FARMERS AND HERDERS CONFLICT: THE CASE OF OMALA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

The study analyzed the farmers and herder conflict and its impact on Omala Local Government Area. The Local Government was under the siege of the farmer and herder crisis for a long time. As a result lives and properties worth millions of naira were lost. Using primary and secondary sources, the study examined the situation in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State and found its impact to be economic, social and physical. The study recommended among other things that the crisis would be averted if the government can secure appropriate ranches for the herders to graze their cattle.

Keywords: Farmers, herders, conflict, Omala and peace

Introduction

Omala is a local government area (LGA) in Kogi State, Nigeria. It is located in the eastern part of the state and shares borders with Ankpa, Olamaboro, Ofu, and Dekina LGAs. The history of Omala dates back to the pre-colonial era when it was inhabited by various ethnic groups, including the Ebira, Igala, and Bassa. The local government has witnessed conflicts in form of farmer herders crisis. Crisis in whatever forms it occurs have negative impacts on the people in the area where it occurs. The people of Omala Local Government have felt the negative impact of the herder farmer crisis that has been a parasite feasting on the peace, freedom and the way of life of the people. This crisis has affected the people of Omala Local Government economically, socially and physically. These impacts have devastating effects and calls for an in-depth analysis.

The herder-farmer crisis in Nigeria has been a long-standing issue that has resulted in significant loss of lives and property, particularly in rural areas. This conflict has been reported in various parts of the country, including Omala Local Government, where it has resulted in the displacement of communities and the disruption of social and economic activities despite the efforts of the government to arrest this situation. The aim of this thesis is to examine the root causes of the herder-farmer crisis in Omala Local Government, with a view to proposing effective solutions that can bring about lasting peace and stability in the area. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the social, economic, and political factors that have contributed to the

conflict, as well as the roles played by different stakeholders, including government agencies, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations. The findings of this study will provide insights that can inform policy interventions aimed at addressing the herder-farmer crisis in Nigeria, particularly in Omala Local Government, and contribute to building more peaceful and inclusive societies in the region.

Economic Impact of the Herder Farmer Conflict in Omala Local Government

The herder-farmer crisis in Nigeria has had severe economic consequences, particularly in areas where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Omala Local Government Area in Kogi State is one of the areas most affected by the crisis, with significant losses in agricultural production and revenue. Some of the economic impacts of the herder farmer crisis in Omala Local Government Area are:

Decline in Agricultural Production

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the people of Omala, with crops such as yams, cassava, and maize, as well as cash crops like cocoa and palm oil, being the mainstay of the local economy.[1] However, the herder-farmer crisis has led to a significant decline in agricultural production, as farmers are unable to cultivate their crops due to the destruction of their farmlands by cattle. This has resulted in a loss of income for farmers and a decline in the availability of food for the local population.[2] Amedu[3] opined that lots of farmers in Omala can no longer cultivate on their farmlands due to the fear of getting attacked by herders. He added that the herders are no different from terrorist because, they visit people on their farms unannounced and they come heavily armed with guns, machete and all forms of arms.[4] Sometimes, they just set farmlands ablaze without putting into consideration the crops that have been cultivated and yet to be harvested.[5]

In areas where they don't burn, they bring their cattle there to graze and feed and the crops on the farmland and when the owners of the farm complain, they threaten them with their weapons or kill in some cases.[6] When animals graze on farmlands, it destroys the crops on the farm and further reduces the nutrients of the farm land making it unsuitable for further cultivation.[7] All these have contributed to the fall of the agricultural products in Omala Local Government Area and this fall has had diverse implication on the people of Omala.

Displacement of Farmers

The herder-farmer crisis has also led to the displacement of farmers from their homes and farmlands, further exacerbating the economic impact of the crisis.[8] Many farmers have been forced to flee their homes, leaving their farms and crops behind, resulting in a loss of income and livelihood.[9] The displacement of farmers has also led to a decline in agricultural production and a shortage of food, which has further increased the cost of food and reduced the purchasing power of the local population.[10] Abimaje [11]stated that he had to relocate his family from Opada in Omala Local Government Area due to the attacks of the Fulani herders in the neighboring villages. The Fulani herders were said to have invaded these villages and burnt down houses and killed in those villages.[12] A certain chief in Agbadema a town in Olmala Local Government was said to be killed by the herders who attacked his village and killed him.[13]

Loss of Investment

The herder-farmer crisis has also led to a loss of investment in the agricultural sector in Omala Local Government Area.[14] The insecurity caused by the crisis has discouraged investment in agriculture, particularly by private investors, who are reluctant to invest in an environment that is perceived as insecure.[15] This has further limited the potential for economic growth and development in the local government area. People in Omala Local Government invest in agriculture.[16] They do this by purchasing large expanse of lands and cultivate on commercial basis using tractors and other machines needed for agricultural cultivation and harvest.[17] Some employ labour by engaging the youths in the community to cultivate, weed and take care of the harvest of the crops planted on the farmland.[18] With the issue of the herder farmer crisis in Omala, some of these people have been forced to give up these lands due to the attack of the herders which has led to the loss of lives and as a result of such occurrences in the Local Government, people's investments have become a waste living these people in poverty and pains over such losses.[19]

Another way in which this crisis has affected investment in Omala is through the discouragement of new investors.[20] People including the sons and daughters of Omala have become scared to come home and invest in the Local Government due to the fear of being attacked, killed or harmed. The herders don't only attack farmers but they also

engage in kidnapping of farmers or members of the community and all this have instilled fear in the minds of investment making the Local Government loose investors and investments.[21]

In conclusion, the herder-farmer crisis in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State has had severe economic consequences, including a decline in agricultural production, displacement of farmers, and a loss of investment in the agricultural sector. These economic consequences have had significant social and political implications, including increased poverty, food insecurity, and social unrest. There is a need for concerted efforts by the government and other stakeholders to address the underlying causes of the crisis and to implement measures to mitigate its economic impact.

