



FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICT IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA: SEEKING FOR LIVELIHOOD OR LAND-GRABBING?

S. F Babalola (Ph.D.), D. O. Alabi (Ph.D.), U. I. Isaac, and S. O. Asuquo

*Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Osun State, Nigeria*

Abstract

This paper addresses the moral dimension of the ongoing Farmers/Herders conflict in Nigeria, which has received limited attention in previous scholarly works. While past studies have explored the origins, causes, and impact of the conflict, the ethical considerations underlying these crises have been largely overlooked. Therefore, this study aims to provide an ethical analysis of the conflicts between farmers and herders in Southwestern Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the research employs a thematic and descriptive approach to examine the causes and consequences of the farmers/herders conflict in the region. Data for the study were collected from primary sources, including interviews, as well as secondary sources such as personal experiences, newspapers, relevant textbooks, and international and local journal articles. The findings reveal that the primary motivation behind the Farmers/Herders conflict is the pursuit of livelihood by both the Fulani herders and Yoruba farmers. However, the study argues that the ethical challenge lies in reconciling the incessant killings, abuse, and displacement of Yoruba Farmers and Herders with the concept of seeking livelihood. In response to this challenge, the paper proposes the concept of seeking the right livelihood, which entails finding a means of earning a living without violating the principles of love and compassion. This concept is aligned with the principles of non-violence, non-stealing, and responsible sexual conduct. Finally, this paper contributes to the existing literature by examining the ethical dimensions of the Farmers/Herders conflict and offers insights into potential pathways for resolution and sustainable development

Keywords: Farmers/Herders, Conflict, Livelihood, Landgrabbling and Ethics

Word count: 243

1.0 Introduction

It is no longer a matter of controversy but a stark reality that the continuous conflict between farmers and herders has become a socio-ethical problem that has posed a serious threat to the security and unity of the Nigerian nation-state, particularly in south western Nigeria. Notably, existing studies on Farmers/Herders conflict in Nigeria have explored the social and economic impact of the conflict in the society, which has caused an adverse effect on the social and economic development of the society because of various undesirable incidences such as wanton killings, arson, wanton destruction of properties robbery, murder, kidnapping, rape and banditry etc. Scholars such as Aliyu (2018); Nzeh (2015); Omowumi (2018); & Doyin (2017) have examined the origin, possible causes, and impact of the Farmers/Herders conflict in Nigeria. However, little attention has been paid to the ethical consideration of this act between farmers and herdsman in selected communities in south western Nigeria.

In their efforts to explain this phenomenon, academics have offered a variety of explanations for why there is such a tense relationship between farmers and herders. Brimah and Olawole (2020) believe that because the Fulani settlers had difficulty accessing essential social services like power, schools, and healthcare facilities, they were forced to look for work in places with more favorable environmental conditions. An alternative perspective contends that the Fulani Bororo (cattle Fulani) are more interested in their nomadic and pastoralist culture than in fundamental social services like infrastructure, western education and healthcare. Their interest has been solely in seeking pastures for their cattle, wherever it is available.

Due to ongoing conflicts between Yoruba farmers and cattle herders, the peaceful coexistence between the host communities and the Fulani in Nigeria's southwest region has gradually deteriorated. Can it therefore be claimed that these conflicts were caused by disputes over access to land or means of basic survival? Or, can it be put forth that these clashes existed in contention for Livelihood or as a result of what could be termed land-grabbing? However, these opinions do not seem to ignore the reality that their nomadic status and the tense relationships with their host communities have made it harder for them to access infrastructure and maintain sustainable security in the study location.

These events, therefore, call for concern, especially from an ethical perspective. The idea of seeking Livelihood at the expense of destroying other people' Livelihood becomes problematic here, especially in a region of people with diverse religious and cultural practices. This scenario of multiple conflicts and killings negates the fundamental human right to life, which is to be protected.

