An Alternative Perspective to Understanding Climate Change-Induced Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract
Hazardous socioeconomic activities on environmental resources among various contenders pose the threat of desertification that inevitably exacerbates conflict between the farmers and herdsmen with devastating effects. Abundant literature analyzed the cause and nature of farmers–herdsmen conflict substantial of which focused on widespread social tension and political instability, whereas inadequate literature continue to remain an inherent characteristic of climate change as catalyst reinforcing farmers-herders conflict. The magnitude, recurrence and escalation of the farmers–herders conflict recently inspired dialectical delusion that the conflict will be unending so long the climate change persists. Employing literature review, this paper infer that threat of environmental degradation (desertification) reinforce competition for scarce resources (fertile soil and water) and consequently led to incessant violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen. Persistent of farmers-herders conflict cannot be debased from misconstruing the conflict as ethnic and religious clash, and the inability of the major actors/stakeholders including the government and media houses to adopt adequate, robust, sustainable and all inclusive measures to mitigate the conflict. Some of the plausible solutions to achieve sustainable peace and security include reconstruction of all-inclusive framework to deal with the climate change induced conflict, building trust between stakeholders, setting up of administrative mechanism for peace and conflict resolution, capacity building training on modern system of agricultural practice and curtailing the influx of illegal small firearms and light weapons; and illegal migrants.
Introduction

Peace, security and harmonious coexistence are the hallmarks for any meaningful development throughout the history of human existence. However conflict of varying scale, magnitude and causes impedes the desire for man to promote the needed atmosphere for development to thrive. Agricultural production (farms and livestock) utilizing environmental resources that revolve around soil fertility and water has been the mainstream socio-economic activities of vast majority of Nigerian population. Aside others development drives such as urbanization, modernization, etc. which have adverse effect on both farm lands and grazing reserves; land and water have been the contending environmental resources among major actors notably farmers and herdsmen. Historical antecedent of colonization, de-colonization including post-independence struggle for political and economic resource control and supremacy brought about changes in the economic, social and political structure that significantly distorted the way in which scarcely environmental resources (land and water) are managed. Farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria is as long as the existence of agriculture that could be traced to pre-colonial epoch.

Increasing spade of hazardous socioeconomic activities on environmental resources (fertile soil and water) among various contenders over long period of time often pose the threat of desertification that inevitably exacerbates conflict between the farmers and herdsmen with devastating effect of loss of lives, wanton destruction of property and perpetual animosity and distrust. It is anticipated that the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events raised by climate change will reinforce migration (Reuveny, 2007). The precarious situation ensued the phenomena deadlock for decades in Nigeria nonetheless, numerous efforts put in place to address the imbroglio. Moreover, given the magnitude, recurrence and escalation of the farmers–herders conflict recently, conjectural delusion that the conflict will be unending so long climate change continue to persist is created. In addition, available literature analyzing the cause and nature of farmers–herdsmen conflict in Nigeria substantially focused on widespread social tension and political instability,
whereas little thought is accorded to understand the impacts of climate change (desertification, drought, famine) on socio-economic activities (scarcity and competition) as catalyst reinforcing migration, tension and conflict between the farmers and herders. This paper is aimed at reviewing extant literature to highlight the relationships between climate change (desertification, drought, famine), socio-economic activities (scarcity and competition) as catalyst reinforcing migration and conflict in the context of Nigeria with a view to postulate alternative view, understand why the conflict continue to persist and identify plausible solutions. The passion to deeply investigate the remote causes of the farmers-herdsmen conflict and why the conflict continue to persist is worthwhile considering the overall national security and development.

