

Violent Strangers at Our Gate: Global Climate Change, Conflict and Violent Crime among Farmers/Herders in Nigeria

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Abstract: Nigeria has increasingly become a theatre of violent conflicts especially that of herders and farmers with spiralling toll on human lives and property. This conflict occasioned largely by global climatic changes that has affected the environmental resources renewability that sustain human beings. The perennial herders and farmers conflicts have attracted large scholarly researches. Despite this scholarly research outcomes, there is a notable research gap on climate change and violent crime. This empirical study aims to address this gap. The objectives include to examine the link between climate change and the recurring conflicts as well as to interrogate how climate change induced conflicts result in violent crime in Nigeria. The Eco-violence theory guided the study. The study employed content analysis to analyse the nexuses between climate change, conflict and violent crimes. The findings revealed that changes in the global environmental composition – drought, desertification, reduction in rainfall, flooding, erosion, reduced land for farming and grazing- are responsible for environmental resource-scarcity that result in the skirmishes between herders and farmers. The study also found that this conflict has overtime assumed violent dimension which has led to the loss of lives and destruction of property. The violence is further exacerbated by the deployment of firearms by the herders. The recommendations include. The study recommends the supply of grasses to herders in their homes at a subsidized rate through a public/private partnership, as this will reduce the migration of herders from far north down south, and also reduce incidences of violent conflict and violent crimes.

Keywords: Climate change, Conflict, Crime, Farmers, Herders, Violent Crime.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the earth is a combination of complex interaction of the atmosphere, ocean and water, land surface, and living organism warmed by the sun, and subject to gradual natural changes in time and space (Mabogunje, 2006, Emmanuel, 2010). In recent time, however, there has been an increasing alteration of the earth's climate by anthropogenic forces that have surpassed centuries of natural climatic changes (Mabogunje, 2006; Bassey, 2012 and Nwodin, 2022). Climate change is one change that is inevitable; it is global in nature, and impacts negatively on the developed, as well as, developing countries alike. The challenges posed by the phenomenon appear to threaten every aspect of human social existence- from economy to politics, to health and to culture. With events around the world's environment, it is evident that climate change is adversely affecting human lives tremendously, as the capacity of the earth to support and sustain human material needs are affected by the change in climate.

As a matter of fact, the Pentagon, a US think-Tank, while presenting a weather report in 2004, alarmed the then US president, George Bush, that "climate change will destroy us" (Webbs, 2007:59). The Nigerian National Policy on Climate Change (NCCP, 2021-2030:4) also acknowledged the danger posed by climate change as a "complex environmental problem because of its long-term uncertain time-frame, scales of occurrence, differential impacts and vulnerabilities". This situation has been responsible for the intense and irreversible depletion of life-supporting and sustaining environmental resources, such as land, vegetation and water, among others, leading to forceful use of these

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dwindling environmental resources by strangers, which in turn results in incessant resource-induced conflicts and violent crimes in recent time. Thus, as Weston (2009) observed the problem, noting that climate change triggers social change, conflicts and instability especially in West Africa with severe weather conditions heightened by droughts and floods. The inability of the earth resources to sustain human material needs and trigger social conflicts as a result of climate change is evident in the recurring conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria and in other parts of Africa.

These climate change-induced conflict between herders and farmers have lately become persistent and pervasive, assuming violent proportion. These conflict, to say the least, have escalated to become not only violent, but have led to the loss of lives and the wanton destruction of property. Apart these losses associated with these conflicts, they have also been responsible for the displacement of some victims and sacking of communities. In fact, as the Internal Crisis Group (ICG, 2017) had noted, the herdsmen/farmers conflicts have not only been violent and indiscriminate, but also destructive in nature, leading to humanitarian crisis. These conflicts, as noted earlier on, are not only peculiar to Nigeria alone, but also occur in such other countries as Togo, Tanzania, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Ethiopia, among others African countries. In Nigeria, of course, there is no region that has not experienced these climate change-induced conflicts that are being exacerbated by shortage of vegetation, land disputes, poverty, identity politics and the proliferation of illegal arms (Usman, 2019).