Hence, this study seeks to unravel the Farmers and the Herders and determine the causes of this conflict; highlight the impact of the conflict; present an ethical critique of the conflict in affected communities in Southwestern Nigeria as well as suggest recommendations for possible management of the conflict. In line with the above objectives, this paper adopts a combination of thematic and descriptive approaches to the study, and thereby analyzes the causes and consequences of the farmers/herders conflict in southwestern Nigeria.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Cultural Determinism theory proposed by a postmodern anthropologist, Franz Boas, to place the study in a scholarly context. According to this theory, it is believed that the culture in which is raised determines who one is at the emotional and behavioral levels (Kevin, 2006). History has it that the Fulani from the onset were pastoralists and were keen to the nomadic way of life, a culture which they inherited from their forbears and passed down to the present generation. As pastoralists they moved from places to places in search of pastures for their cattle. The Yoruba agriculturalists, on the other hand, were keen to a sedentary culture which is entirely different from the pastoralists. A sedentary lifestyle is one in which people spend most, if not all, of the year in one area for long periods of time. The Yoruba farmers are settled agriculturists compared to the Fulani Herdsmen who are known for moving about to pasture their cattle. Bringing this theory to the context of Conflict between the Herders and Farmers, it could be stated that the culture in which the two parties are associated determines who they are. Both parties are raised in completely opposite cultures; as such there are bound to be clashes when they come in contact with each other.

It is imperative to note that this theory does not however, justify the sustained orgy of killings, land grabbing and wanton destruction which are not only continuously destroying Livelihood but also affecting peaceful coexistence of the study location.

3.0 Identity of Conflictual Parties in Related Literature

Two parties are involved in this conflict. These are the Yoruba who are the aborigines of South-west Nigeria and the Fulani, a nomadic ethnic group across the savannah zone of West Africa whose original abode is traceable to Futa Djallon highlands in Lobe region in Central Guinea.

The Fulani(s) are of two groups namely; the Gidan Fulani (Town Fulani) and the Fulani Bororo (Cattle Fulani). The Fulani Bororo are the center for discussion here. Their primary occupation is raising livestock particularly cattle grazing. As noted earlier, they are largely located in the Sahel and semi desert parts of West Africa. However, due to the relatively recent climate changes, many herdsmen moved further south into the savannah and tropical forest belt of West Africa. The sale of goats, lambs, cattles and dairy products like milk (fura de nuna) is the main source of revenue for them. The size of the cattle (herd) is usually used to gauge a people's prosperity and riches. Herdsmen have traditionally loaned cows to one another frequently. Once the cow has given birth to a calf and it is weaned, the animal is then returned to her original owner (Lawal, 2021). In the Sahel region, certain meteorological factors and human activity like overgrazing, deforestation, and soil exploitation for export-oriented crops have raised temperatures and accelerated desertification. This condition of affairs has driven the Fulani herdsmen southerly to pasture their cattle.

The Yoruba Farmers on the other hand, are usually identified as agriculturists in the southwestern region of Nigeria. Going by history, these farmers were not subsistent cultivators but peasants who produced primarily for the market long before the arrival of colonial powers (Lawal, n.d). Most Yoruba men and women are farmers growing cash crops like cocoa, yams, corn, and millet as staples and plantains, peanuts, beans and peas as subsidiary crops.

However, the incessant invasion of the Fulani Bororo to the South western agricultural lands has created series of tension between those parties in recent times. According to Aliyu (2018), who studied the history of the Conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria, the conflict began in 2012. The outbreak and ongoing persistence of farmers and herders in the Ondo and Oyo states of southwest Nigeria, according to Aliyu, has greatly strained relations between the two sides. Scholars such as Nzeh (2015) and Doyin (2017) assert, however, that prior to 2012,

there had been a friendly, peaceful, and harmonious relationship between farmers and herders throughout the states, with the exception of a few minor disagreements that had never resulted in a fatality or affected economic activity.

As asserted by Omowumi (2018), farming, grazing, and access to water were the causes of the current feuds. While the herdsmen started to claim that the farming communities were stealing their livestock, farmers also accused the herdsmen of ruining their crops by not keeping their cattle under control. As a result, this development hampered both economic growth and peaceful coexistence in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The communal settlers were uprooted from their separate communities as a result of this struggle, which also caused internal disintegration.

