

PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FARMERS AND TRANSHUMANTS PASTORALISTS IN NIGERIA.

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Rural farmers and livestock breeders are the primary source of the food in Africa, particularly for the urban areas of most African countries including Nigeria. Of recent Livestock Breeders particularly Transhumant Pastoralist and sedentary/migrant farmers have engaged each other in an internecine warfare that is threatening the peace and stability of our country. The conflict had been primarily about resource use, damage to crops, blocking of transhumant corridors (Burtali), farming along the valleys and stream/river banks and uncomplimentary agricultural policies by government. However of the recent the conflict had assumed a dangerous dimension with the infusion of ethnic, religious and political factors into it. Cattle rustling, availability of dangerous weapons, intra-pastoralist conflicts, mercenary elements and dangerous drugs had all added to the combustion.

There is need to address the issues dispassionately with a view of finding a lasting solution to the problem, otherwise the consequences on the ethnic, political, religious and food security in Nigeria and indeed West Africa will be devastating.

Let me state that this contribution is from a pastoralist perspective and is designed to generate a response from the Farmers/Sedentary groups, with a view of finding a common ground to solve the conflicts between farmers and pastoralist in West Africa particularly Nigeria. My friend Boureima Dodo of the Reseau Bilital Maroobe argues that the problem of pastoralist is the farmer, converse to it; my argument is that the farmer is a misunderstood cousin of the pastoralist. Perhaps this why the Fulani, the primary pastoralist in Nigeria are playmates of the Tivs, one the dominant farmer groups in Nigeria, and same thing between the Fulani and the Bobos in Burkina Faso, the primarily pastoralist and farmer group. There are many instances of these joking relationships between farmer groups and pastoralist in several African countries. This begs for the question, why are Pastoralist and Farmers are at war with each other then? We will seek to find the answer and possible solutions.

Pastoralists are one of the most misunderstood, vulnerable and marginalised occupational groups in Nigeria indeed across Africa. The closed knit family systems, resilience in the face of daunting odds, migratory patterns and a times rare display of courage had made pastoralists to be greatly misunderstood. Policy makers, sections of the media and other sedentary groups that have not come into contact with them tend to brand them as violent, unruly and butt of jokes that portray them as backward and uncivilised. Pastoralists are often blamed as source of troubles and violent conflicts particularly in several rural areas in Nigeria indeed Africa. This stereotyping has beclouded the fact that the problem between pastoralists and farmers is basically a development and economic challenge that ought to be tackled that way. It is regrettable that of recent due to the increase and intensity of the conflicts and challenges political leaders and security agents view the problem as security threat thus befuddling the real issues in dispute as we Lawyers say.

Against the above background, Transhumant pastoralists are in the in the news for all the wrong reasons. Their contributions to food security, environmental sustenance, economic stability and security monitoring are hardly mentioned. The news is always about pastoralist getting involved in violent attacks, killings, armed robbery, banditry, damage to crops, cattle rustling and theft. I am not arguing that some Pastoralist don't get involved in these crimes, some do but we cannot use the act of a few to judge the whole.

Apart from the farmer-pastoralist conflicts, conflicts are abound between pastoralist and forestry/wildlife parks officials, fishermen as result of damages to fishing nets and ponds, mining and quarrying activities,

road construction and property development. Spill over of urban problems like religious and political conflicts into rural communities has also led to hapless killings and wanton destruction of lives and properties.

Roger Blench (a leading expert in this area) in a position paper in 2010 argues that conflicts between pastoralist and farmers had existed since the beginning of agriculture, but the prevalence of tsetse and low settlement densities had kept the incidence of clashes at low frequency until the 20th century. The introduction of easy veterinary drugs has increased disease resistance and treatment, increased herd sizes coupled with rapid depletion of natural fodder in the Northern states sharing borders with Niger and Chad had compelled herders to seek for pasture outside their traditional ecological zones in the Sahel and savannah. At the same period improved human health, rapid populations, urbanization and large scale land acquisitions added the pressure on arable land thus increasing the stiff competition of the static commodity.

The encroachment on traditional livestock migratory routes, cultivation of traditional grazing areas, dry season cultivation of riverine areas and valleys in Northern Nigeria encouraged by the Federal Government of Nigeria Fadama projects, land grabs by very rich trade-political-merchant elites, political attachment to land as political tool to gain access to power has accentuated the conflicts. To paraphrase Roger Blench; In Nigeria.... this conflict is now been subsumed into a broader dichotomy of religion and disputes over access to resources are now framed in religious and political terms. Increasing availability of modern weapons has increased the intensity and violence of these disputes.

The recent security challenges in Nigeria had accentuated the deep schism in the polity and the conflicts in some of our neighbouring countries had led to the availability of illegal sophisticated weapons. Instead of confronting the situation as development challenge, security agents resort to a times brutal methods in dealing with it as was witnessed in Jos, Plateau state, North Central Nigeria, when thousands of pastoralist were forcefully evicted to make room "for security operations" or the hunt for bandits in Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna state, North west Nigeria where hundreds of Pastoralist are being rounded up to undergo harsh detentions and interrogation because basically they are what they are-Pastoralist.

