



PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG CROP FARMERS AND FULANI HERDSMEN IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the participation of community leaders in conflict resolution and management among farmers and herdsmen in Oyo state, Nigeria. Stratified and random sampling technique was used to select 180 community leaders from 25 communities in Orire Local Government Area of Oyo State. Data were collected through the use of structured interview schedule and Focus Group Discussions. The data collected were summarised and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation respectively. Results show that competition over water (93.8%), land (94.4%), lack of grazing zones (77.2%), and aggressive nature of the parties involved (77.2%) were main causes of conflicts among respondents. Conflict resolution measures mainly adopted by the community leaders include dialogue with parties involved (84.4%), use of village committees (76.7%), negotiating settlement (67.2%), entering agreement and ensuring such agreement is implemented (71.1%) and use of law enforcement agencies (84.4%). Level of participation of community leaders in conflict resolution was however moderate. Major constraints to effective participation of community leaders in conflict resolution include lack of institutional support from government (mean=3.0), inadequate finance (mean=3.0), language barrier (mean=3.0) and evasive nature of the herdsmen (mean=3.0). Years of schooling ($r=0.223$; $p<0.05$) was found to be positively and significantly correlated with participation in conflict resolution. The study recommended the need for local leaders and the government to work together and take more proactive measure in reducing the current level of conflict in the conflict prone areas. It also suggested the need to broaden local leaders' knowledge base through provision of training in conflict handling.

Keywords: Local leaders, conflict resolution, participation, capacity building

INTRODUCTION

Conflict between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers in the country has become a topical issue that is being discussed on national dailies in recent time. This is because the country is at a critical period of economic recession and food insecurity, which necessitates the clamouring for diversification of the economy from over dependence on oil to agricultural production for its survival, as it had been in the past. However, recurrent conflict which has become rampant in virtually all the states of the federation with constant reports on clashes between crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen poses a major setback. This situation, among other factors, is greatly contributing to the sector's inability to provide enough food for its ever-increasing population as farmers are quitting farming for the fear of being killed and the destruction of their farms and crops during such conflicts. It is also detrimental to social co-existence (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010; Fasona *et al*, 2013).

The resultant food crisis and insecurity is evident in the heavy presence of scavengers during ceremonial parties by both young and old to scout for food in a bit to fight hunger (Ojo, 2009). In the same vein, FAO (2003) remarks that Nigeria is currently struggling with the problem of food security and sustainable agriculture which is evident in its inability to feed its citizenry on a land mass that is about 80% arable. Also, high

importation of food into the country is another indicator of food insecurity and the situation if not checked portends a great danger to sustainable development. Deliberate and conscious efforts must be put in place at resolving the incessant conflict, so that socio economic activities can prosper in the affected areas.

Various conflicts that ensued between Fulani herdsmen and farmers arose from the destruction of farmlands by herds of cattle. More often than not, conflicts according to Opakleke (2016), arise from opposing needs from both sides. Uhembe (2015) reported that crop farmers accused the pastoralists of destruction of their crops and contamination of community water points. In return, the pastoralists accuse the crop farmers of denying them access to grazing areas and occasionally rustling their cattle. The Fulani herdsmen livelihood strategies had resulted in conflicts over the destruction of crops (Tenuche and Ifatimehin, 2009).

Adisa and Adekunle (2010) opined that conflict is detrimental to rural livelihoods, food security, and social co-existence. It also inhibits the process of wellbeing and development of people and the entire community. Where such conflict occurs, some people have to take charge of resolving it for peace to reign so as to guarantee the well-being of people and improvement of their communities. The prevailing situation over conflict and arson that arises as a result of the aggressive



and annihilating nature of the herders poses a great challenge to the farming community. The importance of providing resolution to farmers and herders conflicts in the country has been recognised because of the declining effect it has on food production. Usually when two parties are in conflict, there is the need for third party interference to cushion or resolve the differences responsible for their actions. Otherwise there may be no peace and this in turn will affect development of the people and community in such areas. This is why community leaders must intensify their effort in resolving conflict in their domain so as to ensure peace and development. Amidst the conscious effort that has been put in place, is the intervention of community leaders to resolve such conflict in areas where it occurs. Studies have shown that the resolution of such conflicts can be seen as an integral part of the function of community leaders (Ofuoku, 2009). Conflict resolution can be defined as the process of resolving a dispute or conflict by meeting at least some of each side's needs and addressing their interest. Community leaders can be effective in controlling the activities of nomadic pastoralist in their environment provided they are actively involved (Tonah, 2006). Activities of the community leaders and the recognition given to them by members of and settlers in the communities give them the opportunity to exercise control in decision making activities that promotes development and reduces conflicts in their community.