In a paper titled "Farmers and Herders Conflict in South-West Nigeria" Shittu (2020) noted that tense relation between the two parties started as a local episode which has since turned into a worrying omen that plagues the south western states and Nigeria as a whole over the past ten years with grave consequences.

4.0 Conflictual Parties in the Biblical Perspectives

People in the Ancient Near Eastern nations were aboriginally agrarians and husbandmen. By this, they were nomadic to a large extent. When elements of civilizations started, domestication of harmless animals was inclusive. In particular, the Jewish patriarchs were husbandmen with flocks of goats, sheep, donkey, cows and bulls. These types of animals formed parts of their wealth and prestige. Anything that happened to their flock threatened their wealth in the society and popularity. References to selected Biblical passages indicate the fact that silver, gold, slaves and flock constituted the property of a family and legacy for the posterity. (c.f Gen. 6:18-20; 8:18-19; 12:5, 12: 14-16; 13: 1-2; 18: 31-34).

Egyptians did not countenance the idea of animal rearing though they were agrarians but the progenitors of ancient Israel were shepherds (c.f Gen. 13: 1-2; 26: 12-14; 30: 29-31:8). As a result, there were conflicts among the herders even among members of the same lineage. The increase in flocks called for more pasture to feed the animals but the desertic terrain of the land might not grow enough pasture. The servants of Lot were faithful to their master while the servants of Abraham as patriarch of the new tribe believed his flocks should be given priority of feeding. Hence, there was a conflict. Destruction of some animals might have happened during the conflict and wounds

inflicted to one another; but Abraham did not want this occurrence. He then called for separation between Lot and himself (cf. Gen. 13:5-12).

The theological import of this was that herders conflict have been long and not recent alone. Supplies of pastures and water to feed the flocks and possibly land grabbing have been reasons for this conflict. The experience of Jacob in the house of Laban was another cause (cf. Gen. 30: 29-31: 8). The envy of the Philistines due to the progress and prosperity of Isaac introduced another dimension to the Herders'-Farmers' conflict in Genesis 26: 12-22. Scarcity of water and the need to have water to quench the thirst of the flocks was another reason for Farmers'- Herder's conflict in this saga.

A critical look at these instances from the ancient world are sufficient to juxtapose the contemporary reasons for Farmers'-Herders' conflicts in the Nigerian society, especially south-western parts. The Herders and hirelings of livestock suffered scarcity of water in the northern parts of the country and many parts of the country and many of them started moving down to the south. The land in the northern part could not grow enough pasture and the flocks must be fed with it. One evil attached to the rearing of the flocks was the grab of religious difference and intentional land grabbing by the herders. Grazing is not evil in itself but the destruction of farm produce and killing of harmless farmers are not acceptable and killing of the harmless farmers are not acceptable and are inherently not parts of grazing in the land, especially the southern parts of modern Nigeria.

5.0 Communities in Southwestern Nigeria Embroiled in the Farmers-Herders Conflict

Ondo State

1. Molenge, Okeluse and Arimogija Communities:

Ola Peter, a journalist wrote in January 2022 that herdsmen who had surrounded the area and launched a murderous attack on the population had invaded three communities in Ondo State's Ose Local Government Area namely, Okeluse, Molege, and Arimogija. Many people were injured and left homeless when homes were destroyed and residents were slain. The journey to these communities from anywhere in Nigeria took almost an hour on a motorbike since they were hidden away in a dense bush. (Peter, 2022)

2. Ute community:

According to agency reports published on January 10, 2022, on the night of January 6, 2022, herdsmen invaded Ute community in Ondo State, killing at least three people and destroying a number of buildings. The incident was described by Felix Olabode, the Akarigbo of Ute Land, a firsthand witness, that;

We arrived here right away and found a dead body. These structures have not been demolished, and when we called the police and the DPO arrived, we were unaware that those individuals were still present. The gunmen returned and destroyed these buildings no later than 30 minutes after the cops evacuated the deceased. They always use guns to scare people away here and then brought their cows to graze on people's farm and drink water (Agency Reports in January 10, 2022).