**Multi-Dimensional Processes of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict with Environmental Implications**

Recently, the concept of security has undergone a paradigm shift from the narrowly militaristic perspective of threat, vulnerability and response, to a multidimensional, holistic approach (Dabelko, Lonergan, & Matthew, 1999). This, the continuously evolving concept of security integrates into its fold, other important variables such as socioeconomic and environmental factors that make it congruent with its complex and dynamic nature. Central to this idea for instance, is Lonergan, Gustavson and Carter (2000) Index of Human Insecurity (IHI) that established intertwined nexus between human activities and environmental changes, thus conceiving security beyond neutralizing the conventional military threat to territorial integrity and political independence, to a nonconventional threats that revolves around resources scarcity, population growth, environmental degradation, soil degradation, water pollution, human right abuse, loss of biodiversity along with other economic, social and institutional factors among other wide range of factors.

**Climate Change**

Literally ‘climate change’ connotes to a long-term change in the distribution of weather patterns (e.g. temperature, rainfall, storm, rivers, humidity, atmospheric pressure, and other meteorological elements) in a given region over a period of time: decades to millions years (Ishaq-ur Rahman, 2013). Multitude layers of stakeholders have ascribed modern undertone to climate change; nevertheless, throughout the history, change in climate have been a recurrent issues long before linking its alteration to human activity (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate
Climate change has differently been defined. Substantial number of the definitions emphasized various aspects of its cause. For instance, IPCC defined climate changes as variability in the state of the climate over time caused by bio-geographical (natural variability) and human activities. Furthermore, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] (1994) defined climate change as “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods”. Centrality of adverse human activities such as burning fossil fuel, deforestation etc. being the key factors that likely cause climate change of some sort is evident in the definitions. Climate change is a reality, which countries of the world including Nigeria are becoming increasingly awaken to manage. Reuveny (2007) urged that the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events induced by climate change would raise the profile of environmental migration from the less privileged society to areas of higher opportunities.

Understanding the Role of Scarcity in Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict
Scarcity plays a central role in the interrelationship between natural resource and security issues. The postulation brings the relevance of Rees’ (1991) four (4) typology of scarcity in relation to conflict over resources, thus: physical scarcity, geopolitical scarcity, socio-economic scarcity, and environmental scarcity. The environmental scarcity entails that renewable resources such as water, fertile soil that have previously been regarded as abundant are gradually becoming scarce due the failure of man to adopt sustainable methods of management thereby posing the threat of desertification, drought, etc. Empirical evidence demonstrates that environmentally-induced migration and conflict from scarcely environmental resource (water and fertile soil) will increasingly become recurrent given the fact that non-renewable resources including technological innovation and the market have provide insignificant substitute for the renewable resources (Dabelko et al., 1999). Trajectories in which human may increase environmental scarcity over renewable resources (water and soil fertility) include decreased quality and quantity of environmental resource through degradation at rates higher than the natural restoration of stocks (supply-induced scarcity); increased population growth or per capita consumption (demand induced scarcity); and unequal resource access (structural scarcity) (Homer-Dixon, 1991). In the light of this, the interplay between these resources, generating environmental scarcity and their interaction produces the phenomena of resource acquisition and ecological degradation or
what Homer-Dixon (1994) called resource capture and ecological marginalization. Built upon this entangled relations, monumental tension between major actors of environmental resources, mainly farmers and herders cannot be ruled out.

**Understanding the Relationships between Climate Change, Scarcity, Environmental Migration and Farmers-Herders Conflict**

Historically, during the time of pre twentieth century, the herders were known for their traditional occupation of pasturing around savanna of Sahel region of the north (Aremu & Abraham, 2018). IPCC (2001) and Shettima and Tar (2008) acknowledged that West African Sahelian drought and famine of 1960s and 1970s and the subsequent climate change in the region are vital phenomenon in understanding the relationships between climate change, migration of Fulani herders; the resultant pressure on the land resource and conflict between farmers and herders. Encroachment and or annexation of grazing routes due to urbanization, modernization and farming activities is another variable factored in the ensuing conflict between farmers and herders (Adeoye, 2017; CGR, 2018). In a similar disposition, the Special Report of United States Institute of Peace forecasted the likelihood for increasing fluctuation of Nigeria’s climate (temperature, rainfall, etc.) throughout the twenty-first century and that poor adaptive responses to these shifts could precipitate violent conflict in some areas of the country (Sayne, 2011).

