



**THE EFFECTS OF FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICT ON SCHOOLS
IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF DECLINING SCHOOL
ENROLMENT IN AGATU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE
STATE, NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

The study examined the effects of farmers/herdsmen crises on school enrolment in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The paper discusses the predisposing factors of farmers/herdsmen crisis, it also described Agatu local government area before the crises and after the carnage and its effects on school enrolment in particular to include: decrease in enrolment, absenteeism, poor turnout of teachers to schools during and after the crises, school infrastructural destruction, prolonged school closure, and set back to the educational advancement of the area. The paper suggested ways of boosting school enrolment which include: restoring peace in the area, provision of security, reviving the nomadic system of education and introducing subjects that helps inculcate the culture of tolerance, integration and interaction among citizens, reconstruction of school buildings destroyed during the carnage and empowering the people of the area for productivity.

Keywords: *Farmers/ Herdsmen crises, School Enrolment, Education Management.*

INTRODUCTION

Africa as a continent has witnessed brutal confrontation and massive assaults from terrorists and disastrous conflicts arising from inequalities among ethnic groups, religious, demographic, cultural (chieftaincy), political and economic classes. Such disputes or conflicts occur at urban, rural or national levels. It may

also be over farmlands, ponds, rivers or sites of construction of houses (Ubwa, 2018). Conflicts may last longer than necessary and it is capable of hindering rural development as it is the case of school enrolment in Agatu LGA of Benue State. There have been several cases of farmers-herdsmen conflicts across various States and locations in Nigeria. These conflicts have now become a threat to the country's national integration, such that the hitherto peaceful relationship between farmers and herdsmen across various parts of Nigeria is degenerating to a carnage level, leading to loss of lives and properties. These clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East (International Crises Group, 2017). Kolawale, Amoge and Akinwande (2018), asserts that attempts by the federal government to curb the incessant farmers-herdsmen appear to be futile.

Mwanfupe (2015), noted that farmers-herdsmen conflicts are equally prevalent in Cameroon, Tanzania, Sudan and Kenya. The necessity to provide food of crop and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever-growing demands, led to intensification of land use which has led to competition between farmers and herdsmen, however, such conflicts often times turned into serious hostilities and social friction. These conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have exacted a heavy humanitarian toll with thousands killed and tens of thousands displaced (Nyong and Fiki, 2005).

In Benue State, Governor Samuel Ortom, reported more than 1,878 people killed between 2014 and 2016. Tens of thousands also have been displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau states; in the absence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, as reported by International Crises Group (2017), most seek shelter in other poor, rural communities, straining their already scarce resources. For women and girls, the impact is frequently magnified. The relatives of men killed in the violence often evict widows from their farmland. Moreover, post-conflict economic and social disenfranchisement renders women and girls even more vulnerable to sexual and economic predation.

The crisis condition has led to a public outcry and expression of worry over the declining school enrolment in Nigeria and Agatu local government in particular. This is largely as a result of the effects of the crises which in turn affect educational quality improvement in the area and Nigeria. School enrolment has

been an area of discourse neglected by researchers, but which has now become a force to be reckoned with as far as growth in the education sector is concerned (Oguche, Haruna and Ikani 2016).

Nigeria accounts for 10% of the world's out-of-school children, and access to education is also very low with 52 percent of children being out of school (World Development Indicators, 2015). Nigerian net primary enrollment rate in 2010 was around 64 percent, well below the average rate for Sub-Saharan Africa (76%) and that of lower-middle-income economies (87%). Total primary completion rate (as a percentage of the relevant age group) in 2010 was around 76%, higher than the average rate for Sub-Saharan Africa (68%) but lower than the average for lower-middle-income economies (91%). The completion of primary school does not necessarily mean that students are able to read and do simple arithmetic. Many students in Nigeria take ten or more years of schooling to master such basic competencies (Favara, Appasamy and Amarito, 2015).

In Agatu local government area, from May 2013-March 2016 which the crises lasted, the researcher observed that many schools were out rightly closed in about 13 communities affected, while communities that some schools opened, there has been a steady decline in school enrolment as a result of crises between the Fulani cattle herdsman and the indigenes of Agatu local government area, some of the major towns and commercial cities in the local government area were attacked and people fled for their lives. This crisis has affected school enrolment, the quality of teaching and educational quality improvement.