As a matter of fact, because of the huge impact of climate change on humans and vegetations alike, a lot of attention has been given to it by scholars and organizations. The United Nation Climate Action (2020) defined climate change as a long term shift in temperature and weather patterns that is natural, due to changes in sun's activity or other natural changes and mainly through human activities that arise due to the burning of fossil fuel like coal and gas. In fact, in a brief description, Schuurmans, (2021) summarized the phenomenon as the heightened temperature across numerous worlds. International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) (2018) as well, captured this peculiar situation as a change in the state of the climate that can be identified by changes in the mean and or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. As observed by United Nation Climate Action (2020), climate change is attributed to sundry causes, but the main cause of this global climatic changes is rooted in the negative relation between humans and the environment. The International Bar Association (2014:34) confirmed this position when they averred that this change is triggered more by those with the "largest carbon footprints, living and working in the world's wealthier regions, - and, by virtue of their wealth and/ or access to resources, most insulated from it." And of course, commenting on the relative situation from it, the United Nations Development Programme (2009) maintained that the impact of climate change, though global in nature, is borne most by the developing countries of the world. That is to say, because of their advanced technology, the developed countries are better insulated from the impacts.

Across the globe, climate change has received an unprecedented attention from scientists, geographers, sociologists, criminologists, policy makers, and governments at the national and the international levels as a result of its far-reaching impacts on individuals, societies and nations as one of the greatest human and development issues. Indeed, the truth is that global climatic changes are a defining challenge to human society. And because of this attention given, researchers have tried to understand and explain the causes and consequences of climate change as a change in the composition of the world's environment.

Global climatic environmental changes and their attendant consequences are multi-faceted in nature, thus warranting multidisciplinary interrogation of the phenomenon. In Nigeria, for instance, Okumadewa (2008) examined the nexus between climate change and poverty, and argued that the outcome of climate change is the degradation of or the depletion of environmental resources which many people depend on for survival. The study found that climate change is a causal factor in the high level of poverty in the country and it worsens the prospect for poverty alleviation. Also, in their separate studies, Okolie and Okoye (2014) and Ekpenyong and Titus (2019) researched on climate change and human security. These studies examined the remote and immediate causes of climate change. The findings from these research revealed that human security has been affected in no mean way by the phenomenon of climate changes. In fact, Ekpenyong and Titus's (2019) findings further showed that the change in climatic condition is responsible for the recurring flood in Bayelsa State.

Also, Smah (2016) interrogated climate change induced migration as the trigger for organised violent conflicts in West Africa. The study examined the human dimension of climate change and the impact of the resultant changes on humanitarian crises. The findings of this study revealed that climate change is responsible for social conflicts, displacement and such other disasters and emergencies in Africa. The study thus recommends a policy framework that will halt desertification, deforestation and greenhouse gas emission. In a related endeavour, Lanshima, Ameh and Anawo (2019) studied violent crime and climate change in Middle Belt, and Northern Nigeria. The study reveal that there is a link between criminal violence and climate change.

However, in spite of these efforts, a critical appraisal of scholarly works on climate change and its deleterious consequences in Nigeria has revealed that there is a gap in literature on climate change, conflict and violent crimes, and it is this gap which this work intends to fill. The objective of this work therefore are to examine the link between climate change and the recurring conflicts and how climate change-induced conflicts result in violent crimes in Nigeria. This has become very necessary owing to the continually recurring conflicts between the farmers and herders in Nigeria, especially in the Middle Belt region, and lately, in some states in the South-south and South-east regions of the country. More often than not, these conflict have always assumed a violent dimensions with resultant losses of lives and property.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories are explanatory tools for the understanding and the explanation social phenomena. In this way, the Eco-violence theory was adopted to elucidate the nexuses between climate change, conflict and violent crime.

The Eco-violence was propounded by Homer-Dixion in 1999. The theory helps to explain the link between scarce environmental resources and violent conflicts. The thrust of this theory is that the competition emanating from the available environmental resources results in violent conflicts especially when there are no alternatives to the available scarce resources.

