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THE ROLE OF NIGERIAN POLICE IN FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN KEBBI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The recent upsurge of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi state is a cause for alarm. Therefore this paper examined the role of Nigerian Police in farmers-herders conflict management in Kebbi State with a view to examine the role of Nigerian Police in farmer-herder conflict management and to assess the factors responsible for ineffective performance of Nigerian Police in managing farmers-herders conflict. The study adopts a theoretical explanation and also relies mainly on secondary data sources, which include periodicals and other archival documents that provide the required information for the discourse. Data gathered were analyzed through content analysis. the paper discovered that several factors caused ineffective performance of Nigerian Police in managing or resolving farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi State. These factors include corruption, shortage of competent manpower, as well as ineffective leadership, etc. therefore, the paper concludes that with a serious and sustained campaign against corruption in Nigerian Police, adequate and modern equipment and sincerity of purpose, genuine political will by the government and other stakeholders in the realm of internal security and conflict management will go a long way in resolving farmers and herders conflict not only in Kebbi State but Nigeria as a whole.

Key Words: Nigerian Police, Farmers-Herders Conclit, Conflict Management, Political will, Kebbi State

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a dramatic increase in farmer-herder conflict, especially in Kebbi state. This caused the loss of lives and properties in the State and other parts of Nigeria. Internal security, crime fighting, and conflict management are within the purview of the Nigerian police force, the judiciary, and other security agencies as contained in Nigeria's Criminal Justice System. The police were specifically mandated to arrest with or without warrant any person who is reasonably suspected to have committed any crime that can jeopardize the peace and security of Nigeria. These powers were enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as the police act, section 4 CAP 359 laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 (Police Act CAP 359 as cited in Enweremadu, 2019). Despite all these powers, some Police officers often compromise and are found culpable of aiding crimes and criminal activities in the country.

Thus, Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) observed that by section 214 (1) of the 1999 constitution and section 3 of the Police Act, the Nigerian Police is supposed to maintain law and order, protect lives and property throughout the country, but the police is a problem in this society. They are the worst violators of the law, they receive bribes from poor citizens and residents at gunpoint, frame up people, kill and commit other atrocities (CEHRD, 2009 cited in Enweremadu, 2019).

In Nigeria, especially in Kebbi state managing the farmers-herders conflict continue to be a great challenge facing the Nigerian Police, with various allegations of extortions of both farmers and herders and extra-judicial killings of innocent citizens. The citizens continue to doubt the capacity of the Nigerian Police to handle the farmers-herders conflict that has recently become very complicated and damaging. However, with the right leadership at the helm of affairs of the police, a lot could be achieved in nipping in the bud all challenges making farmer-herder conflict a monster.

The pertinent questions now are what are the reasons behind the escalation of the farmer-herder conflict? Why have the Nigerian police and other security agencies been unable to manage or resolve

farmer-herder conflict despite enormous resources invested in them to address the conflict? To generate answers to these questions, the paper intends to examine the role of the Nigerian police and the factors responsible for its ineffective performance in managing the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi State.

In Nigeria, the Nigerian Police is the lead agency in internal security and conflict management. The police serve as an embodiment of the coercive power of any modern state (Alemika & Chukuma, 2007 cited in Enweremadu, 2019). It is the agency with the closest contact with the citizens. Thus, the performance of the police is a determinant factor to judge whether any government or political leadership has lived up to the expectation of its citizens in the provision of security to the lives and properties of the citizenry. It is in that light that the Nigerian Police has been heavily criticized in the way and manner it handles the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi State. The Nigerian police had been seriously implicated in poor handling of criminal cases, by engaging in corrupt practice, extortion, and connivance with the judiciary and traditional institutions to delay and deny justice to innocent citizens.

In a similar vein, the police were used by those in power for negative purposes, the political leaders owned the big farms and large herds of cattle, so whichever side they are in the farmer-herder conflict, police were used against the weaker group by those in power. These developments led Haywood (2007: 370) cited in Enweremadu (2019) to conclude that rather than be the solution to Nigeria's national security, development, and integration problems, the Police have compounded them which allowed farmers-herders conflict to escalate.

