

AT THE MERCY OF NATURE: UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CONFLICTS BETWEEN FULANI HERDSMEN AND FARMERS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

From time immemorial, nature has been harsh to mankind. One of the ways this has played out is through climate change. The article explored the interface between climate change and conflict. Analysis was anchored on the eco-violence theory and qualitative method of data collection was used to glean data from documentary evidence of secondary sources. Qualitative descriptive analysis was employed with logical induction. The article argued that much as we believe that the immediate cause of Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict is resource scarcity, that the remote cause is climate change which has through drought and desertification led to natural resource scarcity. This calls for urgent national attention. Hence, government at all levels must put more machinery on ground particularly in the north because over 70 percent of the nation's food crop comes from the region to encourage climate change adaptation.

Keywords: Climate change, conflict, resource scarcity.

Introduction

The subtle nature of climate change usually blurs its paroxysm to the extent that it is not usually seen as a major security threat. Ezirim and Onuoha (2008:89-90) observed this when they noted that:

Climate change does not fit into the mode of traditional threats to national security such as war, terrorism, insurgency, espionage or sabotage. Yet its non-violent and gradual dynamics of manifestation serve only to

disguise its impact on livelihoods, social order, peace and stability.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC (2007) observed that in the 20th century, there have been consistent patterns indicative of climate change. For example, since the 1950s, average global temperature rose by about 0.1 °C per decade, winter snow covers declined by 10%, Northern ice thickness fell by 40%, the frequencies and intensities of droughts, storms, and warm periods rose, glaciers retreated, and the sea level rose by 20 cm. Scholars attribute these changes to increased carbon emissions from fossil fuel burning (Gleditsch *et al*, 2007; Best and Lawson, 2008; Melinda, 2005). Assuming business as usual, these problems are expected to intensify.

Nigeria is not immune to climate change hazards. However, when climate change hazards such as heavy droughts and famine, erratic weather seasons and prolonged dry spells occur in Nigeria, it is normally viewed in relation to environmental degradation, natural resource scarcity, migration and food shortage (Onuoha, 2008; Roger, 2003). Little or no attention is paid to the how climate change can induce conflicts.

Increased competition of pastoralists for a dwindling 'stock' of grazing land has pitched them (Fulani herders) against farmers. Conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen has become so rampant. For instance, violence erupted on 18 December, 2009, between these two groups when pastoralists attacked the farming village of Udeni Gida - two weeks after a clash with farmers on 6 December, when herdsman led their cattle into rice fields resulting in the death of a farmer (<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=87525>), among numerous others.

However, scholars such Adisa and Adekunle, 2010; Abba and Usman, 2008; Tonah, 2002; among others and farmers alike attribute conflict between these two groups usually to environmental resource scarcity with little attention to climate change that engenders it.

We shall argue in this article that climate change has contributed significantly in deepening conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers in northern Nigeria. The article will be divided into six sections with this brief introduction as section one. Section two served as the theoretical perspective of the article. Section three examined the concept of climate change. Section four was devoted to the contending understandings of conflict. Section five

empirically substantiated climatic conflicts in Nigeria, while section six concludes the article.

Theoretical Perspective

The article anchors analysis on the eco-violence theory as articulated by Homer-Dixon. Homer-Dixon and Blitt (1998) argue that large populations in many developing countries are highly dependent on four key environmental resources that are very fundamental to crop production: fresh water, cropland, forests and fish. Scarcity or shrinking of these resources as a result of misuse, over-use or degradation under certain circumstances will trigger off conflicts.

According to Homer-Dixon (1999:30):

Decreases in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and unequal resource access act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests, and fish. This can reduce economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts.