The Oodua People's Congress (OPC) Coordinator in the region, Folorunso Olofe, revealed that the gunmen were constantly using AK-47s to assault. In his words,

this has been going on for a while. They always bring an AK-47 with them. They number exceeded fifty. During the assault, a member of Amotekun, a para-military group was wounded by a bullet. They arrived and killed the Baale. In less than 15 minutes after the police arrived and evacuated the deceased, they returned and leveled the building, the man claimed (Agency Reports due on January 10, 2022).

Osun State

1. Oki and Uro Communities:

Fulani herders allegedly raided two villages, Oki and Uro, both in Obokun East Local Government, with their livestock and damaged crops worth millions of Naira. There was tangible anger in Osun State's agricultural communities, according to Olaniyi (2018).

The incident, which happened on January 20, 2018, deeply shattered and saddened many farmers in the peaceful communities. Prince Patrick Olaniyan, one of the devastated farmers, told Daily Post reporters about his experience at the hands of the marauding herders and described how the cows' destruction of his yam farm cost him hundreds of thousands of Naira (Olaniyi, 2018).

2. Koka Community:

In 2021, Timothy Agbor, a reporter for The Guardian Newspaper, reported on the anxiety that had descended upon Koka community in Obokun Local Council of Osun State after a group of gunmen, thought to be Fulani herders, had barged into the area at night. Residents of the neighborhood, around the Osun State University, Osogbo campus, were allegedly ambushed by the men with AK-47s and told to exit their various homes. The gunmen were Fulani herdsmen, according to a village resident who wants to remain anonymous and who spoke to The Guardian.

According to the report, eight gunmen arrived promptly and told the locals to march out of their homes before leading them to a nearby jungle. One of the inhabitants reportedly escaped from the line, unknown to the gunmen, and made a phone call to the hunters' group in the area while the residents were being led into the bush (Agbor, 2021).

3. Ikire Community:

On April 20, 2019, according to PUNCH Metro, gunmen who were reportedly Fulani herdsmen ambushed motorists on the Ife-Ibadan expressway near Ikire and killed Samson Adenipekun, an employee of the Atakumosa West Local Government Area of Osun State. The deceased was driving a stolen Toyota Corolla to Ibadan, Oyo State, when the tragedy occurred. The source of the information further claims that the herdsmen shot at the car, and one of the bullets struck Adenipekun in the head (Bamigbola, 2019).

Ogun State

1. Yewa Community:

No fewer than 13 individuals were allegedly killed by hoodlums believed to be Fulani herders in various communities dispersed around Yewaland in February 2021, causing anguish and sadness to surround the Yewa axis of Ogun State. One Dele Olowoniyi was reportedly hacked to death by Fulani herdsmen in the middle of the night on Saturday, February 6, 2021 while receiving fresh air in front of his hut in a farm village in Oha, Imeko-Afon Local Government Area of Ogun State. Two days later, two more people were slain in an ambush at Owode-Ketu while traveling to the market by suspects who were thought to be herders (Ogunnaike, 2021).

2. Asa, Ebute Igbooro, Agbon, Agbon-Ojodu and Orile Igbooro Communities:

In February 2021, James Ogunnaike, a journalist for the Punch newspaper, said that the midnight attack left roughly nine additional people injured to varied degrees and claimed three lives in Asa and four lives at Ebute Igbooro. Three farmers were slain at Agbon in the state's Yewa North Local Government Area as a result of another attack by the herders.

Properties, including homes, automobiles, and motorcycles, were destroyed in Agbon-Ojodu, Orile Igbooro. Tajudeen Akorede, the village head, Baale of Orile Igbooro, spoke about the tragic incident and stated that nine additional people underwent medical treatment for injuries while four members of the community, including children, perished at the hands of the alleged herders (Ogunnaike, 2021).

3. Imeko-Afon Community:

In January 2022, Daud Olatunji of The Sunday PUNCH Newspaper reported that a new conflict between farmers and herdsmen broke out in eight villages in Imeko-Afon Local Government Area of Ogun State, leaving five people dead and many injured. There were clashes at Idofa village between some local Oho farmers and Fulani ranchers that resulted in the loss of lives and millions of naira's worth of property. After chasing the herders from their village to Idofa in Imeko, it was discovered that the residents of the Aworo community in Yewa North Local Government Area had killed three of the herdsmen and their cows (Olatunji, 2022).