Concern about the rise of environmental migrants, three decades ago, the then director of the United Nations Environment Programme projected the likely of environmental refugees to reach around 50 million (Bates, 2002). Excessive heat weather condition and decrease in precipitation index in northern Nigeria exposes the region to the brink of desertification; water and land scarcity; the impact that predisposed almost two-thirds of the north western and eastern states to the risk of becoming desert or semi desert (Aremu & Abraham, 2018). As the scarcity of pasture and water for cattle looms and abundant only at different times of the year in different places, seasonal migration of the herders and their herds become the inevitable option (Agyemang, 2017).

Consequent upon the migration trend, recent time marked a sharp increase in the incident of violent conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria (Olaniyan, Francis, & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015; Shettima & Tar, 2008). The phenomenon is evidently attributed to factors such as climate change (desertification) which compelled massive migration of herdsmen across north central and southern part of Nigeria in search of pasture and water for their herds (Abass, 2012; Aremu &
Abraham, 2018). The increase in the movement of herdsmen and their cattle increased in the population of environmental migrants, which Worldometers (2019) put at 51.9% increase in the past 6 decades. Climate change-induced migration of herders to the southern region in the quest for pasture and water is either temporary or permanently terminates in the communities of farmers who develop phobia of the presence of climate refugees that their crops will be destroyed (Aremu & Abraham, 2018). Succinctly put, the large scale movement of both herdsmen and their animals is perceived as posing grave threat by their codependent, farmers who translate the trend as an attempt by the herdsmen to invade their farmlands or as a sort of invasion of their livelihood (Abbass, 2012). Consequently, not only the scenario increased pressure on the already scarcely competitive land resources under threat of desertification but also caused significant upsurge in the interest on the land usage that often have potential for violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen. This is coupled with the reality that the climate change also wrecked the farmers in the area who struggle with decline in yields because of the decrease in soil fertility as a result of poor management; application of toxic chemicals and effect of urbanization that necessitate them to opt for land shift rotation and falling in quest for enhanced farm outputs (see Aremu & Abraham, 2018; Tirado, 2006). This significant increases in the interest on the land usage between the two groups in most cases deteriorate into violence. Although not all the times, Reuveny (2007) argued that environmental migration causes violent conflict especially in less privileged communities where environmental resources is the primary sources of livelihood.

Reuveny (2007) explained that recurrence of environment conflict is imminent where certain conditions are manifest thus i) underdevelopment and dependence on environmental resources for livelihood, ii) resource scarcity iii) resident-migrant motivated ethno-religious tension and iv) unholy competition over scarce resources. Blench (2001) Conformed the idea that factors such as religious differences, competition over socioeconomic and environmental factors accelerate tension between farmers and herdsmen that often result into violence. Meddling separately or combinations of these factors in dealing with climate induced migration and conflict makes it complicated let alone manage it in a sustainable manner. Conforming, Tirado (2006) concludes that persistent conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the Sahel region are motivated by social, economic and political tensions Regrettably, the incessant violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen that is of climate change-engineered (e.g. desertification, migration, blockage/annexation of cattle route) and the consequent struggle over control of
resources (land and water) most often transformed into communal clashes that is mischievously misinterpreted by media houses and other conflict entrepreneurs as ethnic and religious fights between Christian farmers and Muslim Fulani herdsmen (Adamu & Ben, 2017; Aremu & Abraham, 2018). The conflict entrepreneurs find it expediently easier to explore fragile socioeconomic conditions and political structure to fuel distrust and hatred among the affected groups (Frerks, 2007).

Conclusion
This study reviewed extant literature highlighting the causes of the farmers-herders conflict. From the viewpoint highlighted in this paper, the threat to security posed by farmer-herder conflicts is better understood from the perspective of the climate change, migration and competition over scarce resources than militaristic perspective. As the prime instigators that precipitate environmental migration and conflict between farmers and herdsmen are identified beyond the traditional myopic military sentiment, understanding this is expediently important for all the stakeholders to play their roles diligently. It is noteworthy that farmers-herders competition for scarce resources under the threat of desertification is the prime factor behind the incessant violent conflict between the two groups.