Conflict has become an age long affair and it has caused many deaths and destruction of farmland from different parts of the country, resulting into farmers quitting agricultural production in a bid to save their lives. It is currently a national affair that has received and is still receiving attention from all ramifications. Despite concerted efforts being given to it by all the stakeholders involved, the crises still persist all over the country as if nothing has been done to stop it. Community leaders are regarded as having the attributes to resolve crisis as they receive the bulk of the cases dealing with violence which might be political, occupational, domestic or antisocial behaviour. Yet it appears that they lack the power and knowledge to prevent and adequately respond to violence (Rukuni, *et al.* 2015). Against this backdrop, there is need to investigate and document participation of community leaders in conflict resolution among crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen.

This study examined the participation of community leaders in conflicts resolution among crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Oyo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the socioeconomic characteristics of community leaders in the study area;

- ii. identify the causes of conflict between crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen in the study area;
- iii. identify the measures taken by community leaders in conflict resolution between crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen
- iv. determine the participation of community leaders in conflict resolution between crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen; and
- v. identify the constraints to effective participation of community leaders' in conflicts resolution between crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Oyo State, Nigeria. The State is located on the latitude 7,460N and longitude 3,560E in the southern part of Nigeria. The State covers an area of 28, 454 square kilometres. According to NPC (2006), Oyo state had a population of 5,591,585 people. The state shares borders with the Republic of Benin in the West, Kwara state in the north, Osun State in the east and Ogun state in the south. The climate of the state is tropical with distinct wet and dry seasons.

The study was carried out in Orire Local Government Area (LGA) of Oyo State, Nigeria. Farming is the major occupation of the people in the area. The selection of Orire LGA was due to the recurrent clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers. Twenty-five communities were selected from the list of villages in the LGA using simple random sampling technique. From each of the selected communities, stratified sampling was used to isolate the community leaders from the rest of the population. Eight respondents were selected from each of the communities using simple random sampling technique. The total sample size was 200. However, only 180 were certified as containing enough information for analysis.

Data collected was collated and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple frequency counts, percentages and mean were used to summarize the data while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between selected community leaders attributes and their participation in conflict resolution.

A participation index was used as dependent variable and was measured on a scale of 1-5 by requesting respondents to indicate their participation in thirteen conflict resolution strategies. This was measured on a 5 point Likert - type scale of 'never', 'little,' 'moderate', 'high' and 'very high' and scores of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 were assigned respectively. Constraints to participation in conflict resolution were measured by requesting respondents to indicate the constraints experienced from a list of possible constraints and the severity was measured as major (3), minor (2) and not a

constraint (1). Weighted mean score was obtained for each of the constraint items which was used to rank the constraints in order of importance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that more than half of the respondents (52.8 %) fell within the age range of 41-60 years. This implies that most of the respondents were active. Age is an important factor in leadership which could positively influence their participation in conflict resolution activities. Larger proportions of the respondents (80.6%) were male, while the remaining (19.4%) were female. The study signified that males are more involved in agricultural and peace making issues in the study area. Also, majority (80.6%) of the respondents were married (80.6%) with mean household size of 7 persons. The study thus suggested a general inclination towards relatively large households. This implies that conscious effort has to be put in place to ensure relative peace so that people can go about their daily activities and be able to cater for their large family size with adequate security.

However, 37.8% of the respondents had no formal education, while 29.0% only spent 1-6 years in school. Only 17.8% had spent more than 12 years in school. The implication is that educational attainment in the area of study is fairly low. Education however is likely to play a more positive role in conflict resolution since there tend to be less conflict with higher education (Makado *et al*, 2015). Village chiefs (47.2%) dominated those that made up the community leaders in the study area, followed by youth leaders (17.8%). Others that constituted the community leaders are Imams (6.1%), pastors (12.2%) and opinion leaders (16.7%). This is an indication that village chiefs, youths, and religious leaders all play pivotal roles in ensuring peace and development in their domain. Majority (74.4%) of the local leaders indicated that conflict occurred between 1-3 times in the last two years in their communities among crop farmers and herdsmen.