The fundamental theoretical assumption of the theory is that resource scarcity is the product of an insufficient supply, too much demand or an unequal distribution of a resource as a result of environmental hazards that forces some sector of a society into a condition of deprivation and violence. These four sources of scarcity are in turn caused by variables such as population growth, economic development, pollution and climate change. Thus, environmental resource scarcity will constrain agricultural and economic productivity, further inducing the disruption of economic livelihoods, poverty and migration. Migration can occur either because the environmental quality of a habitat has become unlivable or, more commonly, because the migrant's economic outcome is likely to be better in areas with

greater resource availability. Both constrained productivity and migration are likely to strengthen the segmentation around already existing religious, class, ethnic or linguistic cleavages in a society (Gleditsch and Urdal 2002:286), and thus precipitate conflicts.

It is fundamental to state that one basic feature of Fulani herdsman is migration and at the heart of migration is climate change. Within the context of Fulani herdsman and farmer conflict, the eco-violence theory is analytically fecund to capture, and explicate the intricate linkages that can develop between climate change and conflict. This is because the four environmental resources (fresh water, cropland, forests and fish) are resources that climate change affects. As a result of climate change, seas have dried up leading to shortage of fish and fresh water. Drought and desertification have also eaten up crop lands and forest thereby making these environmental resources that trigger violence in short supply.

To avert these situations, individuals especially herdsman stray to where they will get moderate weather, market opportunity, green – vegetation, forage and food, hope and aspiration, thereby threatening the means of production and reproduction of some other people who would not brook such encroachment. This in itself engenders conflict. And when they are accepted, the long run effect will be pressure on land, food shortage, conflict of interests, cultural differences, over population, social disorganization, religious, social, and cultural intolerance which are in themselves conflict triggers.

Further, since most of the impact of climate change is directly on agriculture, the theory helps us to explain the link between climate change and conflict. That agriculture has been neglected in Nigeria is no longer news. This situation has worsened considerably over the years as a result of government insensitivity to climate adaptation and mitigation and puts more pressure on the populace who suffer more as a result of climate change. It is within this context that the link between climate change and conflict in northern Nigeria can be understood.

The Concept of Climate Change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, (2001), Third Assessment Report, AR3, defines climate change as:

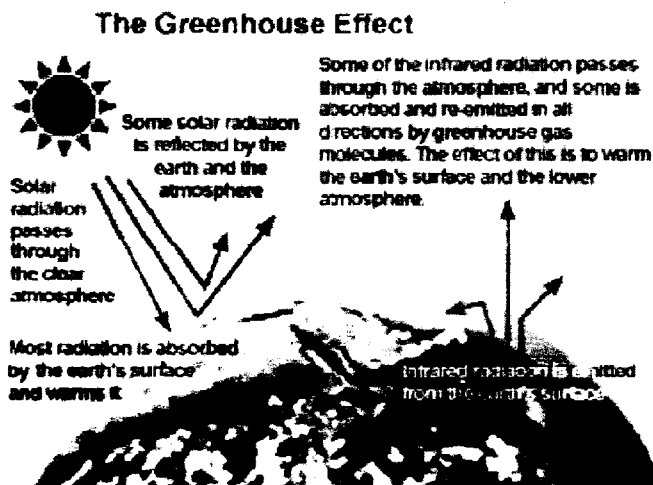
Climate change refers to a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period

(typically decades or longer). Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use.

According to Ezirim and Onuoha (2008:91):

Climate change is caused by increasing concentration of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases include any gas in the atmosphere that is capable, as a result of its particular molecular structure, of absorbing infrared radiation or heat. They are (sic) called greenhouse gases because they display effects similar to that in a "greenhouse". The glass in a "greenhouse" allows the sunlight to pass through but trapping the heat formed and preventing it from escaping, thereby causing a rise in temperature.

They go further to state that carbon dioxide, also called CO_2 is responsible for global warming. Other important greenhouse gases they noted are water vapour (H_2O), chlorofluorocarbons, methane, nitrous oxide, ozone, and halocarbons which are more commonly associated with the ozone layer and ultraviolet radiation released from landfills and agriculture, and the loss of plants that would otherwise store CO_2 .



