



Indigene-Settler Dispute: An Assessment of Farmers-Herders' Conflict in Nigeria

Daniel Risiagbon Ogbeide (Ph.D)

**Augustine University,
Ilara-Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria
Email: daniel.ogbeide@augustineuniversity.edu.ng**

ABSTRACT

The distinction between Indigenes and Settlers as well as the perennial incidences of disputes between Farmers and Herders in the African region, with particular reference to the Nigerian state, has been a cause for concern for some time. Since there is yet no referenced solution to this Farmers-Herders crisis, the paper sought to examine if there exists a direct or indirect linkage of this problem with the universal indigene-settler dilemma. Employing the qualitative methodology of sourcing information from literature and analyzing the content therein, the practical situations experienced in Nigeria were brought into perspective. The Conflict Management Theory was found appropriate for the study in view of its broad coverage of various aspects of conflict. It was observed that there is a direct link between Farmers-Herders conflict and the Indigene-Settler dilemma in the Nigerian case. In view of the intricate nature of the conflict, to forestall a further destructive impact on the Nigerian system, some recommendations relevant to both government and the people were posited. Part of these includes a clear-cut constitutional provision emphasising equity in citizenship. This study will be of relevance to government and scholars of national integration as it would help to impact positively on the collective life of Nigerians.

Keywords: Indigene, Farmer, Content Analysis, Conflict Management Theory, Equity in Citizenship and National Integration.

INTRODUCTION

The distinctive interpretations given the concepts of Indigeneship and Settlership or Settlerism constitute a major source of both intra and international conflicts.

Most often, the delineating boundaries between both concepts are at best hazy. It has led, and still leads to unwarranted deaths, citizenry displacement, inflicted hunger/deprivation and constitutes general aberration to reaping the dividends of democracy in societies. It negates efforts at fostering national integration while facilitating biased or lopsided distribution of available societal benefits.

An Indigene is seen as someone native, inborn in a particular place. To Jones (2012), indigenous people are original inhabitants in a place. On the other hand, a settler is a migrant from somewhere else to a particular place and then establishes permanent residence there.

In essence, both indigenes and settlers are ultimately relevant to the society where they find themselves. They worship together, engage in joint trading, contribute to the economic wellbeing of the society and partake in inter-marriages. The problem however arises when there are discriminatory tendencies against the settlers particularly in the sharing of resources. This now creates cultural intolerance.

This is why scholars have argued that the main source of this dispute is the "scarcity mindset". The indigenes might be envious of the settlers usurping what the indigenes classify as their rights while the settlers feel exploited *vis a vis* their socio-economic and cultural contributions to the development of the society.

While this dichotomy between the Indigenes and Settlers is universal, it is evident that developed/wealthy nations do not emphasise the negatives therefrom. The degree of volatility of the dispute is directly proportional to the stand taken by the specific government in power. The crisis could be a political weapon exploited to incite unwarranted ethnic sentiments to impose instability.

It is thus manifest that the negative impact of this dichotomy is more glaring in developing (Global South) than in developed (Global North) countries of the world.

Conflict as a concept entails confrontation and disagreement amongst persons and groups in communities, it is natural and therefore inevitable. This is simply because individuals in a society pursue incompatible goals. However, the handling of a conflict can either unleash a negative or positive impact on society.

Coser (1957) sees conflict as the struggle over values through attempts at neutralizing, injuring or eliminating counterparties. This could either engender frustration and aggression giving way to mistrust and hostility between groups or serve as instrument of positive change to foster societal development.

Farmers and Herders have coexisted for centuries, particularly in the African region. The farmers see themselves as Indigenes while the herders (pastoralists) are seen as settlers. The Fulanis, also known as the Fulbe people, constitute a significant proportion of the herders. These Fulanis mainly cut across some African countries namely, Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali and Niger.

In recent years, crises between these two classes of people, farmers and herders, have created a lot of mayhem in countries where they coexist, including Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Indigene-Settlers conflict has led to huge losses and destruction just as Farmers-Herders dispute especially with illegal access to the use of arms and ammunition, has also warranted wanton destruction in countries with particular reference to Nigeria.

Unfortunately, more analyses of this dispute seemed to have generated more problems than proffer solutions.

Issues relating to enhanced population, change in climate as well as urbanization have been thrown up as possible catalysts for farmer-herders' dilemma.

This paper seeks to explore if the Farmers-Herders' conflict in Nigeria is an offshoot of the Indigene-Settler dilemma.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to unravel the possible relationship of the Independent, Indigene-Settler dispute, with the Dependent variable, Farmers-Herders conflict.