Homer-Dixion (1999) noted that there are three types of environmental resources scarcity. These, he named as supply-induced scarcity, demand-induced scarcity and structural scarcity. The supply-induced scarcity is the scarcity that results from the degradation of or the depletion of the environmental resources in such a way that what was once in abundance has become degraded or depleted to the point where it as now scarce. Then, the demand-induced scarcity is the scarcity that occurs when there is an increase in the population that depends on the available resources. When there is an increase in population without a corresponding increase in the environmental resource, there would be demand-induced scarcity. Lastly, structural scarcity, according to Homer-Dixion (1999), would occur when the available scarce resources are concentrated in the hands of some few privileged individuals in such a way that the majority of the people are denied access to it. This situation, according Aderayo (2018:150) leads to “resource capture and ecological marginalization, which brings about violent conflicts among different groups.”

A deeper interrogation of the proposition of the Eco-violence theory vis-a-vis the ravaging impact of the climate change on the vegetation of the Savana region would reveal that there will be supply-induced scarcity. This form of scarcity, no doubt, has resulted in the movement of the herders to areas where they can find pasture for their herds. The movement, when not properly conducted with the farmers, often leads to conflicts.

III. CLIMATE CHANGE AND SOCIETY

Global climatic change is the change in the climatic composition of the earth which arises as a result of the complex and un-symbiotic interaction between man and nature (environment). It is the change that comes mainly from the direct, as well as, the indirect activities of human beings that alter the balance in the global atmosphere and this leads to an observable variability in the climate over a long period of time (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992; Okolie and Okoye, 2014).

Climate change has increasingly become one of the worlds most shared problems. This is because no part of the globe is spared of its effect on the environment and human security. It is thus one of the most pressing challenges across the globe in the 21st century with threats that are multidimensional, invisible, unpredictable and transcend national borders (Eze, 2010). It is a powerful force that undermines the capacity of the environment in no mean way with deleterious consequence on human beings.

As a matter of grave worry, the Stern Report on the Economics of Climate Change (2006) which is noted to be the most comprehensive report on the effects of climate change showed that that climate change affects the environment, food security, human health, natural resources, economic activities and infrastructure/infrastructural development. In fact, it threatens the basic elements on which human sustenance depends. The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) also reporting on the vulnerability of regions of the world to the impact of climate change noted that the African Region will experience the impact the most and that this would lead to varying forms of conflicts.

And of course, obviously most notable conflicts in African countries like Chad, Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania, and Nigeria, among other countries, have been linked to the problem of climate change (Usman, 2019). Adeoti and Ajibade (2008), Ekpenyong and Titus (2019) and Nwodim (2023) also observed that that climate change has a damaging consequences on the natural environment and the socio-economic wellbeing of Africa, and indeed, Nigeria. Nigeria, as it could be attested to, is one of the worst hits as a result of the desertification being

experienced in the northern region, which has necessitated the movement of herders and their herds southwards, occasioning conflicts upon conflicts.

Apart from the cases of socio-economic and conflictual issues emanating from climate change, there are other areas affected by it. One of such important areas is food security. This is because the climate or weather condition plays very important role in determining agricultural outputs to a very large extent. The report by Nigeria's First National Communication (NFNC, 2003) noted that there exist an observable rise in temperature of 2 C to 3C per decade in the various ecological zones, characterized by persistent drought since 1960s. This rise in temperature either results in less or high rain fall. And as Gwary (2008) and Ugwuanyi (2010) argued, high temperature, especially during planting season affects the capacity of seeds to develop and produce optimally, for some crops, like maize, wheat, soybeans, among others crops. In areas experiencing drought, occasioned by less rainfall crop yields are affected. For instance, the absence of rainfall in the northern part of Nigeria, makes plants to be exposed to heat stress which in turn, reduces the yielding capacity of seeds or plants (Lebari and Onuegbu, 2019). Conversely, climate change leads to high level of rainfall and this also affects crop yields adversely. Excessive rainfall have been known to lead to flooding in some parts of the country which either destroys crops or induces early harvest without the crops being left to mature (Lebari and Onuegbu, 2019, Oseghale and Aika, 2022). Indeed, in a report of the Food and Agricultural Organization of 2007, as cited in Gwary (2008) it was indicated that agricultural production and food security in Africa will be seriously under the stress as a result of climate change.