Social Impact of the Herder Farmer Conflict in Omala Local Government

The herder-farmer crisis in Nigeria has not only had an economic impact but also a significant social impact on the affected communities.[22] Omala Local Government Area in Kogi State is one of the areas most affected by the crisis, with social consequences ranging from loss of lives, displacement of people, and inter-communal conflicts.

Loss of Lives

One of the most severe social impacts of the herder-farmer crisis in Omala Local Government Area is the loss of lives.[23] The crisis has resulted in frequent clashes between farmers and herders, leading to the death of many people.[24] countless number of people have been killed in Omala Local Government Area due to the herder farmer crisis. The reports on the news and other media platforms are not always accurate.[25] Only people in the Local Government see and understand the extent to which the crisis has claimed lives in Omala Local Government Area.[26]

The killings began with Fulani herders but as times went by, the farmers and some villagers began to fight back and they also caused the deaths of some of the herders in the community.[27] There was a time that the herders were poisoned by a certain community in the Local Government and all those who came in contact with that poison died.[28] According to this source, the herders had a habit of coming to pursue the members of the community from their

farmlands and meeting squares.[29] They chase them away with their guns and arms and go with all the possession of the people. On a certain day, the villagers prepared meals to signify an occasion was ongoing and they poisoned the food and the wine.[30] When the herders came to chase them away as usual like they used to, the people ran living their food and drinks behind. The herders ate these meals and they died.[31] This action by the villagers were said to have reduced the attacks of the herders on the villagers for that period.[32]

Displacement and Migration

The herder-farmer crisis has led to the displacement and migration of people from affected communities in Omala Local Government Area.[33] The frequent clashes between farmers and herders have forced many people to flee their homes, leaving behind their property and means of livelihood.[34] This has resulted in a significant loss of social cohesion, as communities have been fragmented, and people have been forced to relocate to other areas, leading to an increase in social tensions and conflicts.[35] families have relocated from Omala as a way of saving themselves from the crisis and avoiding death. Abimaje[36] clearly stated that he had to relocate his family to Lokja as a way of escaping the crisis and preventing them from falling victims. This relocation affected the business of his mother who was a trader in Omala because she had to close down her business for the period of time she was in Lokoja.

Inter-communal Conflicts

The herder-farmer crisis has also led to an increase in inter-communal conflicts in Omala Local Government Area. The frequent clashes between farmers and herders have not only resulted in loss of lives and property but also heightened tensions between different communities in the area.[37] This has led to an increase in ethno-religious conflicts, which have further weakened the social fabric of the affected communities.[38]

In conclusion, the herder-farmer crisis in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State has had severe social consequences, including loss of lives, displacement and migration of people, and inter-communal conflicts. These social consequences have had significant economic and political implications, including increased poverty, reduced social cohesion, and weakened governance structures. There is a need for concerted efforts by the government and other stakeholders to address the underlying causes of the crisis and to implement measures to mitigate its social impact.

Physical Impact of the Herder Farmer Conflict in Omala Local Government

The herder-farmer crisis in Nigeria has had significant physical impacts on the affected communities, including Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State. The physical impacts include damage to property, destruction of farmland and natural resources, and displacement of people.[39]

Damage to Property

The herder-farmer crisis has resulted in damage to property in Omala Local Government Area. Houses, markets, and other infrastructure have been destroyed in the frequent clashes between farmers and herders.[40] This has had a significant impact on the physical landscape of the affected communities and has led to a reduction in the quality of life for residents.[41]

Destruction of Farmland and Natural Resources

The crisis has also resulted in the destruction of farmland and natural resources in Omala Local Government Area.[42] Farmers and herders have engaged in activities that have led to the destruction of farmland, including burning and trampling crops. The destruction of natural resources such as forests, rivers, and grazing lands has also had a severe impact on the physical landscape of the affected communities.[43]

Displacement of People

The herder-farmer crisis has led to the displacement of people from their homes in Omala Local Government Area. The frequent clashes between farmers and herders have forced many people to flee their homes, leaving behind their property and means of livelihood.[44] This has resulted in a significant loss of social and economic capital, as well as a reduction in the physical population of the affected communities.[45] A reduction in population translates into reduction in production and wealth of the Local Government[46]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the herder-farmer crisis in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State has had severe economic, social and physical impacts, including damage to property, destruction of farmland and natural resources, and displacement of people, poverty, unemployment, loss of investments among several others. These physical impacts have had significant economic and social implications, including increased poverty, reduced agricultural

production, and weakened social cohesion. There is a need for concerted efforts by the government and other stakeholders to address the underlying causes of the crisis and to implement measures to mitigate its physical impact. Until drastic efforts are made to reduce the herder farmer crisis in Omala Local Government, the economic, social and physical impact of the crisis would continue to have devastating effects on the people and its effect will extend to Kogi State as a whole. The adoption of a ranching system, would arrest the situation.

Endnotes

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6 Oral interview with Abu Omiach,

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8 Oral interview with Amedu Haruna

9 Oral interview with Amedu Haruna

10 Oral interview with Amedu Haruna

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12 Oral Interview with Abimaje Samuel

13 Oral Interview with Abimaje Samuel

14 Oral Interview with Abimaje Samuel

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[24] Oral interview with Omale Salifu

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[26] Oral interview with Shehu Hassan

[27] Oral interview with Shehu Hassan

[28] Oral interview with Shehu Hassan

[29] Oral interview with Shehu Hassan

[30] Oral interview with Shehu Hassan

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