The Federal government of Nigeria and authorities of Agatu Local Government had made attempts to ensure that peace returned to the Local Government area and that the internally displaced person return from camp to their homes, but this seems not to have yielded meaningful results as most people are yet to return. Also prolonged school closure has made many children to give up on schooling for farming and other menial jobs to help their families cushion the effects of the crises and poverty, some of the children migrate to other communities others were given out to relatives across various states in Nigeria. The need for normalcy in Agatu local government area of Benue State Nigeria for improved school enrolment necessitates this study.

AGATU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE

The Agatu people are found in Benue, Kogi and Nasarawa States; but the bulk of them are in Benue State which this study is centered on. The Agatu in Benue State was recognized as a Local Government in 1996. As such, it is bounded in the North by Nasarawa State, which is bisected by River Benue, in the south by Apa Local Government area of Benue State and in the East by Gwer-West Local Government Area and in the West it is bounded by Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State. It has a total land mass of about 500km (Godwin, 2004). Agatu has plain land but with jointed hills which extends from Odugbeho through Ogbangede and Ello to Okwutanobe. The most outstanding feature that influenced the people of Agatu is the River Benue and its tributaries like, Olugwu, Ochekwu, Igbabu, Ogwule and other small streams that always over flood their banks during raining season.

In terms of climate and vegetation, Agatu is in tropical zone and as well influenced by sunshine. The climatic and vegetation features make Agatu to observe two distinct seasons. The seasons are dry and wet or raining season. Due to the changing pattern of the climatic condition and because of the fertile land, most of the Agatu people are farmers. They produce crops such as yam, cassava, beni-seed, guinea corn, maize, pepper, rice, millet, melon, beans, to mention but the prominent ones. In addition, they are great fishermen; their neighbors believe that they are the greatest fishermen in Benue State. Also, the thick grasses and forests make some men to be great hunters. The local government is also known for its commercial activities. The abundant natural resources like fertile land, rivers, forestry and solid mineral support commercial activities. The availability of these resources brought about influx of people into the local government area (Godwin, 2016).

THE MIGRATION INTO AGATU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

The term Fulani was coined from the word Fullar by the Europeans and specifically the French that met them in North Africa. The *Fula* people, also known as *Fulani* in *Hausa* language, are a mass population widely dispersed and culturally diverse in all of Africa, but most predominant in West Africa and Nigeria in particular. The Fulani's generally speak the Fula language. A significant number of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and

sheep across the vast dry grass lands of their environment, making them the world's largest pastoral nomadic group. They are massively spread over many countries, and are found mainly in West Africa and northern parts of Central Africa, but also in Sudan and Egypt. The main Fulani sub-groups in Nigeria are: Fulbe Adamawa, FulbeMbororo, FulbeSokoto, FulbeGombe, and the FulbeBorgu (Eyekpimi, 2016).

The Fulani herdsmen were among the early settlers in the local government area who took advantage of the vast land to carry out grazing activities. The coming of the pastoralists or the Fulani nomads started as from early 1950s. This coincided with when the Hausa traders and Christian missionaries became prominent in the area. This was the era that the Agatu reached its heights in the production of cotton and millet. These products were sold at Ugba and Oweto. From those areas the Hausas crossed these crops across River Benue to Loko in Nasarawa region (Godwin, 2004). The planting of cash and food crops such as millet, cotton, rice, cassava, yams among others as from 1940-1950 made the Agatu to clear large hectares of land for planting of these crops. This also resulted in burning of bushes that were cleared even during raining season. Also, this was the time that the Christian missionaries and the Hausa traders spread and began to patronize many routes or foot paths from villages to villages in Agatu land. It was from then that the Hausa traders spread the news of Agatu people to Nasarawa and Keffi traders. Through that, the Hausa scholars and devoted Muslims with some Fulanis came to scout the area known as Agatu. As pointed above, the Fulani and their cattle arrived in Agatu in the early 1950 sequel to the news gotten from the Hausa traders and scholars about the Agatu land which was fertile, evergreen, with plain land and few mountains that they could graze (Godwin, 2016).