On the role of human beings to global warming they noted that:

The increasing concentration of chlorine and bromine atoms which originates from man-induced emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (used in air conditions, refrigerators, aerosols, foams, and sterilants) and haloes (used in fire extinguishing equipment) significantly contributes to global warming by exacerbating the thinning of the ozone layer meant to shield the planet from excessive heat (Ezirim and Onuoha, 2008:91).

According to the Global Humanitarian Forum (2009) climate change impact is hardest on the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. Many of the worst affected live in fragile states. Their vulnerability is shaped not only by the persistence of poverty, the lack of good infrastructure, the difficulty of getting a foothold in the world market, and thus the intractability of underdevelopment, but also by the fragility of state institutions, and the instability of political arrangements.

The Concept of Conflict

For us to understand the concept of conflict, we shall present four schools of thoughts to it. They are the **Traditional View of Conflict, Human Relations View of Conflict, the Marxist View of Conflict and the Social Atavistic Conflict school**. The traditionalists are of the belief that conflict anywhere is a negative development. It is bad and ought not to exist in the life of humans. Accordingly conflict is bad because it transits to violence, destruction, irrationality and physical warfare (Elliot, 1988, Robbins 2000). This school of thought further argues that conflict is a dysfunctional outcome that may result from poor communication; a lack of openness and trust between people, and the inability to detect and work on the early signs or indicators of conflict (Akpuru-Aja 2007:18).

Human Relations View of Conflict believes that conflict has become part of human existence and will ever remain present with man. It is the contention of the proponents of this school that mankind instead of viewing conflict only from the negative standpoint should accept it as natural, innate and inevitable and to that extent people should rather than write off conflict in their lives develop means and weapons of self preservation and defence. Galtung (1990:3) holds this view when he asserts that "many group relations

are marred by the development and readiness to use deadly weapons in the settlement of disputes”.

The Marxist View of Conflict sees conflict in all societies as inevitable in so far as there is a continued exploitation of man by man. The proponent of this theory, Karl Marx argues that the society is divided into two classes “the haves and the have-not”, the haves, not only controls the means of production but also political sphere, the have-nots are left with no other option than selling their labour to earn a living. This state of affairs creates conditions of inequality in the society and in the position of Otite (2004:34):

Conflict arises inevitably due to how a society organizes, manages and reproduces itself between the haves (known as the property class) and the have-nots (known as the propertyless class). In this condition of social inequality or wealth disparity between the classes as they work towards production and rewards, the yawning gap between the affluent the poor creates lines of conflict, known as social contradiction.

The scholars who believe in this school of thought argue that with the great gulf, between the haves and have-nots, revolution is imminent and inevitable. The have-nots are oppressed, repressed and traumatized into a revolution-like behaviour and action to seek liberation from man’s exploitation by man (Akpuru-Aja 2007:20). The revolt of the exploited class against the exploiters will lead to a conflict situation but to which at the end, the have-nots would win and thereafter take over the affairs of the state. A critical study of the postulations of this school of thought brings to the fore the change from a struggle to have a fair and equal share of resources to that of bringing about a democratic society where equality and the rule of law thrive.

Social Atavistic Conflict School believes that the expansionist nature of man breeds conflict. For Ake (1981) there is a natural tendency on the part of creatures to migrate, expand and dominate space; or territory. It is this behaviour by man that more often than not brings about conflict.

Today the tendency of man to continue to migrate to different areas has continued unabated and in most cases these migrations have brought conflict situation and the most common is disputes over lands, territorial water or space and the resources therein.