Furthermore, the Aworo people accused the Fulani ranchers of ruining their fields and water sources by grazing cows in the open, a practice that the state administration had outlawed. Aworo people retaliated and killed the three herders in Idofa. The fracas resulted in the deaths of two Yoruba people one of whom was burned beyond recognition. The Fulani assailants set fire to homes, four barns of maize, grains, motorcycles, and other goods. The Aworo people responded by chasing the herdsmen from Yewa North to Idofa in Imeko, and slaughtered three of them, along with their cows (Olatunji, 2022).

Ekiti State

1. Eda Community:

On April 15, 2019, some herders going by the name of Bororo broke into a farmstead in Iyemero, Ekiti, and shot farmers there. In Ikole Local Government Area of Ekiti State, one of the communities in Iyemero town called Eda was reportedly attacked by suspected herdsmen who invaded in the early hours of the day, murdered many people and injured others in varying degrees (Sahara Reporters, 2019).

6.0 Causes of the Farmers-Herders Conflict in South-West Nigeria

There have been quite a number of factors as to why there exists the farmers and herders conflict in Southwestern Nigeria. Ningxin (2018), in his article titled "Nigeria's Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict and Peace Building" outlined the causes of the conflict between the Fulani and the farmers. These include ideological, historical, and cultural influences. Before there were farmers and herders conflicts in southwestern Nigeria, for instance, the utilization of land and water resources had already led to tremendous pressure. Deforestation and the migration of Fulani Herders are two effects of deserts increasing desertification in the far north. A significant participant in the cattle breeding industry known as the "Mayetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association" (MACBAN) concurred that desertification and climate change were the main causes of trans-human migration from the northern portion of Nigeria to the southwestern region (Ugwumba, 2018).

The violence between farmers and herdsmen in southwestern Nigeria were also sparked by a number of economic and wealth-related causes. According to Christopher (2018), the Fulani

Herdsmen contributed significantly to the Nigerian economy. Christopher claims that they control over 90% of the country's livestock population and about 3% of its GDP. Of course, the Nigerian people are dependent on the cattle for the manufacture of its dairy products. It should be noted in this study, however, that they claim that Nigerians depends on the Fulani may not be correct.

There is a power struggle between the two parties as both groups have grown adversarial, particularly when there is little access for people to safe cattle routes and grazing grounds. Another major contributing reason to the ongoing conflict is resource control. Cattle herders' quest for land and resources has become one of the main causes of fighting, an outbreak of fatal struggle over who should rule over the available but limited vegetation and water

supply. Up to 70% of grassland has been consumed by desert and drought, and droughts are happening more frequently. Muhammed (2015), records thus;

Disagreements over the use and allocation of food and resources such as grazing areas between herders and local farmers are intense because of the interest of both party members. Consequently, as the police force authority announced the arrest of suspected Fulani militants and said they carried dangerous weapons . . . and farmers accused herdsmen of damaging their crops and failing to control their animals (www.premiumtimes.ng.com).

However, the herdsmen emphasized their conviction that using dangerous weapons was necessary to protect themselves from perceived and actual attacks by farming communities that attempted to take their livestock (Aliyu, 2015). Most grazing reserves that the northern regional administration established in the 1960s are no longer in use. Herders are forced to choose between taking the chance of crossing to the host farmers' territory or losing access to grass-rich wetlands. The Grazing Reserves Act, which the federal government passed in 1964 to designate specific regions for grazing, is no longer in effect.

The theft of cattle in the area is another problem that has harmed relations between herders and farmers. The frequency of rustling instances has dramatically increased in recent years.

In a different viewpoint, Burton (2016) asserted that one of the key causes of the farmers and herders conflict was the continued neglect of the interaction between farmers and herdsmen. To support the claim, one can cite Ofuoku and Isife (2009) who pointed out the neglect regarding the requirement for more grazing space and Ofem and Inyang (2014) who pointed out the neglect regarding the disrespect for traditional authorities as well as the neglect of failing to pay levies for local crops and livestock.