THE PREDISPOSING FACTORS OF FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICT

Findings from majority of studies, in-depth interviews with stakeholders from Agatu LG and headers in the area on the predisposing factors of farmers-herdsmen crisis revealed scarcity of grazing land, farm land and water as the causal factor of the crisis. When farmers and herders clash, infrastructural facilities in the schools such as classroom buildings, offices, books and other

relevant documents are greatly destroyed or damaged. Most often, schools are burnt down to ashes in the rural areas. This makes it hard for learners to continue with their learning activities for a long time as they relocate to safer places with their families (Suleiman, 2016 cited in Okwori and Angenyi 2019). The Management of schools requires proper planning, directing, monitoring and controlling of human, material, time and physical resources, finances, records and information flow which has been affected drastically as most school facilities and documents have been destroyed thereby keeping students and teachers out of the school (Ahmed, 2015).

Herdsman and farmers clashes in Agatu LGA are dated to 2012. Before then, there has been a peaceful relationship among farmers and herdsman across states in Nigeria, except few cases of minor misunderstandings that did not claim life (Doyin, 2017). The relationship between the Agatu and Fulanis from the onset was cordial. The two ethnic groups' had lived together in peace for years. The Agatu are predominantly agrarian (farmers) while the Fulanis are traditionally nomads. The two have a profound respect for each other and were engaged in socio-cultural, economic and political interactions over the years.

The Fulanis knew when the Agatu people harvests their crops; they always wait till the month of November every year before moving from the North of the country crossing River Benue between Lokoja and Bagana via Igala land into Agatu area. This was done to avoid clashing with the farmers. Sometimes, their youths reared their cattle close to the farms of Agatu people, and they were always with long sticks to control the cattle from people's farm. This action pleased the Agatu and they exchanged greetings when they meet at the edge of their farms. As time went on their relationship was so tight that the farmers gave the chaff and dried stalks of their crops free to the Fulanis` to feed their cattle. This act as well pleased the Fulanis that when they discovered any of their cows, sheep or goat sick, they gave it out to their Agatu friends without collecting money. They also give animals like rabbits, antelopes and small animals that they killed freely to their Agatu friends.

This continued for almost sixty (60) years (1950-2010). They moved, interacted, traded and performed some political, economic and social activities together peacefully which made them to also have their head or chief as ` Ardo in Agatu. Conflict erupted as a result of grievances between the two parties

from previous years. According to Omawumi (2016), the current feud started because of farming, grazing land and water. The farmers accused the herdsmen of damaging their crops by failing to control their animals while the herdsmen equally claimed that the farming communities steal their cattle.

According to Godwin (2016), the issue of land disputes between Fulanis and Oshigbudu community in 2011 and 2012 also fueled the grievance between the Fulanis and Agatu. The fulanis in this village planned to settle by erecting houses, however the Oshigbudu people insisted they go and return in every November and park in March or April as usual. The elders of Oshigbudu explained that the land they occupied belonged to some individuals. Furthermore, in 2012, the Fulanis alleged that some of their children especially the female ones were kidnapped and assassinated by Agatus that were living in the riverside which led to fight in the riverside on 5th and 12th May 2015.

The crises between the Fulanis and Tiv communities in Guma, Makurdi, and Gwer West LG were another factor that made them to wage war on the Agatu people. This rendered the Fulanis homeless in the North West of the Tiv region. Some of the Fulani groups that escaped from the warring regions settled in Agatu land. Their movements and actions were different from those that were living in Agatu before. Some of them were die-hearted and cruel that they raped some pregnant women on the road and farms (Godwin, 2016).

