



ADOPTING RESEARCH AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AS A MECHANISM FOR MITIGATING FARMERS/PASTORALISTS CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE BELT STATES OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Persistent conflicts between farmers and pastoralist in the Middle Belt Zone have taken a more dangerous dimension in recent times. Deaths, wanton destruction of properties as well as displacement of people from their communities have become the order of the day. This situation is not only economically dangerous to the people of the zone, but has also posed serious challenges to the political stability of the country, making governance difficult. The aim of this paper is to suggest to stake holders in the business of conflict resolution and peace building that the option of, "research and information dissemination" should be adopted as a mechanism for curbing this persistent upheavals, between farmers and pastoralists in the region. Towards accomplishing this desire, the paper discussed key words contained in the discussion and as well highlighted on key components of an empirical research in relation to farmers/pastoralists conflicts. It sums up that research and information dissemination provides more reliable information and as well forms a formidable platform for mitigating farmers/pastoralists conflicts in the Middle Belt States of Nigeria. Hence the paper explains further that information obtained as a result of this exercise shall be devoid of gossips and more authentic to be used in addressing this ugly situation.

Keywords: Research, Information dissemination, Pastoralists, Farmers, Conflict, Mitigation, MiddleBelt

Introduction

It is no longer news that the North- Central region of Nigeria, otherwise known as the Middle Belt is ravaged by violence and conflicts arising from pastoralists/farmers clashes. Impliedly, it has become recurring in everyday life. The pastoralists/farmers conflicts sometimes assume a ghastly character that eventuates in deaths and displacements of individuals and their material holdings from their homes and communities. The consequences of these skirmishes are extending to gradual national disintegration, lack of cooperation among the people involved and underdevelopment in all spheres of human life. The major occupation of people of the Middle Belt is farming (crop farming and animal husbandry including pastoralism), which often leads to clashes between pastoralists and farmers. Ayuba (2014) attributed some of the causes of crises between pastoralists and farmers to; scarcity of land, cattle rustling, climatic change and struggle for leadership. Irrespective of whatever factor (s) considered to be responsible for this ugly development, what is so relevant in paper is that the relationship of the two economic block of this region has been estranged. For instance, the Fulanis who constitute an important

source of cow dung used as manure and energy (for cooking) by communities have deliberately departed any area they consider a danger zone.

Consequently, the cheese milk (kimdirmo and nono) that are very important sources of minerals, protein, fat and oil have become increasingly scarce. On the other hand, the nomadic pastoralists are dependent on farmers for most of their food needs for sustenance. For example, their cows rely on rice, millet, sorghum, and corn husk to feed. They also depend on the fiber and leaves from these crops for their survival, (Sanusi & Ayuba, 2014). The continuous and persistent dimension of these conflicts without a definite solution in sight causes deep concern to people of the Middle Belt in particular and Nigeria in general. It is in view of this development that this paper intends to suggest the way out, hence adopting the option of, “research and information dissemination”. Towards achieving this desire, the paper discussed relevant components of an empirical research in relation to farmers/pastoralists conflicts in the region. Besides, the paper also defined terms considered to be topical in the discussion. The paper summed up that research remains the best instrument of investigating into a perennial and reoccurring phenomenon as this.

This is because it unravels the unknown which can be disseminated as authentic information to be used in solving a problem. It is also pertinent to add that the usefulness of information in conflict mitigation in any society depends largely on the quality of investigation as well as, validity and reliability of the instrument(s) used in the investigation process. This in essence signifies that approaching conflict resolution through research and information dissemination shall form the bases for lasting solutions to conflicts hence peace and development. Obvious reasons why research and information dissemination can be the best option for conflict mitigation with particular reference to this discussion include:

- i. That research is essentially for verification of unknown.
- ii. That research usually publishes result of what it discover from its findings.
- iii. That research findings are often times devoid of mere exaggerations and gossips.
- iv. That research usually adds new knowledge to the already existing one.

Conceptual Clarification

Research: Research can be defined as a systematic procedure of investigating a situation with the aim of discovering the unknown in order to add to the body of knowledge. The essence of research is to use the result of what has been discovered to solve an existing problem. Eneanya (2012) alludes that research “is a systematic inquiry in which its objective is to provide information to solve problems and meet the challenges of a fast-paced decision-making environment”. Nevertheless, irrespective of whatever decision one may hold regarding this concepts, it is its relevance in this discussion that matters.

Information: Mohammed (2011) defines information as “anything that adds to our existing knowledge, ideas skills and experiences positively or negatively that enables us to take decisions or react to situations immediately or later at an appropriate period of time”. According to the author, information can also be conceived as a by-product of our conscious and unconscious actions and inactions that adds to our existing knowledge, ideas, skills given stimuli instantaneously or at a later period of time as a form of reaction or decision taken or to be taken. Deducing from this assertion, one can categorically state that Information is an idea, a fact or data made available for use by an individual, people or a corporate organization that can facilitate decision making. This discussion, one may what to know the relevance of information in conflict resolution between farmers and pastoralists in the Middle belt region.