Climate change has also been known for manifesting adverse effects on human health. As a matter of fact, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), in a recent report noted that climate change is the single biggest source of health threat plaguing humans across the globe. This is because it increases the severity of the weather conditions, causing droughts, flooding and wind storms that exacerbate human health problems. According to Di Napoli, McGushin and Romanello (2022), this climate induced-health challenges occur from the direct changes resulting from temperature precipitation and body exposures to heat waves, floods, droughts and wildfires. The US Global Climate Research Program (USGCRP, 2016) also observed that health challenges resulting from climate change are divers in nature. This could be in form of vector borne diseases, water-related illnesses, mental health-related or food safety and nutrition health issues. The health-related challenges caused by climate change mostly affects nations with weak health system like Nigeria. According to (WHO, 2021), climate change affects the social and environmental determinants of health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient and secure shelter, and nations with weak health system will be worse hit from climate change impact.

IV. CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: THE FARMERS AND HERDERS EXPERIENCE

Conflict has been described as an unavoidable aspect of human social existence across the globe (Agwanwo and Oladejo, 2019). It has been acknowledged that the geographical location, called Nigeria, has been a theatre of various forms of conflicts since 1960 till date. However, of particular interest here are the conflicts between farmers and herders. For a long time in Nigeria, farmers and herders have been enmeshed in a circle of conflicts. These conflicts are largely a climate change induced one. This is mainly because the conflicts are linked to the scarcity of environmental resources, occasioned by weather variation conditions. Smah (2016) affirmed this, when he declared that the recurring nature of the conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria owe its pedigree to climate change.

The farmers and herders conflicts are basically conflicts that result from the inadequacy of environmental resources. The situation, as pointed out earlier, is caused mainly by impact of the climate on the environment which has reduced the capacity of the environment to sustain these social categories (farmers and herders) that depend solely on the earth's surface for their life-support, either for themselves or for their herds. The persistent nature of these conflicts has brought about losses to both parties in conflict. It in this respect that Homer-Dixon (2007) noted that Nigeria will be one of the countries that will be affected by environmentally induced national and international security problems.

The incessant manifestation of conflicts over green vegetation by herdsmen against farmers is accentuated by the negative impact of climate in the Sahel region (Sahara desert) which has continued to experience drought, desertification and deforestation. The worsening condition of this drought-prone region is related to the reduction in rainfall and inflow of water which as a result to reduction in grazing land for herds. This unfavourable environmental condition in some Northern part of Nigeria has been acknowledged to be the major reason why herders are compelled to migrate southwards in search for land full of grazing pastures for their herds. Confirming this view, Nwanegbo, Umara and Ali (2017) stated that the dryness and desert encroachment occasioned by climate change in the North is primarily responsible for the movement of Fulani herdsmen southward.

Okolie and Nnamani (2017) attesting to this movement of the herdsmen southward for the purpose of securing pasture for their herds also averred that the movement usually coincides with the growing season of farmers crops. The incursion of the herders with their herds into farmlands with the consequent destruction of farmers' crops that follows from such incursion have always been met with resistance. The resistance to this trespass has largely been the source of

conflict. In fact, Okoli and Atelhe (2014) also noted that the resistance from the incursion of the herdsmen usually progresses from rudimentary skirmishes to an organized armed confrontations that have frequently led to the losses of lives and property from both parties.

However, apart from the fact that climate change appears to have served as the main precursor to the skirmishes between farmers and herders in recent times in Nigeria, these conflicts are further driven by identity politics. Indeed, Hagg and Kagwanja (2007), and Para-Mallam (2011) revealed this aspect of cause of these conflicts when they noted that identity politics constitute the undertone for communal violence and armed struggles, the world over, especially in Africa where there are national fragmentations based on ethnicity and cultural line/divide. The driving force behind identity politics is the propensity to scramble for scarce resources, especially in Africa where colonial balkanization, fuels the jostling for power and state resources, along ethnic lines. With respect to farmers and herders conflicts, land ownership as an essential resources for their survival, is increasingly becoming scarce for both parties (farmers and herders). This is as a result of climate change that has brought about drought, desertification, and reduction in rainfall thereby increasing the violent competition for the available land resources (Olumba, Nwosu, Okpaleke and okoli, 2022).