Previous studies focused mainly on the broader internal security crises in Nigeria, for instance, Alemika & Chukuma (2007), Akuul, (2011), Enweremadu (2019), and Bakare & Aderinola (2019) all looked at the role of Police in internal security management without being specific to farmer-herder conflict management. However, this particular paper is an attempt to examine the role of the Nigerian police in farmer-herder conflict management in Kebbi state and the factors responsible for the ineffective performance of police in managing the conflict in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi state. The objectives of the study are: 1. To examine the role of Nigerian Police in farmer-herder conflict management in Kebbi State. 2. To assess the factors responsible for the ineffective performance of Nigerian Police in managing farmers-herders conflict in Kebbi State

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conflicts

The term conflict has received significant attention from scholars since time immemorial. The multiplicity of definitions has shown the level of inevitability of conflict in human existence. It is believed that whenever two or more people relate with one another conflict is bound to occur from differences in interest and needs of the interacting parties.

Thus, Coser (1968:6) viewed Conflict as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aim of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities, and intergroup as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life. This definition by Coser is all-encompassing and interesting, it emphasized the nature of the conflict, especially the struggle over scarce resources which is the root cause of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria and other African countries. Thus, even though this definition is outdated considering the time it was made, it is still very relevant judging from current realities in the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria.

Having seen Conflict from the perspective of definition, it is equally important to look at it from the perspective of theorists. Thus, Psycho-cultural conflict theorist argued that conflict emerged from the culturally induced stereotype that is deep-seated in peoples' perception or outlook of each other identity-based conflict, such as ethnic or religious conflicts psycho-cultural and that explains why conflict is intractable and difficult to manage (Golwa, 2013:7). This view pictured the realities in the

farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, considering the fact majority of herders are Hausa-Fulani and Muslim while majority farming communities where the conflict usually occurred are minority tribes and Christian. Although the study is outdated, however, it was able to capture the present situation in the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria.

Also of relevance to this discourse is the systemic theorist who believes that changes in people's socio-structure will cause conflicts. Therefore, environmental degradation, uncontrolled population growth, resource scarcity, allocation and competition, colonial or cold war legacies, and breakdown of values and traditions are major causes of conflicts (Golwa, 2013). It is important to note that this view is very relevant to factors causing conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria. As revealed in this study the competition over scarce resources is the root cause of farmer-herder conflict and it became intense and complicated due to the population explosion among the farming and herding communities in Nigeria.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is very critical in stabilizing relationships and governance in any social and governmental setting. Thus, the capacity of any system to manage conflict occurring within and outside of it will determine whether that system will continue to exist or otherwise.

According to Amaresan (2019), conflict management is the process of handling disputes and disagreements between two or multiple parties. The goal of this system is to minimize the negative factors that are influencing the conflict and encourage all participants to agree. This definition by Amaresan is very relevant to the role of Nigerian Police in handling farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, because, constitutionally the function of Nigerian Police is the maintenance of law and order as well as provide a peaceful environment for every citizen to conduct his chosen activities without fear of being attack or intimidated by anyone.

In a related vein Gyong (2013), defined conflict management as a conscious and dedicated effort that aims at maximizing the potential value and benefit while also minimizing and possibly eliminating the destructive consequences of conflict. He further said, conflict management refers to a process of resolving disagreements between individuals, groups, or communities before they get out of control. It also involves efforts meant to minimize to the barest minimum, the losses and damages likely to occur during conflict. This definition by Gyong is apt because it emphasizes the significance of conflict management which is to reduce to the lowest level the likely negative effects of conflict in the society. This is in tandem with the core function of the police in any democratic society in Nigeria inclusive.

Imobighe (2003) asserts that conflict management should involve a holistic approach which includes; conflict prevention and peace promotion; conflict control and abatement; and conflict resolution. This study provided stages for managing conflict in that it started with processes to be employed to prevent any conflict, other stages are being put forward in case human weaknesses set in and conflict occurs, and the second stage requires involving a third party to avert further escalation of the conflict. The final stage is the actual resolution of the conflict which involves negotiation to deal with fundamental issues to find a lasting peace between conflicting parties.

Farmers-Herders Conflict

According to Isah (2019) farmers-herder conflict is an aggressive behavior exhibited by both farmers and herders in their relationship with one another which oftentimes leads to violent confrontations and deadly conflicts. This resulted from the scarcity of land and shortage of water which made both groups to be very aggressive in trying to defend their source of livelihood. It is important to note that farmers-herders conflict may be an expression of grievance over long-time neglect of the herding community by the government. However, conflict is always inevitable whenever there is a perceived denial of rights or outright injustice meted on a weaker group by the stronger.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the role of the Nigerian Police in managing the Farmer-Herder conflict remains very difficult since there are lots of accusations and counter-accusations on the role of police in resolving the conflict. Thus, adopting Structural Functionalism Theory will go a long way in revealing the true picture of the police's role in managing farmer-herder conflict in Kebbi State.

