

Herders-Farmers' Armed Conflicts and the Possible effects of Anti-Open Grazing Law in Ekiti State, Nigeria

DAODU F. Folasade & FASUAN E. Olawale

*Institute of Peace, Security and Governance, Ekiti State University,
Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

ABSTRACT: Herders in search of greener pasture to feed their cattle adequately struggles with the farmers and creating pressure on the resources of any of the community where they moved their livestock into for grazing. The farmers who are predominantly arable and cash crop agronomists would not stand to see their land to be invaded by cattle, thus violent resistant and, a reprisal violent attacks by herdsman. Arising from the very many cases of armed violent among farmers, herdsman and people within the communities in Ekiti state, the government therefore, took a bold step and enacted laws to prohibit open grazing especially on farm lands. In order of this research, interviews were conducted with the target population (community leaders, the farmers, and some herdsman) to identify the factors responsible for herders-farmers' persistent violent conflicts, investigate the various herdsman attacks in Ekiti state and assess the positive effects of Ekiti state Anti-Open Grazing Law on Herders-Farmers' conflict in Ekiti state, Nigeria. The study revealed that the incessant attacks and killings of both the farmers and the herders prompted the law prohibiting cattle and other ruminants grazing in Ekiti by the State Government in 2016. Following the findings of this study, a conclusion is drawn, that Anti-Open Grazing Law is very effective and hence the activities of the herders and farmers in Ekiti state should be supervised and monitored continually through this law to prevent reoccurrence of the conflicts.

KEYWORDS: *Armed conflicts, farmers, herders, grazing, laws.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Today in Nigeria, the cases of herders and farmers' violent conflicts has become a point of concern and a threat to national integration. For years, herdsman is generally known and easily identified with cattle and general livestock husbandry, the herdsman are pastoralists who herd cattle and other livestock often on an itinerant basis, and such activities takes him far to different parts of the country in search of grassland for animal pasture and particularly towards the southern part of Nigeria where much vegetation's are found because the region receives more rainfall than the north hence, a fertile ground for grazing activities. Meanwhile, there are common features of conflicts between herders and farmers across West Africa (Nathaniel, S.2015). Earlier in the twentieth century, cattle rearing were predominantly prevalent in the Guinea, Sudan and Sahel savanna belts where crop production were being carried out only during the rainy season and on a small scale and less pasture and there were no grazing activities available to cattle herders. Thus, the herdsman had to move and traveled southward to the coastal zone where the rainy season is longer and the soil retains moisture for long, in search of pasture and water for their cattle and to feed their cattle adequately; (Mikailu, 2016). They often migrate southward for greener pasture with their flock thus creating pressure on the resources of any of the community where they move their livestock into for grazing; and the Southerners who are predominantly farmers mostly arable and cash crop farmers used to stand and resist their farms to be invaded by the cattle. (Olugbenga, 2017). The migration Southward brings the herdsman in contact/confrontation with the local farmers over the use of essential resources such as farmland, grazing areas and water. The confrontations and the subsequent clashes were spread from the North Central zone of Nigeria pitching the Berom farming community in Plateau state against the nomadic herders to the state like Benue, South East states such as Enugu, South-South states such as Delta and South West states such as Oyo, Ondo and Ekiti resulting in loss of lives and properties. The incessant clashes of the herdsman with farmers have persistently resulted to massacre of hundreds of people, destruction of properties with many people in the villages becomes internally displaced (Mikailu 2016) and as there were continued effect of climate change on pasture lands the herdsman keep forcing to move further southward in search of grass and water and has widened scope of the confrontations and clashes with raising fears that the violence could threaten the fragile unity that exists among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, the activities of herdsmen are characteristically cut across various acts of armed violent which at most cases are with criminal intent such as armed robbery, murder, looting, kidnapping for ransom, rape, and warton destruction of properties under the guise of land struggle for grazing (Soyombo, O. 2016). And, there were no punitive action apprehending, investigating and prosecution of these dastardly acts and the heinous crimes committed through these activities remained unchallenged, unrestricted and unchecked until the government of Ekiti State took a bold step to enact law prohibiting open grazing particularly on farm lands. Some of the instances as it was reveals by Akinrujomi, (2016) are the report in 2016 that the herdsmen carried out an attack on three villages in Kuje Area Council of Federal Capital Territory, Abuja on November 13, 2016 and killed 3 persons while several other persons were abducted (Akinrujomi, 2016). On 25th August 2016, records shows that some herdsmen attacked NdiaguAttakawuAkegbeUgwu Community in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Enugu state killing a Seminarian of the Catholic Church while others were seriously wounded (Nathaniel, 2016; Vanguard, 2016).in yet another attacks, on April 15, 2014, some herdsmen attacked Nwokyo, Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba state and killed 10 people while 18 others were seriously injured (Nigerian Eye, 2014). Again in April 20, 2016, herdsmen attacked about five communities in the Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State killed some people while several others unspecified number of persons were also recorded injured (Esho, 2016).