THE IMPLICATION OF THE CONFLICT ON SCHOOL ENROLMENT

Education in the modern economy has become a determinant for growth of the national economy. This is because education is seen as one of the major determinant of human capital development. Incessant destruction of schools has created a great social problem in affected areas. Education in Benue state since the incidence of Farmers/Headers crises has been confronted with a lot of challenges which has made many affected villages and local governments to close down schools and colleges for a long period of time. When farmers and herders clash, infrastructural facilities in the schools such as classroom buildings, offices, books and other relevant documents are greatly destroyed or damaged. Most often, schools are burnt down to ashes in the rural areas. This makes it hard for learners to continue with their learning activities for a long time as they relocate to safer places with their families (Suleiman, 2016 cited in Okwori and Angenyi 2019).

The educational system in Agatu LGA of Benue State Nigeria was already fragile before the farmers-herdsmen crisis with significant numbers of children never attending schools and large numbers dropping out without completion of secondary school. It has affected education in Agatu LGA leading to low school enrolment as well as high number of out of school children (Bilyaminu, Iya and Purokayo, 2017). The closing down of schools have far reaching consequences, including ending the education of many students and the opportunity to get to high education (Odinkalu, 2014). Mohammed (2015), also examined the effect of insurgency on girl's education in north eastern Nigeria. The finding revealed that the insurgency has affected education negatively in north eastern Nigeria, because the students had been hurt in the presence of other fellow student during attack in their school, as such students were afraid from going to school.

The crises affected educational activities of both primary and secondary schools in Agatu LGA. More than twenty villages along the river banks were deserted for more than one year. The whole primary and secondary schools in those areas were closed for more than one year. It was also observed that many schools in the heart of Agatu could not operate as parents took their children to other local government for safety. Students of some secondary schools like special science secondary school, Egwuma community secondary school Ekwo/Okpanchenyi, GSS Obagaji, Community secondary school Abugbe among others wrote the West African Examination Council papers in other schools for fear of been attacked by the Fulani warriors. The education Officers in Agatu could not go out for supervision and inspection. Many children were at home for almost two years.

The table below shows the school enrolment analysis of Community Secondary School Abugbe in Agatu Local Government Area Nigeria before and after the Herdsmen- Farmers clashes in the community.

Table 1: Enrolment Analysis of students of Community Secondary School Abugbe before the crises (January-September 2012)

| S/NO | Class | No of Male | No of Female | Total |
|-------|-------|------------|--------------|-------|
| 1 | JSS 1 | 30 | 24 | 54 |
| 2 | JSS 2 | 26 | 20 | 46 |
| 3 | JSS 3 | 20 | 30 | 50 |
| 4 | SS 1 | 57 | 20 | 77 |
| 5 | SS 2 | 20 | 28 | 48 |
| 6 | SS 3 | 80 | 43 | 123 |
| Total | | 233 | 165 | 398 |

Agatu Local Government Education Authority, (2020).

Table 1 showed the enrolment of students in Community Secondary School Abugbe in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State before the crisis, from the table above the total numbers of student enrolled from January to September 2012 are 398, the numbers of male students are 233 while female were 165.

Table 2: Enrolment Analysis of students of Community Secondary School Abugbe after the crises (January-September 2019)

| S/NO | Class | No of Male | No of Female | Total |
|--------------|-------|------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | JSS 1 | 10 | 13 | 23 |
| 2 | JSS 2 | 5 | 7 | 12 |
| 3 | JSS 3 | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| 4 | SS 1 | 6 | 10 | 16 |
| 5 | SS 2 | 8 | 9 | 17 |
| 6 | SS 3 | 13 | 7 | 20 |
| Total | | 50 | 54 | 104 |

Agatu Local Government Education Authority, (2020).

Table 2 presents the enrolment of students in Community Secondary School Abugbe after the farmers-herders crisis in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, the results shows that there were 50 male students and 54 female students enrolled in the school after the crisis in 2019. There was a great reduction of the numbers of students enrolled in 2012 when the crisis started from 398 in 2012 to 104 enrolment in the school within January to September. This is as a result of massive migration to other communities, many children were displaced into different IDP camps and others dropped out of school to support their parents in the farm.