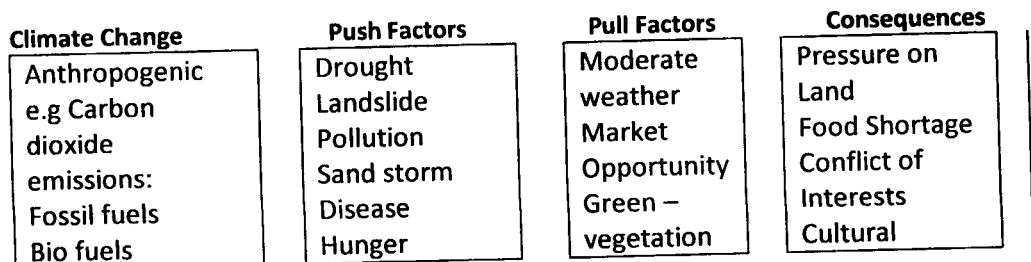
According to Galtung (1996) conflict could be viewed as a triangle with structure, attitudes, and behaviour as its vertices. By structure, he means the conflict situation, the parties, and the conflict of interest among them. Conflict arises where the parties come to have incompatible interests, values or goals. He uses the term attitudes to refer to the tendency for the parties to see conflict from their own point of view, to identify with own side, and to diminish the concerns of others. Behaviour includes gestures and communications, which can convey either a hostile or a conciliatory intent. When a conflict turns into open combat with at least 25 battle related deaths per year, then it is described as armed conflict. Armed conflicts exist between governments (inter-state) or between governments and armed groups within states or between opposing armed groups (intra-state). Presently, intra-state conflict is the dominant form of conflict in the world in general and Africa in particular (Rasheed, 2003).

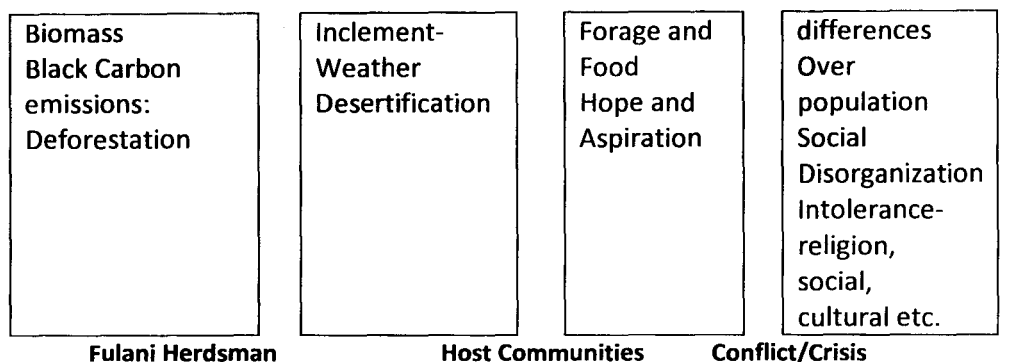
Climate Change and Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Northern Nigeria

To understand the reasons why Fulani herdsmen had to migrate 'forcefully', the following scientific and physical realities of the climate-change conditions must be understood in relation to the opportunity to live a fairly conducive life. Factors that push Fulani-herdsmen out include: Drought; Land-slide; Desertification; Pollution; Sand-storm; Disease; Hunger; and Unusual weather.

Pull factors that attracted the Fulani herdsmen to the northern states near the Guinea Savannah which eventually lead to unavoidable crises in these areas include:

- Moderate weather;
- Market opportunity;
- Green vegetation;
- Forage; and
- Hope and aspiration.





Source: Folami, 2009.

Further in northern part of the country, scramble for land brought out the details in terms of the effect of climate change. According to Ikuomola (2010) there is no weekend in the palaces without cases of conflicts among farmers and farmlands being settled. Different households and farmers do bring cases either relating to violence on their wards or farmhands. On the average he noted that there are usually more than five cases of communal and individual conflicts monthly and fighting relating to agricultural activities and the vandalism of crops by cattle belonging to different communities. Buttressing further the impact of climate change in the region, one official in Tureta Local Council in Sokoto State stated as follows:

In the past the migration use to be more in the middle of the dry season and after harvest but nowadays it is throughout the year. Worst of all during planting season, they walk on seeds planted, and in most cases a lot of the seeds fail to germinate. This has caused huge loss to us. The damage is usually the cause of our conflicts with the Fulani herdsmen. It is a yearly battle between us. (quoted in Ikuomola, 2010:19).