According to Jones, (2016) and Amaize&Ahon, (2016); it was recorded that on 22nd December 2016, herdsmen attacked Agbarha kingdom in Delta and kidnapped the indeed traditional ruler of OrhifiEnemor II and the kidnappers (herdsmen) demanded for ₦50 Million (Fifty Million Naira) ransoms. Another traditional ruler (UbuluUku kingdom in Delta state Chief Edward AkaezeOfulue III on January 5, 2016) was kidnaped but this one was killed by the suspected herdsmen (Jones, 2016; Amaize&Ahon, 2016). Similarly, on December 21, 2016 there was a report that herdsmen attacked and kidnapped a female Youth Corper named Grace OgheneEdegware and two other persons after robbing them of their properties at Kwali Area Council, Abuja Federal Capital Territory (Obiajuru, 2016). On September 21, 2015 there was a report that herdsmen attacked and kidnapped the former Minister of Finance and Secretary to the Federal Government Chief OluFalae in his own farm in Ondo state. The kidnappers (the herdsmen) however, demanded for a ransom and were eventually paid ₦5 Million (Five Million Naira) before releasing the former Minister (Premium Times, 2015; Oluwole, 2015; Nathaniel, 2015).

In addition, record shows that in September 2016, herdsmen attacked Godogodo village, Southern Kaduna and over several people were killed while many others were seriously injured. The same village (Godogodo) was again attacked on October 15, 2016 by herdsmen and killed over 40 Christians while many Churches were burnt (Morning Star News, 2016). At this point, the state government imposed 24 hours curfew for peace keeping activities in Southern Kaduna, but despite this 24 hours curfew imposed on Southern Kaduna, Again, herdsmen carried out an attack in Goska village of Kaninkon Chiefdom in Jema'a Local Government Area of Kaduna State and killed several persons while several houses were also left burnt down (Abimboye, 2016b, Isenyo, 2016).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

The continued acts of attacks and several other heinous crimes by herdsmen across many state in Nigeria such as Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, Plateau, Delta, Ekiti, Ondo, Kaduna and Edo states with daily reported cases while government security agencies seems to be too soft on the issue and incapacitated to arrest, investigate and prosecute those who have found involved. Paradoxically, the herdsmen attack farmlands, killed or injured the farmers and feed their cattle with the farm crops, while in defense, the aggrieved farmers mobilized at night for reprisal attacks and fight over the destructions of their farmland, kills the cows and the herdsmen's in revenge. Arising from this, several violent attacks have been recorded while a large number of people have been killed across the country in the name of herdsmen/farmers armed violent confrontations with little or no decisive response by the government especially the government of the day. However, this is a disturbing situation and Ekiti State of Nigeria took a bold step by enacting laws to prohibit open grazing especially on farm lands.

Arising from the above, this work, was however designed to:

- i. identify the factors responsible for herders-farmers' persistent violent conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria;
- ii. investigate the various herdsmen attacks in Ekiti State and;
- iii. assess the positive effects of Ekiti State Anti-Open Grazing Law on Herders– Farmers' conflict in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

III. DATA COLLECTION

This study adopted a qualitative method of research design. The study make use of both primary and secondary data. Interviews were conducted. The interview was conducted with community leaders, the farmers, and some herdsmen who are readily available for such interview, Secondary data were sourced from the content analysis of the relevant academic texts. Non-random sampling techniques were applied; this however, includes

purposefully selected and snowball sampling method to get members of the population. 20 Key informants were interviewed, these were purposefully selected from the community leaders, the farmers, herdsmen from the study area. Interview information were interpreted and analysed.

The study was carried out in Ekiti State from the affected communities where cases of armed clashes between herdsmen and farmers were prominent such communities as Irele. Orin, Ipao and Oke-Ako farms settlement all in Ekiti State.

Results and Summary of Findings

Profile of respondents

Table I: Distributions of the Respondents according to sex.