The poor identification system in country has also led tagging even Nigerian Pastoralist as foreign mercenaries thus beyond the reach of Nigerian law for protection. The fact that most of them are Nigerians and some of them ECOWAS citizens is immaterial. Detention in Army camps is making the matters worse. Pastoralist cattle, sheep, goats and other small holdings are confiscated at will without recourse to law. Vigilante groups are empowered by security agencies and governments to supposedly hunt bandits, but they increasingly target pastoralist groups. Unprotected by law, and a times victimised by agents of the law, some Pastoralist are forced to resort to revenge missions with devastating consequences on poor rural populations.

It needs to be understood that Pastoralist (except of recent), have no political or civic attachment to land. To the pastoralist, pasture is what he cares for, and land like air and rains cannot be owned. This is unlike the farmer groups who have to till the land and have deep cultural, ethnic and of recent political attachment to land. This could be the reason why the primary transhumant pastoralists in West Africa; the Fulani or Fulbe, Shuwa Arabs and Toureqs are found across several countries in Africa. The creation of "countries" in Africa by the Europeans has not lessened the nomadic spirits as the animals are border blind and pastoralist follow the herds.

The Nigerian Constitution had given every citizen the fundamental right to freedom of movement in search of legitimate businesses; I see transhumance pastoralism along these lines. For pastoralist from neighbouring West African countries access to grazing rights in other countries in the ECOWAS zone including Nigeria are guaranteed by the ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol of 1998 and the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement of Goods and Persons in West Africa. The ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol allows for herders to move across borders in search of pasture upon the fulfilling the conditions

laid down in the Protocol. So it is not strange to see a Malian, Burkinabe or Nigerien pastoralist grazing his cows, sheep or goats in Nigeria or a Nigerian grazing his livestock in Benin, Togo or Ghana.

Pastoralist have argued and quite rightly so that the seasonal movements are not only primarily in search of pasture but could be influenced by other factors like climate change, epidemics, conflicts, bush burning and even market forces. The pastoralists just don't move for the sake of it.

The political and legal emasculation of traditional community leaders in terms of disputes resolution and conflict mediation, bringing in security elements who are untutored in land use practices, who don't appreciate the cultural affinity and history the populations, corruption, the tendency to exploit and extort by some security elements has led affected persons to resort to unorthodox and unconventional means to resolve their disputes. The judicial and legal system does not seem to accord pastoralism as an act that can confer ownership of land. Rather it is seen more privilege to use natural resources or easement or a right of way only.

These factors have all contributed to the rise and voraciousness of the conflicts between crop producers and pastoralist. These conflicts have become endemic in states like Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Kaduna, Zamfara, Ogun, Ondo and Cross Rivers states amongst others. Many lives had been lost by both Pastoralist and Crop producers as well as livestock and crops worth millions of Naira.

As indicated earlier the conflict between Transhumant Pastoralists, particularly the Fulbe and sedentary/host groups in Nigeria had assumed a very wide and dangerous dimension. This is due to the movement of pastoralist southwards in search of pasture, farming and occupation of traditional grazing areas and stock routes (burtali), pastoralist fleeing one conflict zone into another without prior notice, thus triggering fresh conflicts.

The emergence of a third migrant group of resource users; Migrant Farmers had added to the stiff competition for arable land. This Migrant Farmers also move from the north to the central and southern states to cultivate crops for subsistence and commercial purposes. Traditional grazing fields are gradually being leased out to this group for a customary fee. This has increasingly led sedentary groups demanding for fees from Pastoralist for grazing rights too unlike in the past when it was for free. Thus in addition to the Pastoralist/Sedentary Farmer's conflicts, we now have Pastoralist/Sedentary Farmers/Migrant Farmer's conflicts thus contributing to the huge security challenges we now have.

In the 1960s grazing areas were created by the government of Northern Nigeria. The National Livestock Development Project (NLDP) under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture had documented about 415 Grazing Areas in Northern Nigeria exclusively carved out for grazing and subsistence farming. Lack of demarcation and gazetting had made most of the grazing areas to fizzle out. Areas that had been demarcated and gazetted are also facing increasing pressure due population growth and demands for farmlands. The NLDP had also undertaken a survey of the transhumant stock routes in Nigeria, including international routes from and into neighbouring countries like Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin Republics. Some of the routes had been beacons but demarcation had not been easy. One drawback on the utilization of these routes is that most of the times host and sedentary groups are unaware of the routes and migration seasons, and due difference in seasons, are yet to harvest their crops or had planted marginal crops. Awareness, enlightenment, sensitization and strong dialogue mechanisms with communities and their traditional leaders along transhumance corridors are imperative if these projects are to succeed.