Information Dissemination: This is the act of dispensing or diffusing a message to the public for a widespread, understanding, discussion or debate. This equally means broad casting a message to the public in order to accomplish an information desire. In this wise, we can relate the concept of “Information dissemination” to the topic under discussion to mean, communicating desirable information



to the general public about the causes of conflicts, how to curb conflicts and how to provide lasting solutions to conflicts among pastoralists and farmers in the Middle Belt region.

Conflicts: Aderibigbe (2011) defines conflict as “a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals”. She further asserts that, conflict occurs where two or more interests, needs, goals, beliefs, perspectives or opinions are contradictory in nature. This entails being at variance or to clash or to struggle in opposition. Conflict entails demonstrating emotional or physical disagreement as it is observed of pastoralists/farmers in the Middle Belt.

Mitigation: This is referred to as the act of lessening the force or intensity of something unpleasant, as wrath, pain and grief or extreme circumstances. Mitigation Mechanism can also be seen as “the act of making a condition or consequence less severe. Above all, this is a process of making difficult situations become milder, gentler, subtle and less devastating. These therefore means, making conflict less severe or lessening the consequences of conflict among pastoralists and farmers in the Middle Belt region.

Farmers and Pastoralists: Both crop production and animal rearing are two separate arms of agriculture, usually carried out by humanity for survival and existence. Pastoralists are vested in the act of cultivating crops of diverse nature which the end products can be used for local consumption or commercialization. On the other hand, pastoralists harp on animal rearing as a business and as a means of survival.

Middle Belt: Composition and Structure

The idea of creating the Middle Belt as a political independent region was mooted in the first republic (1954-1959) in the annals of Nigeria political history, (Jirbo, 1983, Anifowose, 2011). The pioneering fathers of the Middle Belt project include: J.S.Tarka, Sunday Awoniyi, David Lot, Solomon Lar, etc. The brain behind creating the Middle Belt was to seek political and economic emancipation of ethnic minorities from the Hausa/Fulani hegemony. Even though this dream was not realistic, the creation of North-Central State as well as Benue-Plateau State in 1967 by Yakubu Gowon was a dream come true by the founding fathers of the Middle Belt project. At present Middle Belt states include; Benue State, Plateau State, Niger State, Kwara State, Kogi State and Nasarawa State. Also found in the Middle Belt region is the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja.

This region is occupied by many tribes and to mention in this discussion include; Tiv, Idoma, Igala, Angas, Birom, Bassa, Igede, Gwari, Nupe, Yagba, Gbira, Eggon, Alogo, Jukun, Etulo, etc. It is important to also add here that all the ethnic groups mentioned above are involved in either crops production or animal rearing, which means agriculture is their main means of human existence. Crops production is practiced on a large scale. Such crops commonly cultivated by these tribes include; yams, cocoa yam, ground-nut, cassava, wheat, sweet potato, beni-seed, suya beans, pepper, tomato, maize, millet, etc. Besides orchard farming is also practiced as oranges, mangoes, guava, pineapple, coco-nut, pawpaw are grown on a large scale.

Research Components and Farmers/Pastoralists Conflicts

Research is a systematic procedure of investigating into the unknown to unravel uncertainties concerning a situation. The basic research rudiments to be considered in this discussion are collectively referred to as conflict mitigation mechanism and are discussed in relation with farmers/pastoralists conflict in the Middle Belt. They include the following: identification of research problem, research objectives, significance of research, specific research questions/hypotheses, Data collection procedure, analyzing and interpreting of data, reporting and evaluating research process, communicating the research findings and recommendations.

Problem Identification



The indigenous inhabitants of the Middle Belt are predominantly farmers. Their farming activities encompass crop production and animal rearing. This is to say that land, crops and animals constitute their major way of living hence their lives and these activities are almost inseparable. However, pastoralists are identified as nomads or the Fulani herds men. This in other ways means they are immigrants moving from one place to the other in search of green vegetation to feed their animals. In another development, farmers are a more homely group of people occupying territories with the claim that it is their place of bode inherited from their ancestral fathers. Even though these two groups of people seems to have dissimilarities in their socio-cultural back grounds, one can quickly add here that there exist some level of similarities in their social relationship. They can live in the same environment for some times, transact commercial business and even inter-marry each other. In recent times these two groups whom by obvious circumstances should be friends have become arch rivals and the crises seems to be endless. This is a problem that needs an empirical investigation.

Research Objectives

One may therefore be tempted to find out what should be the main reasons of investigating into pastoralists and farmers persistent conflicts in the Middle Belt region. Some of the reasons why this situation should be investigated include to:

1. identify and ascertain both remote and immediate causes of these conflicts;
2. ascertain the likely economic consequences of these conflicts on the people of the Middle Belt;
3. determine the most effective means of compensating those affected by the conflict and;
4. ascertain efforts made by government to reduce or prevent future occurrence of these conflicts.

