

The Role of Climate Change and Herders Continued Migration to the South

Dr. Salihu Zubairu Mustapha
Department of History
Faculty of Arts
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria
Salihuzubairu@gmail.com

Abstract

It seems that numerous policy measures conceived by the federal government of Nigeria to combat the menace of desertification in Nigeria and other forms of environmental degradation have not yielded much result. There is now a growing concern, and questions are being raised as to what has gone wrong. Are the policies themselves incorrect, or perhaps it is the mechanism of implementation of such policies? This paper examines the questions with a view to determining where the fault lies and if possible suggest alternative policy implementation strategies. The paper addresses desertification in term of its causes and impact including its social dimensions. The role of Government in policy making and implementation is also examined as well as its efficacy. The paper arrives at some findings and makes recommendations.

Introduction

As an important topic in the wider discourse on environmental and natural resources management, desertification (which is defined as *land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas, resulting from several agencies, including climatic variations and human activities*)¹, and its impact on the social and economic lives of many communities in Nigeria is attracting the attention of policy makers and researchers alike who are in a joint search for possible solution to the problem. Additional pressure is put on the pasture resources by livestock from other Sahel countries, especially from Chad, Niger and the Cameroons respectively. Livestock from these countries are attracted to these zones because of the abundant supply of fodder around the patches of the wetland areas of Lake Chad and beyond². However, the desiccation of Sahara Desert and the contraction of the Mega Lake Chad seem to be part of the remote causes of desertification

Desertification has been identified as a major cause of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. It is interesting to note that not only Nigeria, desertification processes

¹ Mark Omorovie Ikeke, 'Ethical Challenge of Desertification in Northern Nigeria', *UnizikJournal of Arts and Humanities* 17, no. 2 (2016):49.

² Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria, 12

affects about 46% of Africa³. The significance of this large area becomes evident when one considers that about 43% of the continent is characterized as extreme deserts (the desert margins represent the areas with very high vulnerability). Only about 11% of the land mass is humid and by definition is excluded from desertification processes⁴. There are about 2.5 million km² of land under low risk, 3.6 million km² under moderate risk, 4.6 million km² under high risk, and 2.9 million km² under very high risk. The region that has the highest propensity is located along the desert margins and occupies about 5% of the land mass. It is estimated that about 22 million people (2.9% of the total population) live in this area. The low, moderate, and high vulnerability classes occupy 14, 16, and 11% respectively and together impact about 485 million people⁵.

Background to the Problem

A number of researches have been conducted on the conflicts between herders-farmers in Nigeria in recent times; one outstanding finding among many of these researches is that desertification and its diminishing impact on land and other natural resources such as water and pastures are responsible for the movement of herders and their animals out of the Sahel region in to the Guinea Savannah and rain forest areas in the south.

The impact of desertification could be seen across the African continent where Desertification processes affect about 46% of the landmass⁶. In 1973, many countries in West Africa experienced the long severe drought which led to the drying up of pastures, and watering points in the Sahel region causing the death of thousands of livestock, including cattle, camels sheep and goats but especially cattle. In the West African sub-region, in particular, the impact of desertification is still exerting the highest pressure on the environment in general and the ecosystem in particular with wide-ranging consequences on the ecosystem. Many observers of climatic and environmental issues have attributed the increased massive movement of herders and their livestock out of the Sahel in to the Guinea

³Paul Reich, 'Land resource stresses and desertification in Africa', *Agro-Science* 2, no. 2 (2001):1.

⁴Paul Reich, 'Land resource stresses and desertification in Africa', 1.

⁵Paul Reich, 'Land resource stresses and desertification in Africa', 1.

⁶ Shettima Abba and Gana and Tar Usman, 'Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts in Nigeria: Case Studies of Dansadau, Sabuwa and Birminn', *Information, Society and Justice*, 1, no. 2 (2008):14.

Savanna, and the rain forest region in the South to desertification putting more pressure on resources and generating inter group conflicts.

In Nigeria for example, many states in the northern parts of the country including Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba, Plateau and Niger have been experiencing such conflicts which have occasionally spread in to some states in the South, for example, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Anambra, Akwa-Ibom, Edo and Abia states⁷.

Research Questions

To write on the above research topic, the following questions were raised as a guide.

- a. To what extent is desertification and the drying up of the natural sources of water and pasture over the years in the Sahelian belt the cause of the conflicts between herders-farmers?
- b. In lieu of sustained measures for dealing with climatic change could any ad-hoc policy provision be made to prevent the further expansion of desertification from causing or exacerbating the conflicts?

Underlying Research Assumptions

The formulation of the research questions that will guide this study was based on the following assumptions:

- a. The drying up of the natural sources of water due to desertification over the years in the Sahelian belt, has forced herders to move into the savannah and tropical rain forest zones in search of water and pasture for their animals thereby exerting more pressure on land and its resources and igniting conflict.
- b. Notwithstanding the absence of permanent and sustained measure for dealing with climate change which seems to be the reason for the further expansion of desertification to the South and worsening the conflicts, ad-hoc policy measures could still be employed to contain the problem of desertification.