The National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in Nigeria and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) office in the Presidency had also made giant strides in developing an education method to enlighten and educate the children of Transhumant Pastoralist in Nigeria. This is with the ultimate objective of gradually transforming pastoralism and the livestock sector without social dislocations on the part of the target group. There need to strengthen and enhance the both NCNE and the NLPD to render the services in this regard.

Government intervention in the Livestock sector is very poor. Unlike their crop producing counterparts, you hardly hear of any support to Traditional Livestock breeders particularly Transhumant Livestock Breeders in terms of inputs like livestock vaccination, fodder development and fodder storage facilities, market support and linkages. Transhumant Pastoralists are hardly supported or even compensated in the event of natural disasters and land acquisitions. This creates the underdog spirit and superiority complex amongst resource users. This needs to be addressed by government and development partners.

The role of traditional community leaders in dispute resolution need not be re-emphasised. The emphasis on western modes of administration of justice had not worked in rural settings. If ignorance of the law is not an excuse, then the law that rural communities are not ignorant of, are their own laws and customs not those of the statute books. The traditional community leaders are products of people's consensus, customs and cultures. Traditional and customary community leaders are well respected unless if they are imposed. There is need to find a role for them in the administration of justice system particularly in rural settings and avoid impositions. The Kaduna state government had attempted this in Farmers and Herdsmen (Prevention and Settlement) of Disputes Edict 1996 incorporating leaders of both farmers and herders in the dispute resolution mechanism. I am not aware whether the provisions of this law is being utilised. There is need to reinvigorate the law and apply it. Other states could also study it and see to what benefit can they put it.

The Nigerian National Assembly is making attempts to create a Federal Commission to Cater and Manage Transhumant Stock Routes and Grazing Areas in Nigeria. The bill is currently before the National Assembly. If enacted into law, it will manage some of the Grazing Areas and Transhumance stock routes. The Federal government may well take over some of the state grazing areas that are being managed and heavily supported by the Federal Government and its agencies. Transhumance had now gone beyond the domain of the north. In the alternative I will recommend southern state governments to create reserved grazing areas. This we believe will significantly reduce conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria.

At the regional level, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had recognized transhumance as mode of livestock production to attain self sufficiency in food production, food security, economic and political stability in the region. The ECOWAS Protocol "Relating to the Regulation on Transhumance Between ECOWAS Member States 1998 and the ECOWAS Regulation on Transhumance Between ECOWAS Member States 2003 seek to regulate transhumance by ensuring that herd movements are regulated and take place along defined corridors allowed by member states.

ECOWAS had also developed Strategic Action Plan for Livestock in West Africa to develop and transform the sector. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations had also developed an Action Plan for Transhumance Livestock Breeding in West Africa. There are also other interventions and support by other agencies and development. Some of these interventions are already on board and some are about taking off. If properly implemented these interventions will significantly reduce conflicts between Farmers and Grazers, enhance pastoralism and bring about economic, ecological and political stability in not only Nigeria but in sub-saharan Africa.

There is need to integrate the traditional stock routes used by different pastoralist clans, customary transhumance corridors and grazing areas in the Action Plans and interventions by governments and development partners. There should be good mechanism for stakeholder participation in the transhumance process and an early warning system in event of change in climatic cycles, conflict eruption and disease outbreak that will necessitate sudden migration of herds and movements.

On the whole my submission on resolving conflicts and insecurity between farmers and pastoralist requires change of attitude by policy makers. Government should put up structures to address development challenges in the livestock sector by supporting it as its crop producing counterparts. The proliferation of arms and ammunitions had led to cattle rustling and theft, banditry and mercenary works. This has to be curbed. The structures put up by government in the ecological and environmental policies to address desert encroachment have not factored in Pastoralist needs. This needs to be addressed.

There is need to re-orient media perceptions of pastoralist as drivers of conflicts to that of pastoralist as victims of conflicts also. Dialogue mechanism amongst farmers/sedentary groups and pastoralist need to be build and enhanced. Intra-Pastoralist conflicts and cattle rustling need to be addressed. Pastoralists CSOs need to be strengthened to enable them adequately represent their constituents and address the issues. Government can also have a formal and informal way addressing the challenges. As it is now Pastoralist CSOs seem overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenges.

The Regional and International interventions plans in Transhumance livestock sector do not carry on board National policies. This could be due to the fact that National bureaucracies are slow to act. There absolute need to leverage on the ECOWAS and FAO Action plans. We also need address education, transformation of the livestock sector and addressing joblessness and youth unemployment amongst others.

This contribution is by no means a template for solving the problems. The problem is as old as history itself. But the world being what it is today, both farmers and pastoralist cannot afford to be at each other's throat. The challenges facing them are too numerous. They need to come together to overcome and face the challenges. As the saying goes, the strength of the weak is in their unity..