It is pertinent to note that persistent of farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria that are often misconstrued as ethnic and religious clashes cannot be debased from the inability of the major stakeholders particularly the government and media houses to adopt robust, sustainable and all inclusive measures adequate to mitigate the immediate and remote enablers of the conflict. The unfortunate situation culminates into barrel of attacks and reprisal attacks that almost turned a number of communities into perpetual theater of war. Failure to take adequate mitigating measures against environmental migration and assuming that the situation will naturally sort out by itself are prime burners that will continue to escalate the climate change induced migration and conflict with very daring cost of loss of lives and destructions of property (Reuveny, 2007). Whereas the government implicitly lacks the genuine political will to decisively and fairly deal with the situation, perhaps for political reasons, media coverage of the issue seemed bias, manipulating the entire scenario in favor of farmers while placing the Fulani herdsmen at the disadvantaged position leaving them without alternative voice. “While government’s body language seems like it approves of the killing of herdsmen, media reportage, too, has made the situation look like only the farmers suffer in this climate-induced conflict” (Aremu & Abraham, 2018, p 9), and even some researchers fall into the trap. Obviously, multitude of actors are key to
auspicious resolution of the environmental and human security challenges and hence the need for all the actors to strengthen the bond of relations between themselves and with their ecological environment that support their livelihood through strengthening their values, knowledge, technologies and institutions (Carrew-Reid, Prescott-Allen, Bass, & Dalal-Clayton, 1994).

Recommendations and Policy Implications
Of all the available plausible solutions proposed by the scholars, Reuveny (2007) dissuades the proposition that climate change-induced migration is exclusive problem of less developed societies, stressing that when the problems persists, policies directed at restricting environmental migrants and related policies would eventually failed. In this sense, if caution is not applied, treating the problem as an isolated phenomenon using harsh policies may breed hostilities and foster atmosphere for terrorism to thrive. To respond to the climat changed induced herders–farmers’ conflicts to ensure sustainable resolution, there is need to reconstruct all inclusive framework to the climate change induced migration and conflict. At the very base is dislodgement of years of mutual suspicion and distrust among the wary parties, while gear efforts towards building trust between them. The Government, media houses, traditional institutions, arbitrators and other third parties must be epitome of justice, fairness and trustworthy, the credential required for building successful reconciliation.
Setting up of administrative mechanism for peace and conflict resolution that facilitate effective engagement of farmers, herders and other stakeholders at all levels to dialogue issues related to climate change mitigation, common means of sharing land resources, reconciliation, would be a headway in reducing tension that may arise from the scarcity of environmental resources as well as ensure peaceful cohabitation (see Egbuta, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017).
Juxtapose the local treatment to climate change with the global practice, capacity building training of the farmers and herders on modern system of agricultural practice such as climate-smart agriculture that sustains both crop farming and animal breeding in addition to being environmentally friendly in view of the pressures of climate change is worthwhile (Egbuta, 2018).
From the institutional and policy frames, existing river basin authorities and agricultural research institutes need to be reinvigorated, strengthened and made functional to among others, make available, adequate water, pasture fertile soil; encourage adoption of diversified and improved crops, farming, silage and forage, and their management as well as other improved agricultural practices (see
Building Nigeria’s Response to Climate Change [BNRCC], 2011). Complementary, revitalization of moribund cattle routes, grazing reserves and ranches as well as construction of new ones where required will facilitate peaceful coexistence and neutralize the imbroglio (Ajibefun, 2018; Asogwa & Okafor, 2016).

On the security front, an effective security architecture should be deployed to curtail the influx of illegal small firearms and light weapons; and illegal migrants into the country while community policing models such as neighborhood watch, early warning mechanism to crisis, communal based arbitration strategies need to be upheld to entrench and sustain peace and harmony in the rural communities (see Awotokun, Nwozor, & Shola, 2020).

Reference


