

FOOD INSECURITY IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA: FARMER-HERDERS CONFLICT AND CONFLICT- RESEARCH DILEMMA IN VIEW

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Abstract

Enugu State has been confronted with food insecurity due to the destruction of farm crops in its different parts. This paper centers on ethical dilemmas confronting researching the causes of food insecurity in the state considering the conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and the indigenous farmers. Crisis intervention model was used to anchor this work because the issue of food insecurity needs urgent intervention. The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research design. Following, the researchers were confronted by ethical issues surrounding such research boarding insecurity issues of researching conflict-torn areas particularly, converging both herders and community-members hence, twenty participants were interviewed using convenient sampling. Result showed that herdsmen and their cows have been noted as key destroyers of farm products in certain parts of the state that have resulted in the scarcity of foodstuff in the market. The promotion of modern ranching and the advocacy role of social workers and all stakeholders will promote peace and production in the study area. Hence, it is recommended that the government should promote adoption of modern ranch for grazing and prohibit herdsmen from invading farms and destroying farmer/community-assets.

Keywords: Ethical dilemma, Food insecurity, Risk, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

All over the globe food and nutrition adequacy are facing critical challenges caused by climate change scenarios, sharply rising food demand to falling supply, neglect of investment in agriculture, high cost of production and herdsmen clash with farmers (Etim, Duke & Ogbinyi, 2017). Ayinde et al. (2020) emphasized that one of the most important and crucial debates in the world today is how to provide sufficient food for over seven billion people in the world. The authors noted that in 2019, 690 million people were suffering from hunger globally while about 135 million people in 55 countries and territories were suffering from acute food insecurity with Africa accounting for 73 million of these figures. Nigeria has increasingly faced economic/food hardship as a result of conflicts between the indigenous farmers and the Fulani herdsmen

(Adebayo & Ojo, 2012; Shettima & Tar, 2008). According to Okwor (2016), Agyemang (2017), Mufutau et al. (2020); the constant clashes have threatened the security of the state, reduced its economic productivity, and deepened food crisis. Okwor (2016), Akerjiir (2018), Eme et al. (2014), Blench (1994) stated that there have been several clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and the farming communities for more than two decades. The conflict reached another level in 2014 with the Fulani herdsmen killing 1,229 people in comparison with 63 deaths in 2013 (Amnesty International, 2018). Expanding from the traditional grazing routes into agricultural land, more than 500 deaths by July 2016 were attributed to the conflicts and pasture-search by Fulani herdsmen for their cows. The escalation of the crisis has made many

Nigerians and international observers including the United States to consider Fulani herdsmen as the second most dangerous group in Nigeria after Boko-Haram group (Amnesty International, 2018; Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko, 2018; Goodhand, 2024). Erundu and Nwakanma (2018) argued that the herdsmen and farmers' crisis is a manifestation of the failure of the Nigerian State to provide good governance and contain contestations within its territory. In recent times, almost every day the news of clash, killing, rape and destruction of farm and its products abound and it boils down to hardship and rise of food insecurity.

Onah, Asadu and Aduma (2019) noted that the herdsmen were before known for holding sticks which they employed in controlling and directing their cattle. They ensured that their cattle followed the right path and grazed in land where there would be no economic destruction. But, the situations, in recent time, have changed. The relationship between crop-growing farmers and cattle-raising herdsmen in different parts of the country is far from being harmonious. The Fulani Herdsmen now carry gun instead of stick and they use it on the people at the slightest provocation. The negative impacts of open grazing are been implicated in attacks on communities within Enugu state that adversely affect the local economy as farmers are prevented from accessing their farms amidst, farm destruction whilst local markets are also deserted for fear of imminent invasion by these herdsmen. Evidently, the bulk of prevailing research-ideas on the conflict has been largely subjective, lacking in intellectual depth, fecundity and rigor. Particularly, research to gain more insight on the prevailing issue between the both parties. Moreover, the rate at which the price of food is rising in the market has attracted the researcher's attention to ask, 'what exactly is the factor responsible for the quick escalation of prices of food items in the market?' Thus, the ethical dilemmas on research to this end have prevented a lot percentage of research owing to the fact that, the researcher, victimizers and the victim of this catastrophe

is on the edged ends. Hence, the general objective of this study is to explore the ethical dilemma in researching on food insecurity in Nigeria: a case study of Enugu state. The specific objectives include:

1. To discover the causes of food insecurity of Enugu state.
2. To find out the ethical dilemmas in researching on food insecurity in Enugu state.
3. To ascertain what the government is doing to ensure food security in Enugu state.
4. To determine the policy implication and social work intervention in curbing food insecurity in Enugu state, Nigeria.

The study assumed that:

1. It is risky to say the exact cause of the problem of food insecurity in the study area, which is the Fulani Herdsmen's intimidation of the indigenous farmers.
2. Also, that the government inaction means their support of the Fulani Herdsmen above the indigenous farmers.

