

The Role of Community Development Committees in Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was carried out in Delta Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria to examine the management of farmer-herder conflicts by community development committees (CDCs). The study revealed that farmer-herder conflicts were caused by the destruction of crops by cattle, competition for land, cattle rustling, female harassment and ethnic differences. Measures taken to manage the conflicts included formation of local farmers' associations; compensation of aggrieved parties; punishment of offenders, particularly rustlers; and educating farmers and herders on their interdependence. The measures taken to resolve such disputes had different levels of success. There were significant differences in the perceptions of CDC members, farmers and herders on the level of success of measures taken to address such conflicts. It is therefore recommended that CDCs should work closely with local government councils to ensure effective control of the activities of herders. There is also the need to expand the composition of the arbitration team to include representatives of other associations, interest groups and institutions in the study area.

Introduction

According to Ofuoku (2002), a Community Development Committee (CDC) is a group of elected officials of a community, for the purpose of co-ordinating the self-help development of that community. There are (CDCs) at local government level too, but the major concern of this study is CDCs at the community level.

The regime of the former military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida (Rtd), established "reach-the-rural-dwellers-with-

government functionaries" through CDCs in 1992 (Ofuoku, 2003). Although, CDCs are not funded by any of the three tiers of government, they are still an officially recognized arm of the government at the community level for the development of rural areas in particular. Each community has ruling authorities in their various capacities and the CDC which oversees the development of their respective rural communities is one of them. The membership of CDCs includes representatives of improvement unions, age groups, women and youth organisations, opinion leaders and community heads. These representatives are elected by the various communities into their respective CDCs.

The role of CDCs is to mobilize the rural community for the purpose of overcoming their problems and needs and the problems of change so they know the importance of desirable change. According to Amirize (1998), CDCs are fundamental machinery for ensuring total development and for fostering community machinery for ensuring total development and fostering community empowerment.

Though community development committees are non-governmental organisations, they receive patronage from the government as well as some corporate bodies operating in their communities. This is because they constitute the avenue for the target community participation in development efforts, which is a means of ensuring sustainability in development (Ofuoku, 2002).

The activities of CDCs are numerous. For instance, according to Amirize (1998), they keep reliable records of activities, plans and resources, particularly money and natural

resources in connection with community development programmes and projects. They also study the peculiar circumstances of the community's various needs and problems, articulate its felt needs and problems and call for changes.

The involvement of communities in development projects is through the CDCs and this leads them to a better diagnosis of the people's problems and voluntary release of local resources for project implementation.

Community participation refers to the ability and opportunities for community members to participate directly in decision-making activities that steer the development of the community (Gueye, 1999). Participating in community decisions gives ownership to community members and empowers people to develop their own community. Community participation does not apply the plate model presently. The peoples are represented by the community development committees.

Conflicts in communities inhibit the process of well being and hence development. The resolution of such conflicts can be seen as an integral part of the function of community development committees. According to Ekong (2003), conflicts is that form of social interaction in which the actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening their contenders.

Conflicts between farmers and herders have always been a common feature of economic livelihood in West Africa (Tonah, 2006). Herders bring their cattle from the arid and semi-arid areas to the forest zones in which Delta Central Agricultural Zones is situated, in search of pasture that is available almost throughout the year. However, prior to the beginning of the 20th century, clashes were not experienced in the Delta Central Agricultural Zone. This is because herder kept their animals away from farming areas most of the time and thus reduced the incidence of livestock destroying crops (Tonah, 2006). During those times too, cattle population were low in the humid and sub-humid zones of West Africa. The low human population, the high numbers of wild animals, and fear of losing animals to diseases, especially trypanosomiasis, prevented herders from settling permanently

in the humid zone water (Bayer and Bayer, 1994; Blench, 1994).

There is consensus among observers that farmer-herder clashes have only since the 20th century becomes widespread in the coastal countries of West Africa (Tonah, 2006). Factors that account for the increasing farmer-herder conflicts include the south ward movement of pastoral her into the humid and sub-humid zones; the successful control of the menace posed by diseases; the widespread availability of veterinary medicines; and hitherto served as pastureland (Tonah, 2006). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that since the 1950s, there has been a considerable growth in human as well as livestock population in the costal countries of West Africa. The result has been a growing pressure on natural resources and a stiff competition for available resources between farmers and herders (Adebayo, 1997; Breusers et al, 1998).

Studies have shown that community based associations and institutions can be very effective in controlling the activities of nomadic pastoralist referred to as Fulani herdsmen (Tonah, 2006). Community based institutions are expected to work closely with local, state and national government to ensure effective control of farmer-herders conflict so that they do not go beyond local levels.