Aside from the reasons above, another subtle cause of the farmers/herders conflicts is the non-implementation of Land Use Act of 1978 in Nigeria. In fact, even though climate change has in part created this competition for land resources dispute in Nigeria, the farmers and herders conflict could also be blamed on the non-implementation of the 1978 Land Use Act. This Act, without any reservation, vested in the Governors of the state in Nigeria the power to allocate land for private and public use. If this Act were enforced in Nigeria, the encroachment of, and the destruction of farm crops; or the usurpation of farmers land by herders would not have the usual occurrences in the country.

V. CLIMATE CHANGE INDUCED-CONFLICTS AND VIOLENT CRIMES AMONG FARMERS AND HERDERS

Crime constitute one of the most perturbing social problems confronting human society across the globe; and they manifest in various forms with deleterious consequences. In fact, nations now vigorously contend with high and increasing incidences of crime such as armed banditry, armed robbery, kidnap, sex trafficking, terrorism, ritual killings, and recently, violent crimes resulting from skirmishes between herders and farmers conflict. The conflicts between farmers and herders have, more often than not, generated so much empirical and theoretical outcome.

The challenge of climate change with its induced-conflicts have metamorphosed into various forms of crimes, including violent crime in recent time. Mamah and Ndujihe (2016) averred that herdsmen activities have led to the death of about 758 Nigerians including the massacre of people in Aguta, Benue state, and Nimbo Ukpabi in Enugu State. Prior to these killings by the herdsmen in these States mentioned above, Egbeadi (2016) noted that between 2010 and 2013, the herdsmen via various coordinated attacks, killed over 80 persons within the said period. Also, in 2014 alone, herdsmen deadly attacks in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Katsina States, Nigeria, has resulted in the death of 1,229 persons, with many others sustaining injuries (Agwanwo and Oladejo, 2019; Lanshima, Ameh and Anawo, 2019, Usman, 2019 and Osah and Balogun, 2020).

Since the beginning of herdsmen-farmers conflicts with the concomitant criminal violence in Nigeria, Benue Farmers have experienced the most cases of death and destruction as noted by Agwanwo and Oladejo (2019: 50-53). For instance, in February 2013, criminal herdsmen coordinated an attack that allegedly led to the murder of 186 people and the burning of houses and other property in Aguta Local Government Area of Benue State. In April 2013, 10 farmers were killed in an attack on Mbasenge community in Gunma LGA by suspected killer herdsmen. In the same Guma LGA in July 2013, 20 people were killed in a conflict between Tiv farmers and herdsmen at Nzorov. Between 21-22 February 2014, killer herdsmen allegedly attacked Gwer West LGA which led to the death of 35 persons; the displacement of about 80,000 people and the sacking of 6 Council Wards in the State. In March 2014, 25 were killed and over 50 injured by herdsmen said to be wielding sophisticated weapons in Gbajimba, Guma LGA. On the 15th of March, 2015 herdsmen attacked in Egba village in Aguta LGA, killing over 90 locals, including women and children. On May 24, 2015, over 100 were killed in an attack on villages, and in internally displaced persons camp (IDP) at Ukura, Gafa Per and Tse-Gusa, Logo LGA. On February 29, 2016 over 500 people were killed and 700 displaced in another attack on Aguta by killer herdsmen.

Given the recurring mayhem unleashed on Benue State farmers by killer herdsmen, it is expected that the herdsmen would have relented. But the situation has remained the same with killing going on unabated. This has made them the worse hit in relation to farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria. However, as noted earlier, other part of the country are not exempted from herdsmen violent conflicts with farmers. On January 15, 2013 in Nasarawa State, the violent conflict between herders and farmers over grazing land led to the death of 10 persons. Five days after, on January 20, another violence erupted that claimed the lives of 25 persons. On February 7, the clash between Fulani herdsmen and Eggon farmers in Nasarawa State, left a death toll of about 30 persons (Agwanwo and Oladejo, 2019; Lanshima, Ameh and Anawo, 2019, Usman, 2019 and Osah, Balogun, 2020 and Omotola, 2024).