7.0 Impact of the Conflict

The conflict has brought negative impact to economic development in the southwestern states. It is evident that the two groups involved in the conflict make a considerable contribution to the economic and social life of the Nigerian states. However, because of the dangerous struggle between farmers and herders, which continued to destroy lives and property, many economic activities were hampered. The affected states now have higher rates of poverty. There have also been tens of thousands of displaced Nigerians. Women and children were particularly affected, they

experienced poverty and lack of access to resources, and their husbands were killed in series of violence between farmers and herders in the region.

The stability of the nation has been jeopardized by violent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in south-west of Nigeria with lives lost in the process. Leme (2017) claims that the confrontations between farmers and herdsmen have led to a humanitarian crisis. Both groups have historically and continue to provide for the basic needs of the residents of the South Western states and of Nigeria as a whole, but their violent clashes have caused hardship and jeopardized the region's entrepreneurial practice (economic activity), especially in Ondo and Ogun states, Nigeria.

Again, the quality of social relationships in the area between the two parties has decreased. There was no question about the first friendly relations between the two parties because there was a feeling of connection, understanding, and support between the farmers and herders. The relationship was more of a partnership; however, since the insurrection of the conflict, the quality of this relationship has decreased even within the general Nigerian society.

Furthermore, the increase in attacks and counterattacks has had a significant negative impact on the economy and the humanitarian situation, with possible negative political and security ramifications. The effects on humanity are very severe. Farmer-herder conflict killed at least 1,500 people between late 2017 and June 2018, maimed many more, and uprooted over 300,000 people. While others choose to seek safety in IDP camps, some of the displaced remain with their relatives in safer areas of their home states. Due to this catastrophe, the Yoruba-speaking people, women, and children affected lack proper housing and food. Several people are susceptible to communicable diseases. Investigative reports shows that some IDP camps are usually overcrowded and lacks safe drinking water. Inadequate sanitation makes poor sanitation worse. Girls and women are frequently at risk of sexual assault, harassment, and rape from both strangers and other IDPs.

The education of children has suffered greatly. There have been allegations that over 300,000 kids have been kept out of school due to repeated attacks. The resources of the local and state governments are almost completely exhausted trying to support the Yoruba Communities' afflicted homes.

This situation has succeeded in widening ethnic gaps and solidifying notions about the farmers-herders dispute, igniting accusations of pogroms, and even worse. Some Fulani are of the opinion that a large-scale plot against

them has been hatched by other groups throughout the nation. The agrarian groups are likewise rife with similar charges. The accusations are weakening national unity and even making it more difficult to find a solution to the disputes.

In addition, the ongoing bloodshed harms relations with religions. For instance, according to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), prominent Muslims encouraged the Herders to carry out jihadist operations. CAN was accused of spreading "hate, calumny and inconceivable malice." according to the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), in response (Vanguard, 31st January 2018). The level of mistrust between the two religious groups is quite high.

The nation's trust in its security forces has been damaged by the escalating violence between farmers and herders. Armed community defense organizations and ethnic militias are being formed as a result of the increase in violence. There is a concern that the current level of insecurity in south-west Nigeria may make the already serious problem of weaponry proliferation much worse. The already overworked police, military, and other para-military groups are now under much more stress as a result of this battle. The deployment of extra police and military to states witnessing intensifying violence between farmers and herders, although undoubtedly necessary, is also using up manpower resources that could be used to combat the insurgency in the North East.

From all ramifications, we have found that the impact of the farmers and herders conflict in Southwestern communities in Nigeria has been that of devastating and discouragement to healthy coexistence. With the farming communities suffering internal displacement resulting from the destruction of farmland, forceful takeover of their communities, destruction of livelihoods and human fatalities and the herding communities suffering from the destruction of Livelihood (such as the killing of cows); we can easily deduce that there is need for the government and non-governmental organizations to take measures in managing this worrisome affairs.