Throughout West Africa the rising incidence of farmer-herders conflict and the violence that frequently accompanies such conflicts have become an issue of public concern (Tonah, 2006). These conflicts are not only threat to peace and national stability but do not also have implications for national development. Clashes between farmers and herders frequently move from the northern part of Nigeria to the southern part of Nigeria where the study area is located. The development of herder-farmer relations, and in particular, the treatment of Fulani herder by indigenous have not only national implications but also implications for the relations between the indigenous of the communities in Delta Central Zone of Delta State and in Fulani community.

The community development committees in the indigenous in the indigenous

communities have the responsibility of managing such conflicts. In spite of their presence in the various communities, these conflicts occur often and a lot of lives and properties lost. Farmer-herder conflicts also have serious implications for national security.

Farmer-herder conflicts are known to be threat to peace and national stability. Such conflicts affect crop production and availability of beef for consumption. The management of such conflicts needs a lot of this study will serve as a guide to the state agricultural development programme in their advisory roles to the community development committees. It will also grant community development committee the opportunity of knowing the areas of adjustment for better farmer-herder conflict management in the future. Without a study like this, the quest for national integration will be futile.

Objectives of the study

This study examines the management of farmer-herder conflicts in Delta Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria by community development committees. Specially, study was designed to;

- i identify the causes of farmer-herder conflicts;
- ii examine how community development committees manage farmer-herder conflicts; and
- iii ascertain the success level of community development committee in management of the farmer-herder conflicts.

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant difference in the success level of CDCs in managing farmer-herder conflict as perceived by CDCs, farmers and herders.

Methodology

The study area is Delta Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State. This area is located in the central part of Delta State, Nigeria. It is made up of Ethipoe East, and West, Ughelli North and South, Okpe, Sapele, Uvwie and

Udu local government areas. It is bounded on the north Ukwuani, Ndokwa west and Ndokwa East Local Government Areas of Delta North Agricultural Zone. On the south by Warri south, Warri south west, Warri north, Bomadi and Patani local government areas of Delta South Agricultural Zones, on the east by Isoko North and South Local Government Areas and on the west by Orhionwon Local Government Area of Edo State.

The area is blessed with mineral resources of crude oil and gas, almost all year round rainfall, fresh water sources and forest resources. The people are predominantly farmers.

This includes all the Community Development Committees of the rural communities in Delta Central Zone in Delta State.

Sample size of 10 Community Development Committees CDCs members, 10 farmers and 10 herders were selected purposively from 6 of the local government areas local government areas that constitute the study area.

It was done on the basis of 10 CDC members, 10 farmers and 10 herders from each randomly selected rural community in the selected LGAs in the study area. The selection of the CDC members, farmers and herder was purposively done. The selected rural communities were Okurekpo (Ethiopia east LGA), Afiesere (Ughelli North LGA), Ovrode (Udu LGA), Oginibo (Ughelli South LGA), Aghalokpe (Okpe LGA) and Elume (Sapele LGA). The sample size was 180 respondents.

Data for this study were collected with a structure interview schedule. Assistance of an interpreter who understands Hausa language was sought because of the Fulani herders who mostly cannot express themselves well in English language.

The analysis of the data was done using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage and mean derived from 3-point Likerts' scale. ANOVA used to address the hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Characteristics Of

Respondents

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents (60%) were males while 40% of them were females implication is that women were given a fair chance and most of the women were farmers. Majority of the respondents (48%) were in the age range of 41-50 years, while 19% were in the age bracket of 31-40 years, 16% were in the age group of 51-60 and 11% were in the age bracket of 61 years and above. Most of the respondents were young and those into the age range of 60 years and above were members of community development committees, farmers and retirees. Table 1 further shows that 33.3% of the respondents were farmers; 33.3% cattle herders; 23.9%, civil servants; 5.6% traders and 3.9%, retirees. Almost all the respondents (89.4%) were married while 10.6% were single. This implies that most of

them were responsible and had their families to protect at time of conflicts.

The Christians had the highest population of the respondents (57.2%). The Moslems had 33.3% of the population of the respondents while African traditional religionist had the least population (9.4%). This means that the people in the study area are predominantly Christians and all the herders were Moslems. Religious differences caused a lot of conflicts between Christians and Moslems in the past few years.