Of course, the Plateau State experience is not any different. Plateau State has also been a scene of this mindless killings resulting from herdsmen/farmers violent conflicts. On March 20, the violent conflict between Fulani and Tarok farmer claimed 30 lives, and the destruction of some property. On March 28 2013, the confrontation between herdsmen and farmers in Riyon led to the death of 28 people. Also, on May 4 2013, herdsmen/farmers clash in Plateau State claimed the lives of 13 people.

The incessant clashes between herdsmen and farmers across the nation and the resultant death tolls and the loss of property have attracted the attention of many international organizations including Amnesty International. According to Amnesty International (2018), as cited in Usman (2019), within the last eight years, the Nigerian watch database recorded 615 violent deaths related to farmers-pastoralists conflict, most of which was violent in nature. A breakdown of this figure show 7 incidents in 2006, 9 in 2007, 6 in 2008, 13 in 2009, 9 in 2010, 15 in 2011, 17 in 2012, 27 in 2013, and 8 in 2014. Still based on the database above, we were further informed the number of deaths from the yearly violent conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. For instance, 22 deaths in 2006, 54 deaths in 2007, 31 deaths in 2008, 83 in 2009, 39 in 2010, 116 in 2011, 128 in 2012, 118 in 2013, 1,229 in 2014, 836 in 2015, 500 in 2016, 544 in 2017 and 168 in 2018. The death toll arising from the incessant violent clashes between herdsmen and farmers appears to be on the rise. Then, what seems to be of serious concern to the ordinary citizens of this nation is the inability of the state to prove her mettle as the institution vested with the use of legitimate violence.

Apart from the incessant clashes resulting in deaths and destructions of property in various communities and states embroiled in the climate induced-crisis, herdsmen have also engaged in the rape of women in host communities. According to Osimen, Uwa, Oyewole and Akinwunmi (2017), Fulani herdsmen have successively raped women (young and old) in their various host communities during their aggressive onslaught against farmers. The implications of this act can be far-reaching as this could expose the victims to health risk of sexually transmitted diseases and or engender to marital crisis; or engrave life-long traumatic experience on the minds of the victims of rape. This situation, no doubt, has exacerbated incidences of gender-based sexual violence in the country.

It has been acknowledged from the foregoing that the conflict between farmers and herders have led to serious fatalities with a toll on the lives and property of victims. However, some factors coalesce to produce this sad situation. These include the nature of weapon used in the conflict, the response of the parties in conflict, as well as, the duration of the conflict, (Omotola, 2020).

VI. CONCLUSION

The increasing phenomenon of climate change is now one of the factors responsible for the social, economic, health and cultural malaise in the world, and listed as the most obvious factor responsible for the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria. The farmer and herdsmen conflict have for some time now, become a recurring issue in Nigeria with the attendant challenges. This conflict have in recent times, assumed violent dimensions have claimed or continue to claim several lives and the destruction of property. It has been shown that these conflicts have cut short the lives of many innocent people, especially in states such as Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa. These conflicts could be said to have been further accentuated by identity politics and the proliferation of illegal arms.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should through a public/private partnership supply grasses at a subsidized rate to herders in their homes. This will enable herders feed their cattle in their homes and prevent the frequent clashes between farmers and herders.
2. The government should ensure strict enforcement of crazing laws in Nigeria, especially those establishing crazing routes for herders, and ensure violators are penalized severely.
3. The government should establish three tier peacebuilding initiatives, at the community, local and state levels to educate both the herders and farmers on the need for peaceful co-existence.
4. The government should make education compulsory particularly for youths in the far north of Nigeria. This will provide an alternative means of livelihood for the youths, as they become employable through the skills they have acquired through educational training.

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