8.0 Ethical Critique on the Farmers-Herders Conflict in South-West Nigeria

To a certain level, we can deduce that the Farmers-Herders Conflict in South-West Nigeria is typically the Fulani herders strive for Livelihood; and the Yoruba farmers strive for Livelihood as well. Both parties are seeking for Livelihood from that which they are engaged in (i.e. cattle grazing and farming). In the general sense, Livelihood

is simply a means of securing the necessities of life. It is the means of support which is usually a self-employed activity. Ryan (2016) defined Livelihood as the methods and means of making a living in the world. The concept revolves around resources such as land/property, crops, food, knowledge, finances, social relations, and their interrelated connection with an individual community's political, economic, and sociocultural characteristics.

Of course, the significance of Livelihood cannot be over-emphasized as it plays a dominant role in social and economic development. However, the problem here is the inability to reconcile the incessant killings, land grabbing, abuse, and displaced homes of Yoruba farmers with the idea of seeking for Livelihood. In every ramification, human lives are to be protected and guarded against all odds.

The idea of seeking for Livelihood at the expense of destroying other people's Livelihood becomes problematic here, especially in Nigeria's region of people with diverse religious and cultural practices. This scenario of multiple fights and killings negate the fundamental human rights to life which is to be protected. According to Article 2 of the Fundamental Human Rights, "nobody including, the government, can try to end your life". It also means the government is intended to take appropriate measures to safeguard life by making laws to protect lives. Yet, lives are taken, lands are grabbed illegally, women are molested, homes are displaced and churches and mosques are vandalized.

The conflict between the farmers and herders therefore calls for an ethical concern. In the course of such unfortunate events, ethical questions are raised;

I. Should one's Livelihood supersede the essence of peaceful living and right action?

II. Should one's Livelihood supersede the essence of justice?

III. Should one's Livelihood supersede the essence of human right to life?

IV. Does livelihood support killing of innocent lives?

V. Does livelihood support land encroachment without the autonomy's consent?

The impact of the farmers-herders conflict in southwestern communities in Nigeria is simply a proof of play down to the cardinal ethical principles of justice, beneficence, and nonmaleficence. The Fulani herdsmen method of

acquiring lands without the consent of the original settlers is simply a mark of injustice to the original owners. In a similar view, the killings, destruction of communal properties is a talk down on the ethics of nonmaleficence which supports not inflicting harm or killing another fellow human being.

Obviously, human beings always need to sustain themselves by working at a job and earning a paycheck. However, beyond a paycheck, there is another aspect that professes serving "Humanity". It is the principle of "Right Livelihood". How can one know if the Livelihood he is seeking is the "right" one? What then is Right Livelihood?

Right Livelihood is part of the moral conduct section in most major world religions doctrine. Major world religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and even the African traditional religion emphasize the need to seek the right way of earning a living. In the Buddhist doctrine, it becomes the fifth fold of the path of life. In Buddhism, Right Livelihood is connected to precepts of not killing, not stealing and not misusing sex. Thus, Right Livelihood is a way of living without compromising the above doctrines. It is a way of making a living that does not harm others. Correlating this, Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh wrote;

To practice Right Livelihood (Samyag Ajiva), you must find a way to earn your living without transgressing your ideals of love and compassion. The way you support yourself can be an expression of your deepest self or a source of suffering for you and others. Our vocation can nourish our understanding and compassion, or erode them. We should be aware of the consequences, far and near, of the way we end our living (Hanh, np, 1998).

In similar view, Christian ethics recognizes the significance of Right Livelihood as a divine and spiritual activity. St. Paul wrote, "Wherever we work, whatever we do, we are to do as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). The explanation here would therefore imply that one's Livelihood must at all means please God and this can be realized in the approaches and exhibited by the worker. Accordingly, the Christian tradition attest that what pleases God is a simple, honest, clean and relationship with Him and our neighbors (Mark 12: 30-31).

Likewise, the Islamic precepts and ethics recognize the importance of Livelihood and teach extensively in the care for man's Livelihood. In one of the prophetic traditions from the Holy messenger (S.A.W.W.), Imam Al- Sadiq wrote;

there is no good in him who does not like to collect wealth lawfully, by which he satisfies his needs, pays off his debts and keeps up his relations with his relatives...Wealthiness that prevents you from wronging others is better than poverty that leads to do evils. It is better for the faithful to wake in the morning or in the evening at the loss of a beloved one than to go in the morning or evening plundering other's possessions (Al- Balagh Foundation, np, 2022).