The supporting objectives are as follows:

- a) To examine if Indigene-Settler conflict is avoidable;
- b) To examine if there exists a direct or indirect relationship between Indigene-Settler and Farmer-Herder disputes;
- c) To examine if there is any link between Farmer-Herders conflict and Banditry/Terrorism: and
- d) To examine if Farmer-Herders' conflict can be eradicated or managed.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Many scholars have written about Farmers-Herders' crises particularly in Nigeria but some gap still exists in that the solution at ameliorating the resultant devastation from the confrontation has not been achieved. To Gursoy (2021), Farmers-Herders' conflict is intensified mainly as a result of the actors' unfettered access to acquisition of weapons of destruction. He also identifies the main cause of the rift as scarcity of resources.

There is the distinction amongst the Fulanis who are the main characters in the Herder's group. There are the Nomadic/Pastoral Fulanis who are majorly in the Northern part of Nigeria and the Urbanised Fulanis, found mainly in the Southern part.

Shehu (2021) is of the view that herders found parading themselves with arms and ammunition is an aberration to the earlier known concept of pastoralism in Nigeria. It is thus his view that such persons are most likely foreign pastoralists.

Blench (2010) posits that some likely causes of this crisis include the issue of climatic changes, scarcity of fresh water and cattle theft. These now necessitate movement of the pastoralists to the southern part of Nigeria as against the erstwhile strategy.

It is obvious that this Farmer-Herder crisis exists in different parts of Nigeria and the potency of its destructive effect is on the increase. What is important is to trace its root cause and proffer likely ways of eradicating or mitigating its destructive tendency.

Since this dilemma features as a conflict, the relevant theory to be applied in the analysis of this subject will be the Conflict Management Theory. It is clear that conflicts are not unexpected amongst groups of people in communities as a result of competing goals. It is natural but what is necessary is to make positive efforts either to resolve or manage such conflicts. This is by looking out for opportunities derivable from the other side of conflict, which is peace, and sustained peace for that matter. If this is not done, there could be frustration and aggression amongst the parties which could escalate into wars.

Rahim (2002) views the Conflict Management Theory along the lines of Avoidance, Accommodation, Compromising and Collaborating:

Avoidance – Having a conscious effort to ignore a situation that can propagate a conflict;

Accommodation – Sacrificing one's goal for another;

Compromise – Creating a "give" and "take" situation out of two extremes;

Collaboration – Integrating ideas for mutual solutions.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this paper is majorly qualitative and of content analysis. This is because information is derived from literature and the contents analysed to unravel the problem identified in society so as to contribute positively to knowledge.

The Discourse

The Indigene-Settler dispute in Nigeria is rife as in many parts of the world but as stated earlier, it is generally more negatively potent in Developing countries.

Amongst many examples, there were the Zagon-Kataf crises of 1990s in Kaduna State between Atyaps (Indigenes) and Hausa-Fulani (Settlers). In 2020/21, similar crises erupted in Southern Kaduna. Also in 1990s, the Tiv-Jukun-Wukari conflict featured in Taraba State as well as the Itsekiri-Urhobo-Warri conflict in Delta state. The Tiv-Fulani crisis in Benue state featured in 2014 and 2017. The Ife-Modakeke crisis in former Oyo and current Osun States have featured for several years.

In all these cases, the indigenes feel threatened by the presence of the settlers while settlers feel exploited and deprived of commensurate enjoyment of benefits as the indigenes. There is therefore mutual suspicion because of the fear of inadequate resources to go round.

In spite of the fact that both the indigenes and settlers coexist and cooperate in many societal things, there still exists ethno-religious cleavages which easily stir up conflict situations.

Constitutionally, there seems to exist a lacuna. For instance, Nigeria's 1999 constitution, as amended, Section 8, Subsection 1a and b as well as Section 147, Subsection 3, attempt to define who an indigene in Nigeria is but without clear details. Citizens should be able to take up residency in other states of the federation other than their own states of birth, but in practice, the dichotomy still exists.

In the same manner in Nigeria, the Farmers assume to be the indigenes while the herders who are pastoralists are taken as the settlers.

Over the years, they have coexisted in communities and seen themselves as being mutually reinforcing but the dichotomy still exists. The farmers use the waste products of the cattle as constituent of manure which enhances productivity of their farm produce. The farmers who own the land produce food for all while the herders produce beef for all.

Consequent upon changes in climate, necessitating the need for greater access to water and conducive environment for the cattle, a southern movement is occasioned. In the process, farmlands could be trampled upon and products destroyed. As a result of the fact that the Fulanis who are the main actors in the herding exercise cut across the West African sub-region, with very slight, if any, differences in

physical presentation. This therefore brings to the fore the suspicion that the destructive herders currently witnessed in some parts of Nigeria could have a foreign content.