In Zamfara state, cases of regular disputes between the farm guards and petty farmers in neighbouring villages is also on the increase as desert encroaches farmlands, community disputes and conflicts over fertile lands increases and the problem of internally displaced persons become inevitable. Ikuomola noted that in Zamfara, conflict exist mostly among peasant farmers, whose lands have over the years become less productive as a result of the harsh climatic factor, and their inability to raise fund to buy fertilizers

and other modern farming products for improved farming. The conflict situation has so degenerated that:

Year in year out...the situation keeps worsening, the complaints were so grave that the state government had to put in place patrol vehicles to routinely go around these conflicting communities to avoid further escalation of conflicts (Ikuomola, 2010:16).

One of the inhabitants of Zamfara stated that:

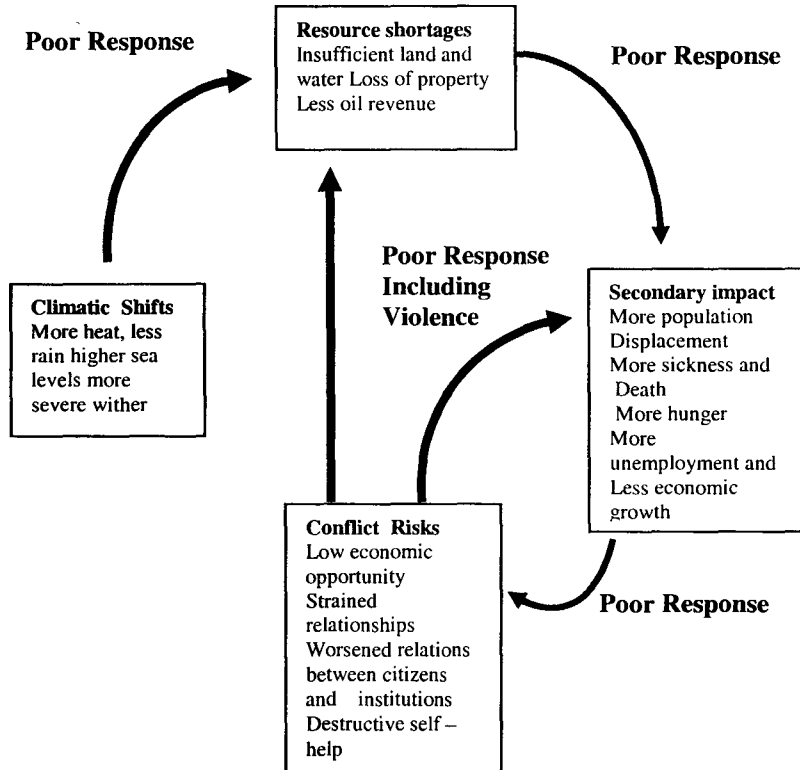
it is not part of the culture of the people here to be hostile and aggressive, it is as a result of poverty and low yield from the farm. To a new comer one will think it has always been their habits and behaviour. This is not true (quoted in Ikuomola, 2010:16).

Drawing lines of causation between climate change and conflict requires caution. Every conflict has many causes, and people do not automatically start fighting when the weather heats up, their crops shrivel, or their jobs disappear. However, Homer-Dixon (2007: 13) noted that climate change:

may well represent a challenge to international security just as dangerous—and more intractable—than the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War or the proliferation of nuclear weapons among rogue states today.

It is a known fact that an area be it a region, population, or sector sees some climatic shifts; poor responses to the shifts lead to resource shortages and poor responses to the resource shortages heighten one or more structural conflict risks. A basic causal mechanism links climate change with violence in Nigeria. Climate change in Nigeria has led to growing shifts in temperature, rainfall, storms, and sea levels. These climatic challenges, left unaddressed, had thrown already stressed resources such as land and water into even shorter supply. Moreover, poor responses to resource shortages could have serious negative secondary effects, including more sickness and hunger, fewer jobs, and poor economic growth, which in turn could open the door to more violence. Indeed, in a few conflict-prone states in the arid north, this sequence is probably playing out already.