Methodology

Secondary data in the form of both published and unpublished research findings and proceedings of conferences and workshops and other stakeholder fora as well as online materials were used. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted in line with hypothesis.

⁷ Shettima Abba and Gana and Tar Usman, 'Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts in Nigeria: Case Studies of Dansadau, Sabuwa and Birminn', 15.

Incidence of Desertification and its impact in Nigeria

The vast Sahara Desert which keeps encroaching on from the fringes of the Sahel Belt immediately neighbouring Northern Nigeria is worsening the problem of desertification not only in Northern Nigeria, but also some states in both the central Savannah and the forest region of the country. The areas of the country that are faced with serious desertification are indicated to be inhabited by 28 million people and over 58 million livestock. Most of the region north of latitude 12 0N is heavily prone to ecological degradation. For example, more than 65 percent of Sokoto State is said to be under threat of desertification and its impact, while about 55 percent of Borno State is afflicted. It may be said that hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of arable land have been lost to desertification in states such as Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, extreme North of Kano, Yobe and Borno⁸.

Desertification and Herders-Farmers Conflicts

Apart from environmental degradation and impact of desertification, there is also the social dimension of the impact, which manifests in the form of inter-groups conflicts such as herders-farmers conflicts and the toll they take on the economic activities of the groups involved as the following information indicates. Below are Some Flash Points of Herders-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria.

⁸ Mark Omorovie Ikeke, 'Ethical Challenge of Desertification in Northern Nigeria', 51-52.

S/No	Date	Location	Deaths	Perpetrators	Notes on Causalities
1.	2019-05-21	Kaura Namoda, Zamfara State	23	Herders-farmers	23 people were killed in a retaliatory attack by bandits on Tunga and Kabaje villages in Kauran Namoda LGA, after the death of their suspected ally
2.	2019-06-09	Maru, Zamfara State	16	Herders-farmers	16 people celebrating Eid al-Fitr were killed by unidentified bandits in Kanoma community of Maru LGA.
3.	2019-06-08,09	Rabah, Sokoto State	25	Herders-farmers	Kalhu, Tsage and Geeri villages in Rabah LGA were attacked by bandits during the night. The attack went on till morning, killing 25 people
4.	2018-06-25	Plateau State	86	Farmers and Herders	Between herders farmers. Total 86 dead.
5.	2019-02-20	Ebete, Agatu, Benue State	17	Fulani herdsman	17 people were killed in an attack by Fulani herdsman on Ebete in Agatu LGA of Benue State.
6.	2019-03-10	Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State	17	Unknown	17 vigilantes were ambushed and killed by unidentified gunmen in the mainly Muslim area of Birnin Gwari as they stole cattle
7.	2020-4-12	Tegina Kabata, Shiroro	12	Fulani herdsman	12 people killed during the wedding with five people captured including the bride and groom.

Source: Wikipedia, “How Climate Change is Spurring Land Conflicts in Nigeria”, 28th June 2018

Nigeria is currently losing about 351,000 ha annually to advancing desert and such conditions are estimated to be advancing southwards at the rate of about 0.6 km per year⁴⁷⁹. It would require a strategy of equal speed if not faster to stave up desert encroachment. The menace of desertification is made even worse by the wasteful activities of man; indiscriminate destruction of forests through the felling of trees for fuel and other domestic uses, denuding of soil cover through bush burning and intensive cultivation and bad environmental management practices have combined to make the situation to appear to be almost intractable and gives the impression that “the problem of desertification would continue to be in the front burner in causing or exacerbating the conflicts” as our research topic feared. Undoubtedly, this is the situation that will come to be, if nothing is done to tackle the problem of desertification and its environmental degrading impact.

Federal Government of Nigeria’s intervention in Combating Desertification

In fairness to the federal government of Nigeria its efforts in policy making and combating desertification should be acknowledged. Several programmes of environmental protection have been inaugurated and pursued under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Environmental within the framework of which the Federal Government of Nigeria has given attention to the problems of drought and desertification. Thus, National Policy both institutional and legislative has been put in place to address the problem of environmental degradation in general and drought and desertification in particular. As is indicated in the “National Action Programme to Combat Desertification”, a document of the Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria which shortlisted some of the National Policies on combating desertification as follows:

1. Development of a National Action Programme to Combat Desertification and mitigate the effects of drought towards the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) in Nigeria;
2. Integrating public awareness and education on causes and dangers associated with drought and desertification, as well as the constraints of the CCD.
3. Strengthening of national and state institutions involved in drought and desertification control programme.

⁴⁷⁹ Olagunju, Temidayo Ebenezer, ‘Drought, desertification and the Nigerian environment’, *Journal of Ecology and Natural Environment* 7, no. 7 (2006): 199.