Reflecting upon our very own African religious cosmology specifically the Yoruba traditional and religious worldview, it can be projected that Livelihood is a crucial concept in the life of the Africans. The popular Yoruba Poem *Ise Logun Ise* i.e. "work is the antidote for poverty" becomes significant in this discourse. The Yoruba thinking has always laid emphasis on work; as depicted in one of their sayings; *sise takun takun ni bayi nitori pe akoko ko duro de enikan* which means "work hard now for time waits for no one". At the same time, the Yoruba traditional religion frowns against covetousness and this is propagated in one of their proverbs which states that "covetousness is the father of unfulfilled desires" translated in Yoruba as *ojukokoro ni baba ifekufee* (Babalola, personal communication, February 20, 2022).

From the above religious traditions, it can be proven that Livelihood is essential and at the same time, seeking for the Right Livelihood is imperative for peaceful coexistence. However, the situation between farmers and herders in the south western region on the literal level is not supposed to be a critical as it is considering the fact the conflictual parties are to some extent religious beings. The three religious traditions hold much value on Right Livelihood. On a norm, the striking similarities should set an ethical balance for both parties to coexist peacefully. Yet, the reverse is the case.

To this end, there is need for both parties to consider and retrace back to the ideals and moral values propagated by their religious traditions in their day-to-day actions, dealings and transactions. Moral values play an essential role as it helps to build a positive character with traits such as compassion, respect, kindness and humility.

9.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this investigation shed light on the escalating conflict between Nigerian herders and farmers, which has resulted in a devastating loss of over 1,300 lives in the north central region since January 2018 and has now permeated the southwestern part of the country. This protracted conflict has been exacerbated by various factors, including militia attacks, inadequate government response, lack of accountability for past

transgressions, environmental degradation, and encroachment on grazing lands. Additionally, religious leaders have failed to effectively promote and prioritize human values, further exacerbating the discord. Consequently, this conflict has emerged as Nigeria's most pressing security challenge, surpassing even the Boko Haram insurgency, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands and undermining national stability by stoking ethnic and regional tensions.

Moreover, this unfortunate state of affairs and the ethical observations made underscore the fact that a nation cannot achieve economic growth by pursuing individual livelihoods at the expense of others. Therefore, it is imperative to explore alternative means of sustenance that do not compromise the principles of love and compassion. This necessitates adhering to moral principles that reject violence, theft, and inappropriate sexual conduct. To foster harmonious coexistence and drive economic progress in the southwestern region, it is crucial for the conflicting parties to reevaluate and embrace these fundamental principles. By doing so, they can pave the way for a peaceful and prosperous future for all.

Recommendations

This study, therefore, recommends the following;

1. Religious leaders and community leaders should teach the ethics of right Livelihood and advocate peace theology to their followers. On this note, sensitization programmes and religious seminars should be organized for the believers and community members regularly to actualize this vision for peaceful coexistence.
2. State governments should launch new initiatives to curb herder-farmer conflicts in the south western states. For instances, grazing reserves should be reestablished by the regional government and the ones that are no longer in good state should be renovated.
3. The Grazing Reserves Act enacted in 1964 by the federal government to determine certain areas for grazing should be reviewed by the Nigerian legislative arm of government to ensure its functionality. This would greatly improve livestock production and management to minimize contacts and friction between the Fulani Herders and the Yoruba Farmers.

4. The nation's inadequate security measures need to be investigated. It is crucial to improve the security arrangements for farming and herding communities, particularly in the southwestern region. Government and security organizations will need to continue their campaigns against rural banditry and cattle rustling, enhance early-warning systems, maintain the operational readiness of police and other security units stationed in rural areas, and promote coordination and communication with local authorities. In fact, it's important to build and promote Community Based Vigilantes.

5. To the best of their abilities, foreign governments and organizations should endeavor to establish and strengthen conflict mediation, reconciliation, and peace-building mechanism in developing countries and regions impacted by such conflicts.

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