concerned without removing their respective interests or ideals (15).

Competing: competition involves authoritative and assertive behavior. In this style, the aggressive individual aims to instill pressure on the other parties to achieve a goal. The individual tries all means to attain what is right.

Compromising: it is the method of accepting and coming up with a possible resolution between the parties involved. Thus, one party is willing to sacrifice their own sets of goals as long as the others will do the same.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for proper crisis resolutions between the herders and farmers so as to enhance the good of the ecosystem.

- (i) International modern ranching should be pursued as one of the possible models in areas with lower population densities in the north-east and north-west.
- (ii) The traditional form of pastoralism should continue for of a period of time agreed upon with some improvements.
- (iii) Development of grazing reserves should be encouraged to target pastoralists with large stocks and large milk production.

- (iv) Government should be firm and fair in her resolution and implementation of decisions. Traditional and local leaders should be well involved in finding solutions to herdersmen and farmers' crisis.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper is on herders and farmers' crisis and its effects on the ecological system. The crisis has disrupted government activities and the economy is also affected in its form as there is public panicking everywhere. The government's attempt to end the crisis has proven abortive or ineffective. The crisis has affected the whole country in the aspect of ecology. It is, therefore, an appeal that our government should try and embrace some of the methods mentioned above to enhance the resolutions of the conflict. It is my belief that with the resolution accomplishment, the crisis will come to an end, with some of the ecological problems solved.

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