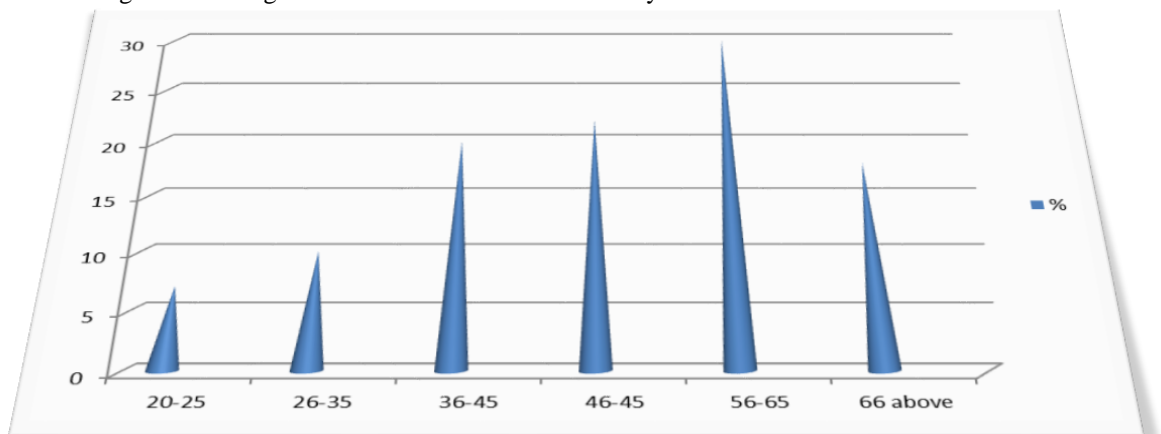
Gender Distribution of the Respondents		Percent %
Valid	Female	37
	Male	63
	Total	100

The table above and the charts below show the proportions of males and females who volunteered to participate and responded to the interview conducted in the study area. The sex distribution stood at 63% males and 37% for females respectively.

Distribution of respondent according to Age

Age Distribution of the Respondents		Percent %
Valid	20-25	7
	26-35	10
	36-45	20
	46-55	22
	56-65	30
	66-above	11

The table above and the following figure shows the age distribution of the respondents. This stood between 25 to 66years and above. The researcher concentrated more on the age that stood between 36-65years being the most active age that could give information relevant to the study.



Discussions of findings

Identification of the factors responsible for herders-farmers’ persistent violent conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria;

According to the reactions of the respondents in identifying the factors that are responsible for herders-farmers’ persistent violent conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria; some of the features identified as factors that triggers persistent armed confrontations between herders-farmers’ is as summarised below:

- i. the main concern of the herdsmen is to keep their cattle in good condition no matter how vulnerable they, as the herders may be. The cattle herder is a servant of his cattle;
- ii. invasion and destruction of farms lands and farm products by herdsmen's cattle;
- iii. farmers attacks on the cattle's for invading their farms;
- iv. farmers aggression in protection of his farmland.

Various cases of herdsmen attacks in Ekiti State;

Reading from the past records and as reveal by many of the respondents, there were evidential proof of several cases of farmers/herdsmen clashes in Ekiti State. A study according to Olugbenga (2017), exposes some of the series of clashes between the herders and farmers', some of the clashes were said to have been happening intermittently since 1998 which includes that of Orin Farm Settlement in Ido/Osi Local Government Council of the State during the then Military Administrator of Ekiti State (Olugbenga, 2017:81).

Other violent clashes between the herders and farmers occurred at Irele-Ekiti, IpaoEkiti and Oke-Ako farms settlement respectively where the fights becomes a communal fights among the community people and the herders in most cases. Adegbuyi (2016) in his finding pointed out that even with the police intervention to restore order during these clashes between herdsmen and natives in the town, the herdsmen usually ganged up after several attempt of resolution process to fight back and attack the people in retaliation, they were usually found carrying sophisticated weapons and attack their target communities mostly at night when the people were asleep and kill women, children and the aged with impunity and without pity, burning houses and looting their properties. The pick of this was the attack on May 20, 2016 at OkeAko in which several people died and others sustained various degrees of injury with several property destroyed. This particular incident was the major trigger of the public outcry that brought about the anti-grazing law by Ekiti State Government.

The positive effects of Ekiti State Anti-Open Grazing Law on Herders-Farmers' conflict in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

From the information gathered it was revealed that, when the incessant case of armed violent and confrontation persist among the Herders and the Farmers' in the affected area, Ekiti State government however enacted Grazing Regulation Law 2016 to control violence and the attacks on the villagers and farmers in Ekiti State by herdsmen. The law was said to have been necessitated by the killing of some people and injuring of several others during a suspected herdsmen's attack in Oke-Ako community in Ikole Local Council area of the state on May 20, 2016.