Significance of Research

The likely question that arises here is, of what relevance is research and information dissemination to pastoralists/farmers conflict in the Middle Belt region? A readily available answer to this question should be; to publish findings discovered from the investigation and also proffer lasting solutions to the persistent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in the region.

Research Questions

The following questions shall assist in investigating into persistent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in the Middle Belt.

1. What are the immediate and remote causes of the conflicts among farmers and pastoralists in the Middle Belt?
2. Who are those behind these conflicts?
3. Which categories of people are mostly affected by the conflicts?
4. What are the likely economic consequences of these conflicts on the people of region as well as the entire nation?
5. What are the most effective means of compensating those affected by the conflict?
6. To what extent are those affected by the conflict satisfied with the method of compensation?
7. What measures have the present government put in place to end and prevent further occurrence of these conflicts?

Data Collection and Analysis

A survey study shall be more appropriate in investigating into farmers/pastoralists in this region. This is because these conflicts engulfed the entire region covering vast grassland vegetation occupied by different ethnic groups, (Torkula, 2004). This means a sample representing every ethnic group shall be evolved in the investigation in order to achieve a significant coverage. Besides, in order to obtain

adequate data and also achieve accurate data analysis, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods of research shall be engaged (Madumere, 2012). Instruments to be used in collecting data include: Participant-observation method, In-depth interview, Focus group discussion and Groups interview.

1. *Observation and participation*:- This entails a situation where the researcher takes active part in the situation under investigation. The researcher pretends to be a member or stakeholder in a situation, hence obtain first-hand information devoid of misrepresentation.
2. *In-Depth interview*: - In-depth interview refers to detailed repeated face-to-face conversation with people who are directly affected by the situation under consideration. This form of investigation provides a more precise and defined information. Data collection using this method tenders better results when combined with participant observation method.
3. *Focus Group method*: -This method involves a small group representing the entire study population which usually allows the researcher to gain insight into the target population's knowledge, attitudes and behavior to the situation under consideration.
4. *Group Interview*: - This method allows the researcher to prepared semi-structured questions which are answered by selected people identified to be directly involved in the situation under investigation. This method usually provides a high sense of belonging to the selected group and they are always ready to provide adequate and accurate information about the situation under consideration.

The aforementioned methods of collecting data are relevant to this discussion because, they are people oriented, also very interactive in nature and can conveniently capture the sampled audience. This allows for accuracy of information gathering from stakeholders. Findings about conflict among farmers and pastoralist in this region therefore need to adopt methods that shall provide precise and concrete information to enhance effective investigation that will lead to appropriate means of intervention.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

This discussion further recommends that, the qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis should be used. This means both facts and figures obtained during data collection procedure shall be manipulated upon and statistically analyzed to arrive at findings. This can be made possible using any data analysis instruments of either, Measure of Central Tendency, Descriptive Statistics, T-Score, Chi-square, etc. It is the result of the analysis that the researcher shall sufficiently explain and publicize as findings.

Research Evaluation

This refers to a systematic review of an entire research process. The essence is to ensure that the process through which investigation is carried is hitch-free (Eneanya, 2012). This also entails reviewing the entire investigation into farmers/pastoralists conflicts in the Middle Belt to ensure that there are no gaps in the investigation process before final publication.

Summary and Conclusion

Any issue that is characteristically, perennial, painstaking and destructive should be properly investigated. Such issues if left unattended to may eventually lead to rancor that can rob the entire society of its existence. Consequences incurred by people of this region as a result of the persistent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists are monumental. It is by way of seeking lasting solution to this ugly situation that this paper suggests the adoption of research and information dissemination. This method can be very useful as a mechanism for mitigating on this ghastly and endless situation largely because it is people and empirical in nature. It is therefore pertinent to assert that if this option is adopted, there shall



be precise and useful information to every stake holder in the business of conflict resolution and peace building in this region. This shall therefore be achieved in the following ways:

1. That there shall be available and concise facts concerning the causes of these conflicts as oppose to mere gossips and speculations that usually aggravate situations.
2. There shall be availability of information on the category of people mostly affected by these conflicts.
3. There shall be available information on the level of damages incurred during and after these conflicts.
4. That there shall be adequate and appropriate information regarding the best methods to be used in compensating victims of these conflicts.
5. There shall be available information on the appropriate punishment to be meted on the culprits.
6. That with concise and precise information, government shall become better informed on appropriate preventive measures to be put in place to avoid future occurrences of these conflicts.
7. That this shall provide reliable information to legislatures on how to enact appropriate laws on farmers/pastoralists conflicts in the Middle Belt.
8. Above all, research and information dissemination shall enhance large scale production of crops and animals which by implication shall lead to socio-economic and political advancement of the Middle Belt region in particular and Nigeria as a nation.

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