Table 1 indicates that most 23.9% of the respondents had tertiary education, 31.1% had secondary education, 25.6% had Islamic education and 17.8% had primary education, while 11.7% had no formal education. This implies that most of the respondents had one form of education or the other.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of socio-economic characteristics of respondents

| Variables | frequency | percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender: | | |
| Male | 108 | 60 |
| Female | 72 | 40 |
| Age: | | |
| 21 – 30 | 11 | 6 |
| 31 – 40 | 34 | 19 |
| 41 – 50 | 86 | 48 |
| 51 – 60 | 29 | 16 |
| 61 and above | 20 | 11 |
| Occupation: | | |
| Farming | 60 | 33.3 |
| Trading | 10 | 5.6 |
| Civil servant | 43 | 23.9 |
| Retiree | 7 | 3.9 |
| Cattle herding | 60 | 33.3 |
| Marital Status: | | |
| Married | 161 | 89.4 |
| Single | 19 | 10.6 |
| Religion: | | |
| Christianity | 103 | 57.2 |
| African Traditional Religion (ATR) | 17 | 9.4 |
| Islam | 60 | 33.3 |
| Level Of Formal Education | | |
| No formal education | 21 | 11.7 |
| primary education | 32 | 17.8 |
| Islamic education | 46 | 25.6 |
| Secondary education | 56 | 31.1 |
| Tertiary education | 43 | 23.9 |

(Source: Field Survey, 2008.)

Causes of farmer-herder conflicts

Table 2 indicates that destruction of crops (mean=2.94) and ranked highest met above the cut-off score, cattle rustling (theft) and female harassment (mean=2.66 respectively) ranked second and also met above the cut-off score. However, competition for land (mean=2.40) and ethnic difference (mean=1.85) did not meet the cut-off score. This means that the major causes of farmer-herder conflicts included destruction of crops, cattle rustling and female harassment, while the minor causes were competition for land and ethnic

differences. During farming season herder meander through farms to access grazing areas and cattle are prone to trampling on cross belonging to farmers. In pre-harvest period, cattle are known to frequently destroy of feed on ripe crops as they are being led from the grazing areas to their camps. This supports Tonah (2006); Breusers et al (1998); Hagberg (1998) who stated that the most frequent causes of conflicts between farmer and herder is the destruction and eating up of crops in farming seasons and pre-harvest period.

There is also the problem of frequent loss of cattle to rustler. Some cattle stray from the herd

Table 2: Causes Of Farmer-Herders Conflicts

| Causes | SA % | A % | D % | SD % | Score | Mean | Rank |
|----------------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|-------|------|------|
| Destruction of crops | 50 | 90 | 20 | 20 | 530 | 2.94 | 1 |
| Competition for land | 30 | 56 | 51 | 43 | 433 | 2.40 | 4 |
| Cattle rustling | 52 | 41 | 61 | 26 | 479 | 2.66 | 2 |
| Ethnic difference | 10 | 30 | 63 | 77 | 333 | 1.85 | 5 |
| Female harassment | 44 | 63 | 41 | 32 | 479 | 2.66 | 2 |

(Source: Field Survey, 2008)

Cut-off score=2.5 (≥ 2.5 =major cause; < 2.5 minor cause; 0=not a cause)

sometimes and the criminal minded ones in the communities take advantage of the situation to make away with such cattle. This is regarded as stealing among the communities' citizens and the herders. This crime is most of the time committed by male farmers and youths in the communities. This is congruent with Tonah(2006) who stated that the frequent loss of cattle to rustler has also worsened the already tense farmer-herder relationship in the Volta basin of Ghana.

The Fulani herders have been reported several times to have harassed women on their farms especially when such farms are close to their grazing areas. Young girls who are daughters of farmers are not left out. This often happens when during days of break from school when these girls go to

their farms for weeding of the farm.

In spite of the abundant farm kind and water in the study area (Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria.) there is a kind of competition between farmers and herders for fertile lands. Disputes about the use of the residual plains of the various rivers that traverse the area is also a source of farmer-herder conflicts. The residual plains are used for Fadama (dry season) farming of vegetables and early maturing cassava varieties. During the dry season, herdsman normally allow cattle to wander along the entire plain pretending to be in search of water and pasture, but the real aim is to prevent the farmers' from farming in the plains so as to have exclusive use of them. This was also discovered by Tonah (2006) in his study in Ghana's Volta Basin.

In the same way, since the advent of poverty alleviation scheme and unemployment problem there has been an expansion in dry season farming along the rivers in the Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria.

Unemployed youths and men and women who took to farming have acquired large tracts of land along riverbeds and established permanent fields for the cultivation of early maturing cassava variety, tomatoes and leafy vegetables. Small scale fish farmers have also taken a cue from the crop farmers and have started utilizing the plains for fish pond construction. The expansion of farming in the area is as a result of unemployment problems that has plagued the study area and increased demands for food. The all-time rising urban population and the accessibility of distant markets are enhanced increasing agricultural production in the central agricultural zone farmer. This has in turn deprived Fulani herders of key dry season pastures and made it difficult for livestock to have access to water (Basset, 1994; Diallo, 2001).

