

Fulani Herdsmen and Communal Conflicts: Climate Change as Precipitator

Nte Timothy Ubelejit (PhD)

Department of Political and Administrative Studies
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
timmy_nte@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The crux of this article is that there is a diametrical link between climate change and communal conflicts caused by Fulani herdsmen. These conflicts have engulfed communities in different states of Nigeria like Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa, Zamfara, Oyo, Imo, Cross-River and Enugu. Climate change is a great precipitator of communal conflicts and this potential is to a reasonable extent determined by migration and other variables like attitude of the immigrants on the one hand and perception of host communities on the other hand. The study concludes that Fulani herdsmen are completely dependent on pastures which the desertification of the Sahel region has depleted and this makes them go all out to get these pastures thereby making them susceptible to resistance which they fight back and communal conflicts tantamount. The study recommends that government should come up with policies to create grazing reserves and dams for pasture and water in states that are predominantly Fulani so that they don't stray long distances in search of pastures which degenerates into conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

The menace posed by Fulani Herdsmen in the different communities they migrate to for purposes of grazing their cattle is becoming very alarming. They are more and more constituting major security challenges to their host communities. The propensity towards engaging the land and farm owners of the sites they graze their cattle is increasing by the day as they update their arsenal with highly sophisticated weapons. This is the prevalent security challenge in some communities and states in Nigeria.

The scenario is most succinctly portrayed by Durojaiye (2014) who said that recently "there have been escalations of reported attacks by Fulani herdsmen who brutally kill natives of the invaded farming communities including women and children in various states across the country. Worst affected states include Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa, Zamfara, Oyo, Imo, Cross-River and Enugu.

It is so bad that some scholars have suggested that incursion by Fulani herdsmen is the second greatest security challenge confronting Nigeria. According to Akevi (2014 Apr 18) "apart from Boko Haram, one recurrent security challenge that confronts many states in the country is the scourge of Fulani herdsmen. The attacks by the herdsmen on the sedentary communities have been increasing with each passing day." Against the backdrop, it is imperative to review communal conflicts triggered by Fulani Herdsmen in juxtaposition with climate change adversity. This article explores the communal conflicts caused by Fulani herdsmen and evaluates the fact that there is a diametrical link between climatic change and these communal conflicts.

FULANI HERDSMEN AND COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Communal conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and host communities usually arise when grazing cattle are not properly controlled and consequently graze on cultivated plants like cassava, maize etc. in farms of host communities. Attempts by the owners of such farms to register their grievance of destruction of their livelihood (food crops and cash crops) by the cattle of Fulani herdsmen is always stoutly resisted thereby degenerating into communal conflicts. Host communities sometimes register their grievances by placing restrictions on movement and grazing of cattle in designated areas and enforcing compliance through coercive measures decreed by the host community vigilante which may take the shape of killing stray cattle or arresting and prosecution defaulters. When the communities attempt to moderate their activities or request their exit, the Fulani herdsmen become aggressive and attack the host community sometimes with the assistance of hired mercenaries. Fulani herdsmen normally attack their target communities at the time they are most susceptible such as mid-night or prayer days, when they are in their churches, incessantly killing people with sophisticated weapons, looting properties and burning houses. (Durojaiye 2014) Fulani Herdsmen are “believed to have killed at least 1,229 people in Nigeria in 2014, according to the latest Global Terrorism Index (GTI)...” (Ludovica 2014)

Much of the very violent and heavy casualty communal conflicts triggered by Fulani Herdsmen occur in the middle-belt of Nigeria in general and Benue State in particular. In the case of Benue State there have been highly devastating conflicts that have claimed so much lives and properties engendered by Fulani Herdsmen in communities of local government areas such as Agatu, Guma, Gwer West, Makurdi, Kwande, Katsina-Ala and Loggo. The communal conflicts orchestrated by Fulani herdsmen in Benue State had claimed the lives of more than 5000 victims in the first half in the year 2014. The victims include women and children and they sacked more than 100 communities and have thrown thousands of refugees into Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp located Makurdi. Earlier more than 200 people were killed by Fulani Herdsmen in the Shengev community in Gwer West Local Government Council with strange substance that looks like bio-chemical weapons. (Ugbechie 2016, Akevi 2014) What this means is that their sophistication and combat readiness is increasing by the day as they are apparently armed not just with AK47 rifles but with strange weapons. Very recently, precisely March 2016, more than 10 communities in Agatu Local Government were razed down to the rubbles and more than 500 lives lost in what David Mark (Former Senate President) described as “genocide against his people” by Fulani Herdsmen. The high casualties associated with these conflicts have attracted the attention of Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch in December said clashes in the nation's central region had killed 3,000 people since 2010. [Abrak 2015]