There have been arguments between State and Federal governments of Nigeria about open grazing or ranching. While open grazing allows free movement of herders with their cattle, ranching restricts such movements to specific locations. Debates are on as to what the involvement of government should be in sorting out the economic desires of citizens and the right of government over land within state jurisdiction bearing in mind that the Land Use Act which is enshrined in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, as amended, authorizes the state government to take decisions on issues of land within its jurisdiction.

Conflicts, when not abated, can be viral and easily attract any other means to inflict injury or eliminate the counterparty. This is the reason why some arguments abound that this Farmer-Herders' conflict can be an instrument for propagating banditry, kidnapping or any other form of terrorist act. This is because Farmer-Herders' conflict, banditry and terrorism have some common raw materials namely, the use of threat or violence to achieve the desired purpose.

Banditry is an organized crime which includes activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery amongst others. Terrorism is a systematic use of violence to coerce people particularly for political purposes.

To Egbefo and Babalola (2021), a fundamental cause of the increasing trend of banditry in Nigeria is the obvious failure of democratic institutions in the country. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) also agree that maintaining internal peace and security in a nation-state is a *sine qua non* for good governance. Ogbeide (2021) posits that efforts must be made to enable Nigerians imbibe the spirit of oneness which facilitates national integration.

The truth of the matter is that this political goal could be in the short or long term. So, there could be a continuum of Farmer-Herders' conflict → Banditry → Terrorism, if not forestalled.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the review of literature, the Discourse and happenings in Nigeria in the current political dispensation, it is apparent that the subsisting Farmer-Herders' conflict is a spin-off of the fundamental dispute between Indigenes and Settlers. This is where the farmers see themselves as the indigenes (sons of the soil) while the herders are seen as the settlers (migrants/visitors).

Since the dilemma of indigene-settlers is a universal one, though with more grievous impact in the developing world, and conflict being an inevitable feature of life, it might be impracticable to eliminate the farmer-herders' crisis in its entirety. Rather, efforts should be made to manage it and make the relationship to be of positive consequence to the development of the Nigerian state.

So, three key aspects of the Conflict Management Theory should be employed, namely,

Accommodation – whereby government will encourage the process of the two parties giving in to each other's wishes in some respects, in form of sacrifice;

Compromise – whereby there should be an agreed mid-way house between their two extremes; and

Collaboration – whereby both parties should endeavour to work together to reach mutual solutions in the interest of the nation.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from this paper that the Indigene-Settler dispute may not be completely avoidable in societies but can be managed for positive returns. It is also clear that Farmers-Herders' crisis experienced in Nigeria is an offshoot of the Indigene-Settler dispute.

Taking cognisance of the similarities of instruments of operation amongst actors in farmer-herders' disputes, banditry and terrorism, it is safe to assume that there exists some reasonable link among them.

While it might not be practically possible to eliminate Farmers-Herders' conflict in Nigeria, it is possible to manage it so as to mitigate the likely negative impact. The reciprocal relationship expected between the State and the Citizen should always be stressed over and above the component differences of the citizenry.

The Conflict Management theory selected for this study is therefore appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from all above, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Nigerian government should effect a clear-cut constitutional provision emphasizing the concept of citizenship of individuals rather than of being indigenes or settlers;
2. Nigerians should see themselves as equal stakeholders of the Nigerian project, not minding their place of birth or location;
3. Government should de-emphasise particularistic distinctions in requesting citizens' bio-data so as to foster oneness in aid of national integration;
4. The militarized behaviour of Nigerians arising from the past military experience should be made to wear off through constant re-orientation so as to allow the spirit of accommodation to thrive; and
5. Efforts should be made by both government and the people to benefit from the diversity of the human resources in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Abbass, I. M. (2012). No retreat, No surrender: Conflict for survival between Fulani pastoralists and farmers in Northern Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, Vol.8, No. 1, pp. 331-346.
- Blench, R. M. (2010). Conflict between pastoralists and culturalists in Nigeria. A Review Paper for DFID, Nigeria.
- Coser, L. (1957). Social conflict and the theory of social change.
- Egbefo, D. O. and Babalola, S. F. (2021). Trans-border nomadic banditry and degraded democracy in Nigeria. *Trans-border Pastoral Nomadism and Human Security in Africa*. India: Routledge.
- Gursoy, G. (2021). Farmers-Herders conflict in Nigeria: Analysis of root causes and effects of the conflict.
- Ogbeide, D. R. (2021). Nation-building in Nigeria: The dilemma of a Union or Unity. *International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies*, 9 (3):34-41.
- Okeke, O. E. (2014). Conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers. *An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 3, No. 1.
- Osaghae, E. and Suberu, R. (2005). A history of identities, violence and stability in Nigeria. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity. CRISE Working Paper, No.6.
- Rahim, A. M. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13 (3) 206-223.
- Shehu, G. (2021). Herders in Nigeria. Vanguard Newspapers of 21st January, 2021.