Ethical dilemma in researching on food insecurity

Researching in conflict zones raises ethical dilemma that needed to be considered otherwise the data collected will be lopsided and harmful to policy makers. Wood (2006) stated that field research in conflict zones is challenging for both methodological and ethical reasons. In conflict zones, the usual imperatives of empirical research (to gather and analyze accurate data to address a relevant theoretical question) are intensified by the absence of unbiased data from sources such as newspapers, the partisan nature of much data compiled by organizations operating in the conflict zone, the difficulty of establishing what a representative sample would be and carrying out a study of that sample, and the obvious logistical challenges.

Similarly, Goodhand (2000) affirmed that researching in a conflict zone goes with risks and ethical issues which include

security risks, opening old woods, confidentiality, perverse outcomes among others. In responding to those challenges, one may adopt the precept of do no harm and do some good. This means that the researcher has to go extra mile to ensure the cooperation of the research participants.

In handling these ethical issues in this present study, the researchers did a

Theoretical Foundation

Crisis intervention model

According to Staff (2014) Crisis intervention model is used when someone is dealing with an acute crisis. The model includes seven stages: assess safety and lethality, rapport building, problem identification, address feelings, generate alternatives, develop an action plan, and follow up. This social work

qualitative study using both primary and secondary data, participatory observation and interviews to generate data. The researchers living and residing in Enugu state interviewed food sellers in the conflict areas through patronage to ensure objectivity of study result.

practice model is commonly used with clients who are expressing suicidal ideation. This study adopted crisis intervention model because the case of food insecurity in Nigeria is a suicidal case and needed urgent intervention. The researchers thus understood the nature of the problem, explored the people's feeling and generated action plan to eradicate food insecurity in the state.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study population is Enugu state, Nigeria. The study design is cross sectional quantitative survey and qualitative research design in using research guide to interview respondents. The respondents were purposively selected. Twenty food sellers participated in the interview. Other sources of data were also used including secondary

data and participatory observation. These techniques were considered adequate to handle the ethical issues around researching in conflict zones, especially where the security agency seems to be supporting or protecting one ethnic group against the rest of the ethnic groups. Verbal consent was obtained to address ethical concerns.

Results

Twenty participants were interviewed differently to avoid suspicion of whether the researchers are spies. They sell different food stuffs in the market. They fall within the age range of 35 and 60 years. They sell cassava, maize, yam, beans and food ingredients. The result showed that the Fulani herdsmen graze their cows in numerous hectares of farm grown with crops like maize, cassava, beans, and vegetable; eat up the crops together with the cassava. All of them agreed that the price of goods is rising every day in the market. They all concurred that the cause is as a result of Fulani Herdsmen destructive moves into farms and on farm products. Transcribing in exact words, one of the participants said that 'they do not even see the commodities again [supply of commodities], and if you are opportune to, the price will be too high'.

Also, 'that people are afraid to go to their farms because of attacks from herdsmen'.

Besides destruction of crops, 'sometimes the herdsmen with their cows extend their intimidation by invading people's compound to plunk coconut to their satisfaction without the permission of the owner. For fear of retaliation from the herdsmen, another participant said the farmers would have resorted to poisoning leaves of farm crops as a measure to, stop them.

Either due to many occasions where community people were killed for confronting these armed herdsmen or reporting them or; due to the obnoxious thinking common among these armed herdsmen that everywhere belongs to them; the community members are somethings

confronted with the feeling of remaining quiet. The situation worsened to the extent that during traditional marriage, the herdsmen could invade from the bush, cart-away food, drink, wine to their satisfaction without anybody's permission and to the total dismay of the community members who most times remain quiet to avoid armed confrontation and/or death. Continuing, participants affirmed that particularly residents across all the villages neighboring the bush areas live in fear. They rape people with reckless abandon deterring farmers from going to their farms.

According to another participant, 'the problem of food insecurity has seven twins.' In disappointment, she stated that Nigeria do not have one government. Her reason is that 'the government is not being proactive to solving the issue of insecurity neither defensive at all'. In addition, 'Covid-19 Pandemic also contributed to food insecurity', she said. During the lockdown people were not going to farm and, some farm products spoiled due to lack of sales leading to hardship in the state.

It was affirmed that researching on the cause of food insecurity and trying to illicit measures to tackle insecurity in the study area posed serious dilemma both to the researchers and the respondents. The researcher is at the risk of not knowing who may be offended by the research findings while the respondents are confronted with fear of whether the researcher is spying on them. Following, convincing the respondents that the research is purely for academic purposes was difficult and it led the researchers to interviewing only familiar participants, which is a limitation to the findings and conclusions.