Measure taken to manage conflicts By CDCS

Table 3. indicates that the measures taken to manage farmers-herders conflicts were compensation of aggrieved farmers and herders, (100%) formation of local community farmers' association (65%), punishment of offenders (47.8%) and educating farmers and herders on their interdependence (30%).

Most farmer-herder disputes are usually resolved by the CDCs with the parties involved. In cases involving destruction of crops by cattle, both parties would usually agree on the extent of damage caused the cattle and level of compensation to be paid to the farmers whose crops have been damaged, with the CDC mediating. This supports Tonah (2006) who opined that farmer-herder conflicts relating to destruction of crops are usually resolved by payment of compensation to the farmers by the herder or herd owner.

Table 3: Measures taken to manage conflict by CDCs

| Measures | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Formation of local community farmers association | 117 | 65.0 |
| Compensation of arrived farmers and herders | 180 | 100.0 |
| Punishment of offender | 86 | 47.8 |
| Educating farmers and herder on their interdependence | 54 | 30.0 |

(Source: Field Survey, 2008. there were multiple responses)

Similarly, herder whose cattle are stolen is also compensated by the thief who is always caught and arrested by the vigilante group on instruction by CDC. Normally the herd owner is the one who determines the price to be paid for such cattle and the CDC in collaboration with the local vigilante group ensures that the payment is made to the herd owner. Sometimes it is done on installments. However, the thief is given

punishment by public flogging (50 strokes) and sweeping of the market for some months.

The determination of compensation is often a major source of contention between aggrieved parties (Tonah, 2006). Cattle owners always claim that farmers have the tendency of exaggerating the extent of crop damage in order to attract higher compensation than they deserve. Farmer

likewise, accuses herders of being dishonest, because they never report incidents of crop destruction by their cattle unless they are caught in the process. It is the farmers who have the burden of proof. The farmer has to convince the arbitrators (CDC or LCFA) that the damages to his crops were actually caused the herds of the accused cattle owner. Such proof is always difficult to provide,

crop are mostly damages in the absence of the farmer of during the night thus making it difficult to identify the herd responsible for the damage (Tonah, 2006).

Since the owner of the herd is usually responsible for the cash payments and not the herder, the herders are initially chided by the herd's owners, while those who repeatedly destroy crops bear the risk of being relieved of their jobs as herders. CDCs encourage the farmers in their respective communities to form local community farmers association (LCFA). This they also supervise as facilitators. Some of the cases of conflicts involving farmers who are members are handled by the LCFA. In cases of farmer-herders conflicts, the chairman of the LCFA's home always the first port of call for many aggrieved farmers whose crops have been destroyed by cattle. Herder and herd owners on the other hand, also report incidents of missing cattle, conflicts with farmers and trespassed on pasture areas by farmers to the executive of LCFA.

The cases of farmer-herder conflicts reported to the CDCs or the police are often referred to the executives of the LCFA. This executive of the LCFA normally investigate such reported cases. Once the compliment is able to identify the owner of the herd responsible for the destruction of is crops, the association mediates between the two conflicting parties.

In every case, the LCFA examines all reported cases at their executive meetings and makes moves to find lasting solution or mediate between the conflicting parties. In cases involving land disputes, land owners and local chiefs are consulted to determine the land ownership and use-right. In cases of rustling, LCFA seeks the assistance of similar organization like the livestock traders, cattle owners and middlemen in

livestock business to help in identifying the stolen animals.

In cases when LCFA cannot establish compromise between the two parties involved, the case is refereed to the CDC. At intervals, the CDC in collaboration with the local extension agency and LCFA executives organize meetings for farmers and herders and livestock owners where they are educated on the need t accommodate each other as they are interdependent on each other and livestock owner and herders are obliged to keep her animals form the farms. Though such forum is poorly attended, it has made some impute.

Level of success of strategies used

Table 4 shows that all the measures taken by the CDC were very successful. Many factors explain why the LCFA has such a high level of credibility among the population in the rural farming system. He first thing is that ownership of livestock is a major form of investment among large sections of the communities, especially those involved in the agricultural, fishing, trading, and the informal sector. Almost every person in the community is part of a collective or cooperative investment in cattle in a bid to diversify their investment. Farmers in the membership of the LCFA come together to invest as various groups. Farmers therefore tend to understand and appreciate the concerns of herd owner and herders. Therefore they become more cooperative and accommodating towards cattle owner because most of them have investment in the cattle industry. The relationship between farmers and herders tend to be better in areas where the population is engaged in multi-sectoral economic activities then in single activity. The level of hostility tends to decrease as a result of common economic interests.