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Age	21-30	12	6.6
	31-40	37	20.6
	41-50	54	30.0
	51-60	41	22.8
	61 and above	36	20.0
Sex	Male	145	80.6
	Female	35	19.4
Marital status	Single	3	1.7
	Married	145	80.6
	Divorce	3	1.7
	Widow	29	16.1
Household size	1-3	25	13.9
	4-6	67	37.2
	7-9	40	22.2
	10 and above	48	26.7
Years of schooling	1-6	53	29.4
	7-12	27	16.0
	12 and above	32	17.8
	No formal education	68	37.8
Position of the leaders in their communities	Youth leader	32	17.8
	Opinion leader	30	16.7
	Village chief	85	47.2
	Imam	11	6.1
	Pastor	22	12.2
Number of times conflict occurred in the last 2 years	1-3	134	74.4
	4-6	46	25.6

Causes of conflict among crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen

The data in Table 2 shows that competition for land (93.8%), competition for water (94.4%) and destruction of farmland and crop damage (93.8%) were the main causes of conflict

between the crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen. Other causes of conflict identified by local leaders include lack of grazing zone (77.2%) and aggressive nature of parties involved (76.1%). It is evident from the findings that the major causes of conflict are struggle by the crop farmers and the



Fulani herdsmen over scarce resources in order to guarantee survival. Local leaders opined that the Fulani herdsmen were in the habit of moving away from locations of insufficient pasture and water to more favourable locations and this leads to overgrazing of fallow land, destruction of crops by cattle as well as pollution of water source. This supports the position of Gefu and Gills (1990), Tonah (2006) and Ofuoku (2009) who stated that the most frequent causes of conflicts between farmers and herders is the destruction of crops in

farming seasons and pre-harvest periods. According to views expressed during Focus Group Discussions:

'Herdsmen often disregard the local authority and go as far as killing and sexually harassing the women and youths on the fields'- A farmer from Onidoko.

'They are notorious and aggressive and can go to any extent to get what they want especially water and pasture for their animals' – A farmer from Tewure.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents on causes of conflict among crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen

Causes*	Frequency	Percentage
Competition for water	169	93.8
Competition for land	170	94.4
Lack of grazing zone	139	77.2
Aggressive nature of parties involved	139	77.2
Destruction of farmland and damaging of crops	169	93.8

*Multiple responses

Source: Field survey, 2016

Measures adopted by community leaders in conflict resolution

Table 3 reveals that most of the community leaders adopted dialogue facilitation (84.4%), use of law enforcement agency (84.4%), use of village committee (76.7%), negotiating settlement (67.2%), fostering agreement (71.1%) as measures for conflict resolution among the conflicting parties.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents on measures adopted in conflict resolution

Adopted measures	Frequency	Percentage
Facilitation of dialogue	152	84.4
Use of village committee	138	76.7
Negotiating settlement	121	67.2
Fostering agreement	128	71.1
Use of law enforcement agency	152	84.4

*Multiple responses

*Source: Field survey, 2016

Table 4 shows the participation of community leaders in conflict resolution. Majority indicated that they participated in actions involving calling on government for intervention especially for a clear-cut policy on the issue and invitation of the parties involved to meetings separately (mean=5.0). The use of government in management of conflict supports findings of Adekunle and Adisa (2010) where farmers and herdsmen expressed their readiness to cooperate with government in managing conflict. Also, there was high participation of leaders in enquiry making on resolving the crisis from both sides (mean=4.98), joint meetings of the two parties (mean=4.98), involvement of law enforcement agents (4.98) and meeting with the leaders of the Fulani (mean=4.95). This is further illustrated by a comment during one of the FDGs

'The community leader tries to mediate between the two parties which is not effective most of the time as it only brings peace for a short period. The herdsmen retreat for some time and later come back' – A farmer from Oniyo.

There was however little participation of leaders in decisions regarding provision of palliative measures to aggrieved parties (mean=2.03). Local leaders also never participated in making move to create grazing zones (mean=1.00) and use of indigenous knowledge to resolve conflict (mean=1.00). The study revealed that majority (84.40%) of the respondents participated in conflict resolution strategies on a moderate level as 84.4% were in the moderate range of participation. There might be certain factors restraining their full participation in conflict resolution.