4. Promoting sustainable agricultural practices and management of water resources including water harvesting and inter-basin transfers.
5. Encouraging individual and community participation in viable afforestation and reforestation programmes using tested pest and drought-resistant and/or economic tree species;
6. Encouraging the development and adoption of efficient wood stoves and alternative sources of energy.
7. Establishing drought early warning systems.
8. Involvement of the local people in the designing, implementation and management of natural resources conservation programmes for combating desertification and ameliorating the effects of drought.
9. Intensifying international cooperation and partnership arrangements in the areas of training, research, development and transfer of affordable and acceptable environmentally sound technology and provision of new and additional technical and financial resources;
10. Inventorizing degraded lands, and implementing preventive measures for lands that are not yet degraded or which are slightly degraded.
11. Adopting an integrated approach to address physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification and drought
12. Intensifying cooperation with relevant inter and non-governmental organizations in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought;
13. Strengthening the nation's food security system;
14. Establishing, reviewing and enforcing cattle routes and grazing reserves⁴⁸⁰.

Also as Omorovie has noted

‘...there was the 1977 National Committee on Arid Zone Afforestation Project which was dissolved in 1985, the Department of Rural Development and River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA) of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development

⁴⁸⁰Mark Omorovie Ikeke, ‘Ethical Challenge of Desertification in Northern Nigeria’, 18.

(which absolved the functions of the previously mentioned committee), the Forestry Management Department of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture (which had transferred to it in 1987 the functions of the RDBA); and the Federal Environmental Protection Authority of 1988'.⁴⁸¹

Unfortunately, however, like most policies in Nigeria, these policies on combating desertification suffered in the long run at the level of committed implementation together with unnecessary policy shift. It has been observed that efforts to combat desertification in Nigeria have been adversely affected by policy shift by government. A good example is that of the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), which was conceived as an attempt to develop the country's water resources for multi-purpose use, to combat desertification as well as mitigate the negative consequences of drought in this zone. The RBDAs have since the 1970s witnessed a number of policy shifts and bodies have undergone a number of re-organization exercises. Thus RBDAs expanded from 3 in 1973 to 11 in 1976 and to 18 in 1984, further reduced to 11 in 1986 following the economic reforms of the early 1980s, which culminated in the adoption of the structural adjustment programme (SAP). All these suggest a non-coherent approach to the management of water and agricultural resources that were intended for the RBDAs⁴⁸².

This seems to suggest that more than any other thing, inconsistency in policy making and implementation is the major factor responsible for the continual setback in the efforts at combating desertification and other environmental degradation problems. In this case, the way forward can be summarised in one phrase: Change of attitude towards policy implementation for the better.

Finding

Based on a close study of the sources on which this research is based, a number of findings have been made which have also tallied neatly both with the research questions and the research assumptions. They include the following:

1. Desertification can be linked to the problem of massive movement of herders and livestock outside the Sahel region in to the area further southwards, which cause conflicts.

⁴⁸¹ Mark Omorovie Ikeke, 'Ethical Challenge of Desertification in Northern Nigeria', 23.

⁴⁸² Mark Omorovie Ikeke, 'Ethical Challenge of Desertification in Northern Nigeria', 24.

2. The additional pressure which the populations of herders and livestock bring to bear on the limited water and land resources is the primary cause for the frequent conflicts between herders and farming communities who have high population density in these areas south of the Sahel.
3. The Federal Government of Nigeria has instituted National polices both legislative and institutional aimed at addressing desertification and other problems of environmental degradation in general.
4. Luck of consistency in policy making and implementation as evidenced by frequent shift in policy is the major obstacle to the realization of the objective of tackling desertification and that of environmental protection in general.
5. In spite all these obstacles, it is not as if all hope is lost: The problem can be resolved by a change of attitude.

Recommendations

1. In view of the above submission, the government must expand the mechanism of monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation to include all stakeholders down to the grass roots.
It will then require:
 2. Being more proactive on items 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the National Policy on Environment as contained in the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification document of the Federal Ministry of Environment.
 3. Establishing a special coordinating unit comprising of top government administrators and technical staff drawn from relevant ministries to supervise the implementation of items 6 – 14 also as contained in the same document.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted an examination of the assertion that the “desertification is the major herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria”, and has found it to be true based on the empirical evidence gathered and evaluated in the course of the research. The paper however, disagrees slightly with the aspect of the assertion which enthuses that “since no permanent and sustained containment is ever found in dealing with the climate change, which causes the phenomenon to continue expanding further southwards, the problem of desertification would continue to be in the front burner in causing or exacerbating the conflicts”. For as it has been suggested above, a change of attitude on the part of the government and citizens

alike would help in mitigating if not entirely solving the problem of desertification and that of the processes of environmental degradation in Nigeria.

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