Another factor is that ownership of the cattle and by implication membership of the LCFA cuts across ethnic and religious affinity unlike in many parts of the country where participation economic activities are dominated by members of a particular ethnic group.

This ethnicism of economic activities

reinforces existing social barriers and prejudices towards a particular ethnic group. The indigenous Urhobo ethnic groups as well as other migrant groups like the Ibos, Hausas, Efiks, and Ijaws etc are farmers, fish farmers and fishers, traders and artisans, while the Fulani and Hausa mainly work in the cattle industry. However, irrespective of their special economic activities, individual from all the different

ethnic groups have invested in the livestock sector. The ethnic diversity is also reflected in the executive members of the LCFA. Undoubtedly having membership that cuts across all the ethnic and religious groups in the area is a major reasons behind the associations' successful arbitration in farmer-herder disputes

Table 4: Level of success of strategies used

| Strategies | CDC members | | Farmers | | Herders | |
|---|-------------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | Score | mean | score | mean | score | mean |
| Formation of LCFA | 170 | 2.83 | 160 | 2.67 | 188 | 3.13 |
| Compensation | 179 | 2.98 | 189 | 3.15 | 208 | 3.47 |
| Punishment | 180 | 3.0 | 159 | 2.65 | 179 | 2.98 |
| Education | 179 | 2.98 | 160 | 2.67 | 181 | 3.01 |
| Mediation in land issues (est. of user-right) | 208 | 3.47 | 180 | 3.0 | 189 | 3.15 |

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

Cut-off score = 2.5 (2.5-2.99=successful; ≥ 3.0 =very successful; 2.0-2.49 = fairly successful; < 2.0 = not successful).

Thirdly, since the CDC supervise LCFA; it is very active and well organized compared with many other associations in the Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria. It operates very informally; it is able to resolve farmer-herder disputes expeditiously. The association's services are offered free of charge to disputing parties. Only persons who are not satisfied with the judgment given by the executive of the LCFA refer such cases to the CDC.

The other measures were successful as a result of the arbitration by the LCFA. The success of LCFA in arbitration is the product of close supervision and advice by the CDC. Though there are cases when people query the judgment of LCFA executives, the CDC has always been there to take over the cases to seek new terms of settlement between disputing parties.

Test of hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the

success level of CDCs in managing farmer-herder conflict as perceived by CDCs, farmer and herders

Results

The result (Table 5) shows significant difference in the perception of CDCs and farmers and herders on the level of success of the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the study area as the calculated F value of 19.36 is greater than the F table value of 6.93, df 12 at 0.01 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The difference in perception is as a result of the fact that the farmers and herders and CDC members show that strategies used as being successful at different levels of success. Perceptions are relative to the individuals involved.

Table 5: Difference in perception of respondents on the level of success of strategies for the management of farmer-herder conflicts.

| Respondents | | sum of sq. | df | f | ftab | sig. | dec |
|-------------|----------------|------------|----|-------|------|------|---------|
| CDC members | Between groups | 793.80 | 12 | 19.36 | 6.93 | .049 | signifi |
| | Within groups | 41.00 | | | | | |
| | Total | 834.80 | | | | | |
| Farmers | Between groups | 360.20 | | | | | |
| | Within groups | 421.00 | | | | | |
| | Total | 781.20 | | | | | |
| Herders | Between groups | 324.00 | | | | | |
| | Within groups | 202.00 | | | | | |
| | Total | 526.00 | | | | | |

Conclusion and Recommendation

farmer-herder conflicts were often resolved at the individual level by the CDCs in conjunction with local community farmers association. The study has shown that relevance of local institutions such as the CDC and LCFA in the resolution and management of farmers-herders conflicts. This indicates that given a cohesive, vibrant and trust worthy group, it is possible to reduce farmer-herder conflicts in the future. Herders have been responsible for most of the violent farmer-herder conflict in Delta Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria. This study has shown that there is a strong support and cooperation between CDCs, LCFAs, farmer and herders. Conclusively, CDCs have played significant roles in the resolution and management of farmer-herder conflicts in the study area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made;

- i. CDCs should work closely with local government councils to ensure effective control of the activities of herders,
- ii. There is the need to expand the composition of the arbitration team to include representative of other associations, interest groups and institutions in the study

area. This will enhance the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the future.

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