Their combat readiness and sophistication gives them the courage not only to attack host communities but to confront and attack constituted authorities that are heavily protected with state of the art military convoys. A scenario where the convoy of the Governor of Benue State (Gabriel Suswan) was ambushed and attacked by these herdsmen on his way from Tse-Akanyi village in Guma Local Government Area where he went to commiserate with the victims of conflict with Fulani Herdsmen elucidates the picture better. The fact that Governor Gabriel Suswan eventually summoned an emergency security council meeting and solicited the intervention of the international community showed that communal conflicts perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen in Benue State is getting out of control. This is corroborated by Durojaiye (2014) who said that “earlier this month, some local Governments in Benue State were savagely attacked by suspected Fulani herdsmen who killed hundreds of people, torched houses, sacked some communities and occupied them.”

The situation is not too different in Taraba State which is a neighbouring state to Benue State. The southern senatorial zone of Taraba State has for some months now witnessed unprecedented and sudden influx of Fulani Herdsmen and the relationship between

the Fulani and the Tiv in both Benue and Taraba states is intensely becoming strained because of incessant attacks on the Tiv by the Fulani's with very high human casualties and loss of properties. (Ahima 2014) Evidently the constant attacks on the Tiv from Taraba State by Fulani Herdsmen had made most landowners in the affected communities to flee their homes in search of safe alternatives.

There have been a number of crisis in Wukari with gruesome murders of dozens of people and wanton destruction of property. According to Aji (2014) the "Red Cross yesterday said in Wukari, Taraba State that about 77 people lost their lives during the crises between some Fulani herdsmen and the indigenous people of the area few days ago." More than 40 other people were getting treatment for various degrees of injuries sustained because of the attacks by Fulani Herdsmen.

In Kaduna State the story is not different as Fulani Herdsmen cause communal conflicts. According to Shiklam (2014) "Rampaging gun men suspected to be Fulani herdsmen on Tuesday killed about 123 people in seven villages in Sanga local government area of Kaduna state in an onslaught which started on Monday night." The invaders had earlier slaughtered 38 people in sporadic attacks on Kabamu and Ankpong villages.

Although subsiding, the crisis that tore communities of Plateau State apart in violent conflicts with gruesome murders was not unconnected to the siege by Fulani Herdsmen. Recently it was Zamfara state where more than 200 villagers were killed by Fulani herdsmen in an orgy of violent attacks that lasted for three days. Some of the worst hit communities are Dansadau and Yargaladima village in Dansadau Emirate of Maru Local government area.

Eastern Nigeria is not left out in the onslaught of Fulani Herdsmen with respect to communal conflicts. Some communities of Enugu State are also under siege. As the case in other instances, the crisis is caused by the indiscriminate search for cattle pastures by the Fulani herdsmen. In the process they encroach on farm lands and their cattle destroy food crops and cash crops. Instead of these herdsmen to take responsibility for the destructions caused by their cattle they confront and challenge farm owners expressing their plight. Such challenges get heated and leads to conflicts which creates great insecurity to host communities because the herdsmen are said to be well armed.

In the case of Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu State consisting of more than forty communities, the aggression and violent activities of Fulani herdsmen have grounded agricultural and economic activities in most of the communities. The superior arms wielded by the invading herdsmen renders the local vigilante group helpless. The herdsmen are armed with AK47 raffles and the government is obviously not doing enough to checkmate the trend. People no longer go to the farm nor sleep well at night for fear of aggressive attacks in Ezeagu community by the herdsmen. (Ozobu 2014) The situation is very pathetic and can cause economic depression in the area.