Table 4: Results of Participation index of community leaders' participation in conflict resolution

Participation in decisions on conflict resolution measures	Mean	Rank
Enquiry on causes and how to resolve the crisis from both sides.	4.98	2
Invitation of the two parties to meeting separately	5.00	1
Joint meeting of the two parties involved to facilitate dialogue	4.98	2
Creation of grazing zones in areas of conflict.	1.00	9
Involvement of law enforcement agents	4.98	2
Negotiate a settlement/Palliative measures to aggrieved parties	2.03	5
Sanction of defaulters	1.23	8
Provision of protective measures	1.41	6
Calling on government for a clear-cut policy on the issue	5.00	1
Formation of joint monitoring group.	1.33	7
Identification of Fulani herdsmen leaders	4.95	3
Outright ban of Fulani herdsmen	3.68	4
Use of indigenous knowledge to deal with the situation	1.00	9

Never participated = 1.00-1.99,
 Little participation=2.00-2.99,
 Moderate participation = 3.00-3.99,
 High participation = 4.00-4.99,
 Very high participation =5.00-5.99

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by level of participation

Level of Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Low (1-39.80)	3	1.60
Moderate (39.81-43.40)	152	84.40
High (43.40 and above)	25	14.00

Constraints to conflict resolution

The data in Table 6 indicates the constraints to effective local leaders' participation in conflict resolution among crop and Fulani herdsmen. The constraints were ranked according to their severity. Lack of institutional support by government, inadequate finance, evasive nature of the Fulani and language barrier constituted the main constraints to effective participation of the

respondents in the study area. Other constraints faced by the respondents were lack of adequate commitment and accountability, low level of respect for community leaders, lack of protective measure to counter hostile parties and declining influence of traditional rulers. The minor constraint was however lack of cooperation among crop farmers.

Table 6: Constraints to conflict resolution

Constraints*	Mean	Rank
Lack of institutional support by government	3.00	1
Lack of commitment and poor accountability on the part of community leaders	2.60	2
Inadequate finance	3.00	1
Evasive nature of the Fulani	3.00	1
Low level of respect for community leaders	2.60	2
Language barrier	3.00	1
Lack of protective measure to counter hostile parties	2.53	3
Declining influence of traditional rulers	2.40	4
Lack of cooperation among crop farmers	1.00	5

*Multiple responses
 Field survey, 2016

Relationship between personal attributes and participation of community leaders

The results in Table 7 show that there was a significant relationship between years of

schooling and participation of community leaders in conflict resolution ($r=0.223$). Age also had negative but not significant relationship with participation ($r=-0.128$). The implication is that the higher the years of schooling, the higher the



willingness of local leaders to take charge of issues that affect their community for development and wellbeing of the locality. Education had significant positive relationship with level of participation of community leaders. Implicitly, the more educated a community leader is the higher the level of his

participation in conflict resolution in his community as education has a lot of influence on the alertness of people to rise up and find solutions to challenges in their community.

Table 7: Relationship between personal attributes of local leaders and their participation

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Age	-0.128	0.08	NS
Household size	0.113	0.079	NS
Years of schooling	0.223*	0.018	S

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Source: Field survey, 2016

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown the relevance and participation of local leaders in farmers-herders conflict resolution. It also revealed that level of participation of community leaders in the study area was moderate. Major constraints to effective participation of community leaders include lack of institutional supports by government, lack of commitment and accountability, inadequate finance, invasive nature of Fulani herdsmen and injustice from law enforcement agency. Education and number of training local leaders attended on conflict handling have been found to have positive and significant relationship with their level of participation. Based on findings of this study, it is therefore concluded that much still need to be done in the area of study so as to ensure active and effective participation of community leaders in conflict resolution. Hence, the study recommends the need for local leaders and the government to work together and take more proactive measures in reducing the current level of conflict in the conflict prone areas. There is need for government at various levels (federal, state and local) to address the issue of adequate provision of grazing reserves to accommodate the interest of herdsmen who are always on the move to secure food and water for their herds.

Also, there is need to empower the leaders to be able to face the constraints to their participation. Since most local leaders get to position of leadership through hereditary and appointment, there is need to broaden their knowledge base through provision of training in conflict handling.

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