Structural Functionalism or simply Functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structure that shapes society as a whole, and believes that society has evolved like an organism. This approach looks at both social structure and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements, namely norms, customs, traditions, and institutions.

Spencer (1903) presents these parts of society as “organs” that work toward the proper functioning of the body as a whole. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes “the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom or practice, its effects on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system.

By applying the theory to farmer-herder conflict management in Kebbi state, the true picture of why the conflict continues to escalate despite huge resources invested in Nigerian police and other sister security agencies would be uncovered. The relevance of this theory to this discourse is that it examined the functioning of all elements within the system as a whole to determine which part is malfunctioning so that corrective measures could be taken to stabilize the system.

Role of Nigerian Police and Farmers-Herders' Conflict Management

Nigerian Police is constitutionally mandated to among other things protect the lives and properties of all Nigerian. Thus, in their study, Alemika & Chukuma (2007) emphasized that the Police are an embodiment of the coercive power of modern states. It is the agency with the closest and most frequent contact with the citizens. Modern states are judged by their citizens to determine the effectiveness or otherwise of the government or political leadership based on the performance of their police in the protection of lives and properties.

In a similar vein, Bakare & Aderinola (2019) examined the role of Nigerian Police in Internal Security Management. The authors commended the Nigerian Police for discharging their constitutional responsibilities of providing security of lives and properties. They however affirmed that the recent events of the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria indicated that Nigerians are longer safe, especially with the escalation of farmer-herder conflict. Despite its shortcomings, the Nigerian Police have the potential to nip in the bud all security challenges in Nigeria if issues militating against the smooth running of the police such as manpower shortage and elite policing, poor public perception, public alienation, corruption, and overly centralized and non-meritocratic leadership among others are mitigated. This study gave a picture of the true situation and happenings in Nigerian Police. Thus, timely intervention in rejuvenating and restructuring the Nigerian Police will go a long way in managing the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. The only gap in this study is its inability to use any theory to support its findings and current realities on the ground in Nigeria.

Akuul (2011) studied the role of Nigerian Police in maintaining Peace and Security in Nigeria. The author found out that, the Nigerian Police has failed in discharging its constitutional mandates. He explained the reasons behind this failure which include, corruption, delayed justice, and impartiality among others which painted the police in a bad light in the eyes of Nigerian people. The author emphasized that if crimes and criminality, especially farmer-herder conflicts are to be surmounted in Nigeria to guarantee the security of the citizens, the government then should restructure the Nigerian Police to pave the way for more positive values to set in which will ensure a more effective response to farmer-herder conflicts and other criminal activities in the country. Although the study period was limited to 2011, the findings and recommendations of this study if properly utilized will go a long way in

averting conflict that can consume several lives and properties as seen in the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria.

In a related vein, Chijoke, Tshababa, & Jagada (2020) undertook a critical review of the role of Police in Conflict management. The authors emphasized that police actions could exacerbate the polarity between conflicting parties. Also individual actions of Police officers while trying to manage any conflict, especially farmer-herder conflict are crucial in managing or mismanaging conflict. Thus, the authors recommended that police officers should be trained in Conflict Management and International Relations at the grass root level to improve their capacity on peace and security matters. The study was able to capture some current realities which are the major factors causing conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Thus, the study is very relevant as it covered to 2020 period.

In his study, Enweremadu (2019) analyzed the Impact of Corruption on Internal Security by focusing on the Nigerian Police. He found out that, although the Nigerian Police is the preeminent public institution that was established to assure the security of lives and properties in Nigeria, the institution has ironically functioned more as the enabler of corruption and insecurity. The reasons behind this according to the author include misuse of the police by the political class, poor welfare packages, low level of professionalism, and understaffing. Thus, the study recommends that there is a need to recruit more manpower to ensure a representative police force, while also providing adequate logistics and improving welfare packages which will go a long way in effective and efficient police service delivery. The study was able to capture some of the reasons behind the police's inability to manage farmer-herder conflict and other violent crimes in Nigeria and fairly suggested possible solutions to address those challenges so that Nigerian Police will become combat-ready in discharging its constitutional responsibilities.

Factors Responsible for Ineffective Performance of the Nigerian Police in Farmers-herders Conflict Management in Kebbi State

Many factors are responsible for the ineffective performance of Nigerian Police in resolving the Farmers-Herders conflict in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi state. According to Madaki cited in Madubuike-Ekwe & Obayemi (2019) noted that these range from historical and structural factors to institutional and personality frameworks.