This has a great implication on the future of the children, the Local Government, State and the country at large. The crisis brought hardship on the parent's ability to feed, not to talk of enrolling children in school. The management of schools by teachers also became a problem as observed by Okwori and Angenyi (2019) in a study titled Farmers/Pastoralists conflicts and the management of primary schools in Benue State. They found that farmers/pastoralists conflicts negatively influenced infrastructural facilities utilization and students' enrolment in primary schools in Benue State to a high extent. These conflicts undermine educational development and economic growth by destroying the productive segment of the society. The worst part is that many pupils in Benue

State have failed to be enrolled in school after this calamity children were forced to relocate with parents to places that are safer from the crisis while children presently in the communities, choose farming over school.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociological studies are conducted within, and guided by theoretical frame of reference. The study used the most relevant approach (Closure Theory). This is because Nigeria can be rightly described as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa; the problem can be rooted in horizontal inequality. Almost all conflicts in North-Central Nigeria are triggered by the feeling of one ethnic identity deprivation, the contest of domination, and unequal distribution of society's approved value "Land". In a country characterized by such intense ethnic and economic polarization; inter-ethnic violence for access to Land and domination is a fatal affliction of all process (Mustapha, 2005).

Weber's Closure theory can be used to buttress the condition in Agatu L.G.A. Social Closure theory suggests the process by which social collective ties seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligible. This entails the singling out of certain social or physical attributes as the justificatory bases of exclusion (Weber, 1958). The monopolization is directed against competitors who share some negative or positive characteristics (race, religion, trade, language, social origin). Its purpose is always the closure of social and economic opportunities to these different identities.

This is because certain social relation corresponds to definite forms of consciousness. Ethnic identity which has the consciousness of kind, derives, at the level of social relations, from the purposeful nature of cooperation in the sense that it involves the selection of others on the basis of identified common interest i.e. land for crops by the Agatu identity and same land for grazing by the herdsmen. A consciousness of interest; what this means is that common identities are premised on material conditions favorable to material need, satisfaction and separate identities derive from conditions that do not lead to or obstruct need satisfaction. In the latter case there is competition. "Competition may thus be as the activity which produces class... an unending battle of who can get the most out of whom..." (Ollman, 1971: 209). Other people such as children, women in the conflict areas are mere objects and victims of the carnage (Dansabo, 2011; Mensah, 2011, Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

If these conditions are present, the individual or groups feel (s) deprived. This condition can be likened to the Farmers/Herdsmen crisis in Agatu LGA. Following the incessant attacks and reprisals by both identities, the

representation following the violence is largely hinged on the claim that one ethnic identity (Agatu) are the original owners of the land as such should determine how the Fulanis conducts their economic activities in a way that will not affects their farming activities practiced for centuries. However, this claim is contradicted by the position of the Herdsmen who claimed years of effective residency hence entitled to own land for their economic activities.

This led to the chain of violent outbursts in which has greatly affected the educational advancements of students; leading to massive declining of school enrolment.

CONCLUSION:

Education in Benue State, specifically Agatu LGA is influenced and affected by Farmers-Headers crises. The level of output expected for national development from children in Agatu LGA may not be attained with the continuous farmers-headers crises in Agatu LGA which has led to prolonged school closure and hence low school enrolment. This has also resulted to high level of students drop out. An improvement in school enrolment, school infrastructure will significantly determine positive educational output for the State and country at large. The higher the level of school enrolment, the higher the level of educational output. This can be achieved through finding a lasting solution to the farmers-headers crises as educational output is now largely dependent on it.

Recommendations

- The Federal government should find a way of reconciling the enmity between farmers and headers through the introduction of cattle ranches to avoid free grazing of farm land which will ignite more crises.
- The government should provide free education and make it compulsory for all children in Agatu Local Government Area.
- Nongovernmental organizations and wealthy philanthropists should partner with the community members in reconstructing school buildings destroyed during the crisis. This will encourage the parents to send back their children to school in the region.
- Government should be on a periodic dialogue with Agatu community leaders, Fulani leaders in the area, and parents on the need to enroll their children in school and also sensitize them on the importance of education
- Government should provide infrastructure and enabling environment for private sector investment for the employment of youths which will cushion the effects of the crisis on the victims.
- The Federal government should revive the Nomadic system of education; and design academic curriculum in a way that conveys the message of social

integration, tolerance and interaction among citizens to foster peace among conflicting communities.

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