

Rural Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts, State Mediation Failure and Prospects of Traditional Institutions' Intervention in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract : Rural Farmers-herdsmen conflicts have resulted in a large number of casualties in many parts of Nigeria. Herds of cattle have died, while farmers recorded inestimable losses of their crops and harvests. The overall consequences have impacted negatively on food security across the country. There are divided opinions by scholars, agricultural experts and conflict analysts on the root causes of the conflicts and why traditional institutional interventions are ineffective in resolving the crisis. The study, therefore, aims to investigate the fundamentality of the conflicts' causes in Southwest Nigeria and the correlates between traditional institutional authorities' intervention and farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Southwest Nigeria. A structured interview schedule and focus group discussion were employed to elicit information from 180 farmers and 48 herdsman selected through a multistage sampling procedure from the conflict zones in Southwest Nigeria. Collected data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means and the Relative Importance Index (RII). The study found that climate change effects, farmland encroachment, crop damage, theft, and competition for land and water resources and pollution were the root causes of the violent herders-rural farmer's clashes. The quest for wealth acquisition by some traditional rulers and some notable individuals in the conflict neighborhoods, occasioned tribal-mix herds possession and, thus undermining local institutional interventions and perverting justice through weak conflict resolution strategies, therefore, fueling further conflicts. Most farmers in the conflict zones have abandoned their farms for fear of death. This coupled with physical, social, economic and psychological consequences have deepened food insecurity and impaired the economic conditions of the herdsman and the farmers. Currently, there are no mutually established mediation mechanisms as most states are opposed to the enactment of grazing laws to protect territorial encroachments of lands and subsequent multiplication of the herdsman. It is suggested that government and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) should encourage a functional stakeholder's forum for sustainable conflict resolution and establish a compensation scheme for losses incurred while extension agents are equipped with knowledge on conflict management strategies for peace attainment with the envisioned goal of achieving sustainable livelihoods and food security in Southwest Nigeria.

Keywords : conflict resolution, food security, herdsman-farmers conflict, sustainable livelihoods, traditional institutions

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