Discussion

The results emphasize the invasion of farmers and their farm-land by the Fulani Herdsmen is in part the cause of food insecurity in the state. This is in line with the findings of Oke and Olawale (2019) who lamented that the menace of Fulani herdsmen has spread like wildfire which poses a great

threat to the corporate existence and oneness of Nigeria.

From the various studies reviewed in this study, it is revealed that the food insecurity in Nigeria, especially in Enugu state, rises daily. The participants of this study lamented that the increase rate of prices of goods is alarming. Hunger is killing people and it is not the same way one spends money that he gets. According to many of the study participants due to the ceiling-aching inflation, many occasions arose, after purchases, they were left to wonder if they lost their money in the market; or, overpaid given the little items bought vis-à-vis the amount of money spent on such purchases. In many other cases they were left to think the money was lost before arriving the market. This corroborates the study of Ezemenaka and Ekumaoko (2018) that noted that President Muhammadu Buhari's role in the conflict going on between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria shows ethnic and overt regional favoritism despite the continued actions and inactions of core stakeholders in the conflict influencing rising inflation.

Further, disturbing, one of the participants reported that in some communities, community-members were forced to contribute money onward to the Fulani Herdsmen in order to allow them go to their farm. This is disheartening and is simply forced intimidation even on owned possessions and; affirms previous report of International Crisis Group (2018) of, herdsmen who sent notice ahead of their attack, yet, no security was put in place. In contrast, security always showed up when the attack must have been executed. This has further created lots of suspicion on the position of the President vis-à-vis the conflict.

Implications for Policy and Practice

It is implied from the result of this study that there is urgent need for policy pronouncement and implementation that will stop the oppression of farmers in the state. This leads to the question, 'What are the

interventive measures taken by the government to curb the food insecurity in the state?' Nwozor, Olanrewaju and Ake (2019) were of the opinion that the government deserted agriculture because of oil boom, though they are obviously reverting back to agriculture since oil is losing its market worth.

These call for the social work intervention to influence policy and policy frames/analysis in the face of the seemingly unending conflict between the Fulani Herdsmen and indigenous farmers in the different parts of Nigeria. Following, policy that gives equal attention to different agricultural stance and not just a part – the nomads – for justice, peace is adduced fair. Justice brings about peace and peace produce progress and prosperity of any nation. In contrast, in the words of a study participant, 'if the issue of insecurity in the state is not handled then, forget about food security'. The assurance of peace and food security vis-à-vis the herders-farmers conflict comes when cattle rearing is handled like every other business in Nigeria. The government stance of open grazing of; giving unrestricted access to herders across communities will cripple farming thereby causing food scarcity across states and the nation at large. Further, government should promote modern ranching of non-pastoral cattle rearing that must be adopted by herders towards further guaranteeing food security.

The participants were of the opinion that if the government will adopt modern ranching and force the Fulani to remain in their own land, food security will be guaranteed. This is supported by Amnesty International (2018) report of violent clashes between members of farmer communities and members of herder communities in parts of Nigeria, particularly in the northern parts of the country, over access to resources: water, land and pasture as frustrating. It also documents the failure of the Nigerian government in fulfilling its constitutional responsibility of protection of lives and property by refusing to investigate; arrest and prosecute perpetrators of attacks. The report

shows how government's inaction fuels impunity, resulting in attacks and reprisal attacks, with at least 3,641 people killed between January 2016 and October 2018, 57 percent of them in 2018 alone.

In a bid to curb the incessant attack by the Fulani herdsman, the Oduduwa and Eastern Security Outfit were introduced into the Nigerian society, which has generated another level of attack on the people (Iwuamadi, Ngwu & Onyemaobi, 2021; PM-News, 2020). The food insecurity has exposed Nigeria's inability to control her armed herders prompting self-help interventions in Oduduwa and Eastern Security Outfit besides other community security outfits to defend its people, since the central security outfit seems to be favoring herders.

Conclusion

The study investigated ethical dilemma in researching on food insecurity in Enugu state, Nigeria using primary, secondary, participatory observation and interviews of respondents. It was revealed that the incessant attack and damage of farm produce by the Herdsmen where the major cause of food scarcity in the State. Social work intervention should be geared towards influencing policy makers in enforcing policy that will give equal attention to all forms of agriculture. Thus, cattle rearing should be treated like every other business in the country. It is recommended that there should be immediate government intervention to stop open grazing adoption of modern ranching such to ensure that all the Fulani herdsman utilize their base except where there is proper negotiation between state government and community members to officially permitted ranching in such communities/state place. Also, re-orientation of herders towards not considering the lives of their cattle above the lives of human being. Rather, herders should learn to treat every human being with respect and dignity. Consequently, education of the herders to change their orientation and how they handle others. This is a paramount concern for

government and/or all the stakeholders of human development. Also, since poverty is a mindset purportedly affecting the way people reason; their behaviours and belief system – poverty becomes another hidden problem that needs to be tackled. Moreso, sustainable development cannot be actualized without mind development and advancement.

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