Very recently the menace posed by Fulani Herdsmen with respect to communal conflicts would have engulfed the Obimma Community, in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State but for the diplomatic and prompt intervention of the State Governor. Evidently the herdsmen were harassing farmers and their cattle destroying cash crops and food crops in Obimma Community. The decisive intervention of the governor saved the community from the scourge of Fulani herdsmen which nearly degenerated into full blown conflict.

The magnitude of attacks on host communities by Fulani herdsmen assumes such a sophisticated dimension that more often than not the host communities are overwhelmed by their might. This is reminiscent of warfare waged by highly sophisticated warriors. The most pathetic issue is the gruesome manner in which attacks are carried out. In this regard Vande-Acka (2014) noted that "some suspected Fulani herdsmen had attacked Uipkam in Guma

LGA of the state [Benue] were they captured and slaughtered some of the farmers, gorged out their eyes and removed their genitals.”

The attacks are sometimes shrouded in mystery and diabolism. A situation where a multitude of community men are held helplessly captive and slaughtered without any resistance or gun shots depicts elements of clairvoyance. This is because “most of the persons that were slain by their assailants during the crisis at Ayilamo were captured with little or no resistance... to prove this there was no bullet wounds on some of the bodies that were recovered.” [Vande-Acka 2014]

This mysterious picture is illuminated on account that most of the men that were captured alive by the Fulani herdsmen were physically strong and well-armed community warriors. Invariably the Fulani herdsmen are very powerful and highly endowed with subjugating and conquering skills. They adopt these skills to survive the challenges of the different communities they migrate to for purposes of pasturing their herds. The question here is why do they migrate to other communities which bring them into conflict? To this we turn

CLIMATE CHANGE AS PRECIPITATOR OF THE CONFLICTS

The most fundamental reason why Fulani Herdsmen migrate to other areas is because of desert encroachment (desertification) of the Sahel region caused by climate change. Climate change destroys and depletes natural. A lot of communities are heavily dependent on natural resources and it is also very crucial for individual wellbeing. Climate change significantly undermines individual livelihoods and community growth thereby undermining the capacity of state to provide social services and economic opportunities requisite for state development and stability. The lack of opportunities to sustain livelihood makes indigenes of such communities very susceptible to conflicts.

Climate Change impedes development, intensifies income disparities between rich and poor and ultimately degenerates into communal conflicts. This is alluded to by Sawin (2013) who said that “Climate change will undermine efforts to mitigate world poverty, directly threatening people's homes and livelihoods.... Not only could this impede development, it might also increase national and regional instability and intensify income disparities between rich and poor.” Climate change has the potentials of triggering severe disruptions with disastrous consequences for the people. Famines, droughts, and climate-change related disasters could claim thousands or even millions of lives and aggravate existing strains within and among communities.

Climate change not only triggers communal conflicts but can engender state failure. In an International Alert publication, Smith and Vivekananda (2007) have noted that “threats to international stability associated with climate change, is placing some 40 states at risk of climate induced conflict.” Climatic factors have given rise to water related hazards; lack of water causes draughts and excess of water causes floods, high tidal water causes salinity and acidity in soil.

These impact negatively on land causing food scarcity and energy depletion, thereby making people to migrate and spiraling into communal conflicts. Purvis and Busby (2004:72) argue that preventing “large-scale humanitarian catastrophes from climate-related droughts, floods, crop failures, mass migrations and exceptionally severe weather remains the most significant policy challenges.” Drought triggers desertification and famine with spiral disastrous consequences.

More often than not the catastrophes of climate change degenerate into cutthroat rivalries which causes ethnic conflicts and sometimes religious crisis. This is because there is the tendency of groups bound together by ethnicity or creed to gang up against other groups with a view to protecting their interest on the negative impacts of climate change. This is most succinctly presented by Paterson (1996) who said that “as countries are hit by the negative impacts of climate change, existing ethnic, religious, or other divides may play a

role in decision-making processes, and governments may favor dominant groups in decisions.”