The Law was said to have contains eight major sections and the law contains the following:

- i. prohibits uncontrolled grazing;
- ii. impounding cattle or other ruminants animals that engages in indiscriminate grazing;
- iii. no person shall cause or permit any cattle or other ruminants belonging to him or under his control to graze on any land which the Governor has not designated as ranches.
- iv. the Governor shall by an order designate poses land in each Local Government in respect of which cattle or other ruminants may be permitted to graze;
- v. no cattle or other ruminants shall by any means move or graze at night;
- vi. cattle movement and grazing are restricted to the hours between 7:00am and 6:00pm" herdsmen are forbidden to carry firearms and other offensive weapons while grazing animals,
- vii. offenders are liable for the charge of terrorism.
- viii. criminalizing the carrying of all categories of weapons (including AK 47) with which pastoralists (herdsmen) have hacked down their numerous victims with impunity.
- ix. confiscation by government of cattle or other ruminants found to be grazing freely
- x. valuing and payment of compensation by herdsmen for property or farm products destroyed by herdsmen and, or their cattle.
- xi. make rules for the enforcement of the provisions of the Law.

(Ekiti State of Nigeria, 2016).

Arising from this, and since the law prohibiting the grazing of cattle by the herdsmen have been enacted, it was reveal that there has been a positive development. According to the interview conducted among the people from the affected area, it was reported that the Law has been able to reduce the conflicts between the herdsmen and farmers and some levels of positive achievements have been recorded. Some of the interview conducted is as summarized as follows.

According to some stakeholders from the affected community, they disclosed that some herdsmen have been arrested and persecuted appropriately in Ekiti State for violating the law prohibition open grazing.

According to one of the community head who is also a hunter spoke in anonymous and said:

As at date and after the bill has been passed into law by the Executive Governor of Ekiti State, 'We have been able to arrest some cattle and the herders who violated the law. Also, the herders have been persecuted by Ekiti State Grazing Enforcement Marshals (EGEM) and fines have been paid in respect of the crime and to repossess their cattle in the custody of Ekiti State Grazing Enforcement Marshals (EGEM).

However, some of the farmers in the affected communities admitted that the law was able to restrict the herdsman's activities in the in the area. One of the residence from the community who spoke in anonymous claimed that:

The grazing law has helped tremendously to enhance inter-group relationship. The people has been living in peace after the grazing law, we are now living and relate together as before. The dreaded activities of the herders have reduced drastically because they are afraid of the grazing law and to be jailed as promised by the governor of Ekiti State, in person of 'Chief AyodeleFayose, Osokomole of our time.

One of the herders who participated in the interview confirm that the grazing law has indeed helped to limit the excessiveness of the some herdsman or farmers/indigenes who always put laws into their hands. Some of the herders submitted that:

the law is good because it has been able to restore peace back to the community. Both the herders and the farmers are now doing normal.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Herdsman-Farmers' fight is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria and Ekiti state. Herders in search of greener pasture to feed their cattle persistently struggles with the farmers who are predominantly arable and cash crop agronomists and therefore, a violent resistant and a reprisal violent attacks by herdsman. Some cases of herdsman attacks and conflict has been witnessed in the state continually especially when the herdsman trample upon the rights of farmers by allowing their cows to encroach upon farmer's crops on their farmland. The study revealed that the incessant attacks and killings of the farmers by the herders and vice versa prompted the law prohibiting cattle and other ruminants grazing in Ekiti State by the Ekiti State Government in 2016. The Law was said to have been a stabilizing factor between the farmers and the herders. The study revealed that there has been a positive development arising from putting the Law in place and it was able to reduce the conflicts between the herdsman and farmers and recorded some levels of positive achievements.

Following the findings from the study, it is therefore concluded that the activities of the herders and farmers in Ekiti State is being supervised and monitored and this has indeed prevented the violent reoccurrence of herders-farmers conflicts in Ekiti State.

The study recommended that:

- i. the leaders of herdsman association in any community in Ekiti State must be held responsible and accountable for any breach of peace in the area of their domicile;
- ii. any victims on herders-farmers conflicts should be adequately compensated inform of palliative to assist in rehabilitating the victims;
- iii. the community heads in Ekiti State should put in place adequate security systems that would help to reduce the conflict between herders and farmers in the state.
- iv. both the herders and the farmers should be involved in enforcement of the law;
- v. the law on the prohibition of arms must be effectively enforced by law the enforcement agencies.

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