One of the many reasons for the ineffective performance of the Nigerian Police Force in tackling the issue of farmer-herder conflict is Corruption. It is so pervasive in the Nigerian police that herders or farmers were competing in getting the upper hand once a case of conflict occurred between them. They prefer to spend whatever amount they were asked to pay by either police or judicial officers than to pay compensation to their victims. In a poll conducted by NOI, most Nigerians (29%) attributed the poor performance of the Nigerian Police to corruption in the rank and file. Followed by 22% who think it is poor salary and welfare package that contributes to the inefficient performance of the police (Madubuike-Ekwe & Obayemi, 2019).

Another major reason for the inefficient performance of the Police is the government itself. It is widely believed that the Nigerian Police suffered the worst neglect from the successive government in the country to the extent that they became highly demoralized to intervene in issues that requires prompt intervention such as farmers-herders conflict. There were no adequate provisions for logistics or other necessary tools that could greatly assist in aiding police operations during any conflict to avert major loss of lives and property which are witnessed during the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria (Golwa, 2013).

In a similar vein, the poor Early Warning and Early Response System have greatly impeded police to perform optimally in preventing or resolving farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. Most of the incidences of farmer-herder conflict do not occur in a vacuum but have indicators and signs that manifested themselves early enough to show that violent conflict between farmers and herders is about to take place. The lack of proactive measures by the Police to nip any potential farmer-herder conflict in the bud has been the major reason for the escalation and destructive consequences of these conflicts (Golwa, 2019).

Furthermore, the menace of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) has been another factor for the escalation of farmer-herder conflict and by extension the reason for the police's ineffective performance in tackling the conflict, because more sophisticated weapons are in the hands of these culprits. This has made managing internal security very challenging for Nigerian Police since people tend to trust the capacity of their arms to give them what they want than trust the Nigerian Police. Other factors include political interference, nepotism and ethnicity, inadequate manpower, and lack of equipment. Because oftentimes, the police officers connive with their kinsmen to deny justice to its rightful owner, thus making the conflict escalate (Madubuike-Ekwe & Obayemi, 2019).

Conclusion

This paper examined the role of Nigerian Police in managing Farmers-Herders conflict and some major factors that impeded the effective performance of police in that respect. There is no doubt that the Nigerian police is constitutionally empowered to protect the lives and property of Nigerian citizens through internal security and conflict management strategies. However, this paper discovered that the Nigerian police had failed in managing the farmer-herder conflict and other internal security challenges bedeviling the country which led to huge losses of both lives and properties of Nigerians in the conflict.

The paper argued that resolving the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, especially in Kebbi state requires restructuring and re-jigging the Nigerian Police for effective service delivery in the protection of lives and properties of all Nigerians, irrespective of place of birth, tribe, or religion. It will also require genuine effort and political will of the government and other stakeholders to pursue farmer-herder conflict resolution with sincerity and commitment. This research is hopeful that, the Nigerian Police and other sister security agencies are capable and can do wonders in tackling the menace of farmers-herders conflict if they are provided with the necessary support and tools for internal security and conflict management in Nigeria.

Recommendations

This paper intends to offer some suggestions and recommendations that can play a significant role in addressing major challenges being faced by Nigerian Police in protecting the lives and property of Nigerians these include:

- a. There is a need for a serious and sustained campaign against corruption in the Nigerian Police. Citizens have to be sensitized to understand that it's their constitutional right to be served by the police without giving them any bribe because they are paid by the government to render such services. Also, those who perpetrate a crime or influence others to engage in conflict or stand as bottlenecks by offering bribes to police officers instead of paying compensation after being found guilty of destroying farm produce or killing cattle of herders should be severely dealt with to serve as an example for others not to engage in such corrupt practices.
- b. The government should equip the Nigerian Police with modern and sophisticated equipment so that Nigerian police could effectively and efficiently handle any challenge of internal security and conflict management.
- c. Nigerian police should create new units dedicated to handling farmers-herders conflict and the officers to be deployed to the new unit should be properly trained in peace building and conflict resolution or management
- d. The Nigerian Police should ensure that only Nigerians with track records of honesty and good character are recruited into the force so that issues of nepotism, tribalism and extrajudicial killings, and other criminal activities committed by police officers while in service could be reduced to the barest minimum.
- e. The Nigerian Police should review its operational procedures so that it could nip in the bud any potential farmer-herder conflict before it even started. In other words, the police should try to be proactive police instead of being ineffectively reactive.

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