Whatever direction the pendulum swings climate change is a major contributor to communal conflict in Nigeria and other third world countries. The Fulani herdsmen are completely dependent on resources of the natural environment and this makes them go all out to get these resources thereby making them susceptible to resistance when they fight back and communal conflicts tantamount. This is subscribed to by Barnett (2008) who argues that “there are different levels of vulnerability to climate change. Those impacted most are likely to be those who depend on natural resources and ecosystem services for their livelihoods.” This underscores the fact that “the negative impacts of climate change are expected to fall disproportionately on poor countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America” (Biermann and Klaus 2004).

In a related development Valerie (2010:10) noted that “Water is a key resource for sustaining life and society through agricultural production, industry, and hydropower, as well as health and human development at large. No community and economy will prevail without water of sufficient quality and quantity. Water and security are basically interconnected in two ways: Resource crisis can occur over water, especially if the amount available is grossly inadequate and competition increases; Water insufficiency can influence human security and possibly lead to instability, migration, and amplified resource competition. [Houdret & Carius 2010]

This is supported by Gareth (1995:232) who noted that in “developing countries, one of the greatest environmental threat is to water. Today, the world’s supply of water per capita is only one-third of what it was in 1970. Water scarcity is increasingly becoming a factor in ethnic strife and political tension.” It is also estimated that approximately 1.4 billion people are living in areas with acute water scarcity. It is predicted that an estimated 5 billion people, which constitutes what is about the current world population, could be living in water-stressed locations by 2025. (Sawin 2013) In another vein, Valerie (2010:11) noted that “fragile and weak states are not only less capable of adapting to climatic change but also managing and controlling conflicts peacefully. As a consequence, Africa is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as its ability to cope with the adverse impacts remains low.” Most Fulani communities are in the Sahel zone which has been taken over by desertification thereby compelling the Fulani herdsmen to migrate towards coastal areas in search of pasture and water.

Migration is a rational drive imposed on Fulani herdsmen by climatic conditions. This is succinctly subscribed to by Flavell (2010:29) who said that in the initial stages of environmental degradation, migration can signify a logical and lawful livelihood diversification alternative. It is an adaptation approach for affected people to mitigate the effects of environmental hazards and climate change. “When environmental degradation becomes severe...migration can become permanent and may require relocation of affected populations, either internally or in another country.” (Flavell 2010:29) This is what is happening in Plateau State, Benue State, Taraba State etc.

Ostensibly, these migrations would generate discontent, attrition and conflicts. Climate change impacts abroad could trigger massive migration of people, incite civil conflict and ultimately generate more conflicts and crisis in the world. Change in weather patterns is the causal factor of drought and famine gives rise to shortages in food. The rural-to-urban migration of people exacerbates water scarcity and competition for resources therefrom. (Schultz 2013)

The major alternative is to migrate to other countries and face the consequences. The case of Fulani herdsmen is a perfect illustration of such migrations. Because of persistent droughts and desertification in the Northern part of Nigeria, most Fulani herdsmen have

migrated South in search of green pastures for their cattle. “In terms of migration, the influx of migrants into new areas has been a significant factor in many ‘environmental conflicts’ ...large migrations have at times lead to violent conflict, and large migrations may be a consequence of climate change” (Van 1996). This is also the case with Fulani herdsmen whose migration has been causing a lot of violent conflicts for the host communities.

Invariably climate change is a great facilitator of communal conflicts, this potential is to a reasonable extent determined by migration and other variables like attitude of the immigrants on the one hand and perception, reception, response and cordial relationship with host communities on the other hand.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflict with different host communities by Fulani herdsmen is a survival strategy that is perpetrated by climate change. The only reason why Fulani herdsmen migrate long distances to communities whose indigenes would eventually challenge and oppose their modus operandi is because of the search for green pastures and water. Their immediate environment is bereft of these pastures because of desertification and other environmental challenges. Most Fulani communities are in the Sahel zone which has been taken over by desertification thereby compelling the Fulani herdsmen to migrate towards coastal areas in search of pasture and water.

The areas Fulani herdsmen migrate to are not completely protected from climatic change environmental hazards. Consequently, the migrant Fulani herdsmen and the host communities they migrated to have to compete for scarce natural resources. This degenerates into communal conflicts. The situation is aggravated by the fact that natural resources are worst hit by climatic change.