Diagram Showing Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: A Basic Casual Mechanism



Source: Aaron, 2011.

Some Climate Related Conflicts in Northern Nigeria

S/N	Crisis/Location	Year	Casualty	Source of Conflict
1	Song LGA (Adamawa)	2002	Fulani herdsmen/Farmers in Dumme fought over grazing land	Land resources
2	Dumme village (Song L.G.A, Adamawa state)	2002	Communal conflict between farmers and herdsmen	Land resources
3	Okeogun Crisis(Oyo state)	2003	Nomadic herdsmen/Farmers clashing	Land resources

4	Demsa council (Adamawa State)	2005	The crisis was sparked up by the allegations that cattle rearers destroyed harvested farm products.	Land resources
5	Bali Village(Demsa council in Adamawa State)	2005	Reprisal attack by the regrouped Fulani cattle rearers for the death of their two colleague killed by farmers	Land resources
6	Mambila Plateau State	2008	Dispute over grazing land	Land resources
7	Mambila Plateau State	2008	Fulani herdsmen numbering 23,000 fled Eastern Taraba to avert fighting going on between them and farmers	Land resources
8	Gwer Local Government	2011	Scores killed with over 20000 residents displaced over grazing land	Land resources
9	Udeni Gida Nasarawa State	2013	Over 32 people killed over grazing land	Land resources
10	Gindin Dorawa Wukari Local Government Taraba state	2013	No fewer than 25 farmers killed by herdsmen on a reprisal attack	Land resources
11	Tse Abate Benue State	2012	Armed Fulani killed all men, women and children in their path	Land resources
12	Angwan Sakwai Kaura LGA, Kaduna State	2014	No fewer than 57 innocent residents killed	

Source: Compiled by the Authors.

In addition, the following communities in Benue state have come under the Fulani firepower, Nyiev, Tse Anda, Yandev, Dooga, Kpata, Lokobi, Mbagwen, Tse Zaki, TseKper, Chile, Tse Kpoku, Tse Kpar, Sengev, Gbuku and

Tse Yaji. In Nasarawa state, the following communities have also experienced the orgy of farmers-herdsmen clashes, Andōri, Rukubi, Akpan, Agyema, Idaku, Gidan, Rai, Ankome, Agimaka, Ekije development area, Migli, Eggon Agatu and Doma (Iyorwuese, 2013).

Only recently Nigerian Television Authority (NTA, 2010) weather forecast reported that for the first time in the history of Nigeria, Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state had a temperature of 47°C, which was also linked to ailing health of the people, low crop yields and conflict.

Conclusion

The link between climate change and conflict in Nigeria is the focus of this article. The article was designed to examine the correlation between climate-change and its unbridled effects that manifest itself most times in violent conflict in Nigeria using the Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflicts in northern Nigeria. Our central objective is to ascertain if there is any link between climate change and most conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in northern Nigeria. After critical analyses of available data and literature, the articles revealed as follows:

1. Nigeria's climate is experiencing growing shifts in temperature, rainfall, storms, and sea levels throughout and poor adaptive responses to these shifts has fuelled violent conflict in some areas of the country.
2. A basic causal mechanism links climate change with violence in Nigeria. Under it, poor responses to climatic shifts create shortages of resources such as land and water. Shortages are followed by negative secondary impacts, such as more sickness, hunger, and lost of cattle. Poor responses to these, in turn, open the door to conflict.

Hence, much as we believe that the immediate cause of Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict is resource scarcity, the remote cause is climate change which has through drought and desertification led to natural resource scarcity. This calls for urgent attention. It is therefore, important for government at all levels to put more machinery on ground particularly in the north because over 70 percent of the nation's food crop comes from the region to encourage climate change adaptation.

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