The study recommends that there should be legislation to remedy the effect of desertification in the Sahel region and other Fulani communities. Government should come up with policies to create grazing reserves and dams for pasture and water in states that are predominantly Fulani so that they don't stray long distances in search of pastures. On issues of climate change the study recommends stronger international cooperation. The dictates of the Kyoto Protocol with respect to reducing the emission greenhouse gas and other harmful emissions should be observed. This would save our environment and contain radical climate change.

REFERENCES

- Ahima Caleb S. (Apr 2014) Fulani Herdsmen Attack Wukari, Taraba State
Aji Saidu (2014) Clash Between Fulani Herdsmen and Wukari Residents Leaves 77 Dead
Akevi John (2014 Apr 18), Addressing the scourge of Fulani Herdsmen in Benue State, Eagle Reporters Journal
Babajide Johnson (2014, Jul 8) Benue residents raise the alarm over influx of Fulani herdsmen, Nigerian Tribune Newspaper
Barnett, J. (2008). Climate change, human security and violent conflict. Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research and CSERGE, School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK
Biermann, F., & Klaus, D. (2004). Global Environmental Change and the Nation State. *Global Environmental Politics* 4(1): 1–22.
Durojaiye Rotimi (2014 July 8) Challenge of Fulani Herdsmen, Editorial, Daily Independence
Flavel, A. (2010). Migration. In V. Ndaruzaniye, L. Lipper, D. Fiot, A. Flavell & J. Clover (Eds.), *Climate Change and Security in Africa: Vulnerability Discussion Paper of Climate Change, Environment and Security (ACCES) Conference*

- Gareth, P. (1995). Redefining Security: The Human Dimension, Current History Journal
- Houdret, A., Kramer, A. & Carius (2010). The Water Security Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities for Development Cooperation. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
- Human Rights Watch as cited by Abrak Isaac (2015) Nigeria Clashes between Fulani Herdsmen and vigilantes, Reuters
- Ludovica Iaccino (2015) Nigeria Fulani militants: Herdsmen accused of killing 1,200 people in 2014, International Business Times, United Kingdom
- Ozobu Justice E. (2014) Fulani Herdsmen invade Enugu Communities, 2 Killed, 3 Women Raped
- Paterson, M. (1996). Global Warming and Global Politics. New York: Routledge.
- Purvis, N., & Busby, J. (2008). The Security Implications of Climate Change for the UN System. In Policy Brief for the United Nations and Environmental Security
- Sawin, J. (2013). Climate Change Poses Greater Security Threat than Terrorism. In World Watch Institute Journal. Available at: <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/77>, [date accessed 26-Jul-2013]
- Schultz, K. (2013). US Experts Say Climate Change is Threat to National Security. In The International Journal. Available at: <http://www.theinternational.org/articles/388-us-experts-say-climate-change-is-threat-t> [date accessed 24-Jul-2013]
- Shiklam John (2014 Jun 25), Kaduna: Suspected Fulani Herdsmen Kill 123 in Fresh Attacks, This Day Newspaper
- Smith, D. & Janani, V. (2007). A Climate of Conflict: The Links between Climate Change, Peace and War. London: International Alert.
- Tenuche Marietu S and Ifatimehin Olarewaju O. (2009)) Resource conflict among farmers and Fulani herdsmen: Implications for resources sustainability, in African Journal of Political Science and International Relations Vol. 3 (9). Pp.360-364
- Ugbechie Ken (2016) Republic of Fulani Herdsmen, National Accord
- Valerie, N. (2010). Water Security. In V. Ndaruzaniye, L. Lipper, D. Fiot, A. Flavell & J. Clover (Eds.), Climate Change and Security in Africa: Vulnerability Discussion Paper of Climate Change, Environment and Security (ACCES) Conference
- Vande-Acka Tor (2014 Jul 08), Tiv/Fulani crisis: Precision of attacking herdsmen shocks Benue farmers, Daily Independence Newspaper
- Van, I. et al (1996). Climate change: Socio economic impacts and violent conflict. Dutch National Research Programme on Global Air Pollution and Climate Change