

OPEN GRAZING IN NIGERIA: A THREAT TO HUMAN LIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

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Abstract

Open grazing in Nigeria is now a source of major crisis in Nigeria, hence the enactment of laws by different states house of assembly in different states of Nigeria become a necessity. This crisis has reached to the extent or point that lives are being lost daily in different localities and community. Not only that lives are being lost, depletion of environment is going on due to the activities of cattle rearing. The ecosystem and their environmental assets such as fertile soil, clean water, forests and biodiversity are greatly threatened towards extinction, degradation, and so on. Though the cattle rearing or open grazing provide their own services to economic growth of the Nigerian, but the losses being experienced or incurred is now out weighing the supposed gains towards the economic growth and maintaining biological foundations for human and non-human life. This explains why the Nigerian people are experiencing acute environmental crisis in different forms due to open grazing. A sociological research undertaking in this write-up is showing that many factors are responsible for these crises which are being experienced in the Nigeria society. Apart from some factors development that is on-going contributed to the issue at hand. The effects and implications are being discussed in this write-up.

Keywords: Open Grazing, Fulani Herdsmen, Environment, Nigeria, Human Life, Degradation

Introduction

The open grazing among other meanings can be seen or understood as the practice of roaming about with animals including the human beings who pilot and guide their ways through the grazing routes in any open fields, plains and nearby bushes in search of pasture, food, water and shelter for the animals. This implies that grazing is about allowing livestock to directly consume the growing forage, gasses, legumes, and forbs in an open plain, valley or hilly places. Infact the grazing can take place wherever is accessible for the rearers but preferably in a pasture or rangeland. Grazing on its own provides good nutrition and other benefits to the animals in question being reared, this at the same time fertilizes the land in which

the animals grazes because its dumps are sources of manure to the crops and fertilizing the soil.

In Nigeria, grazing of animals were not initially seen as problem till recently, the problem of killing, destroying of agricultural products, spreading of diseases become rife in the societies or states in Nigeria. The most common grazing problem comes through the cattle herders who roam about with their cattle from states to states. Human lives, agricultural products and properties are lost daily due to the roaming and clashing of the herders and farmers whose crops or agricultural products are being destroyed by the cattle. Hence there is cry for ranching as it is the global practice rather than roaming of cattle in the society and places meant for human beings.

Sequel to the above condition of lost of human lives, destruction of agricultural products and properties, grazing laws or rights were enacted to enable any user to pasture their livestock to feed or graze in a given area. Earlier in the Nigerian history the traditional practice of grazing has been no man's affair and rarely disputed or become a source of battle because the amount of undeveloped and unsettled open land were in large quantity. But with the increase in population of the Nigeria people things began to turn around to the extent of being bloody affair. It is on record that the initial grazing law of 1965 was only applicable to the states in Northern part of the Nigeria which has not adequately curb the problems of clashes seen in Nigeria and the climatic depletion in the eco-system. This was affirmed by Mohammed (2021) when he said that the only grazing law that existed in Nigeria was the Northern Nigerian Grazing Law of 1964/1965 that was enacted by the Northern Nigeria Legislative Assembly. But with the collapse of regionalism all pre-existing law extinguished. Hence there is no grazing right in Nigeria as of today but it is a sort of privilege that the herders are enjoying or operating on as of today. This privilege being granted or given is being mismanaged today in the Nigerian society.

This write-up seeks to investigate the effects of the open grazing in Nigeria and what the government of Nigeria is doing to curtail the menace or situation which is being caused by the open grazing in Nigeria. At the same time to balance the situation for the cattle meat (beef) is needed by the Nigeria and other agricultural products are needed also. For non can displace the other both in the economic growth and healthy living of the populace in the Nigerian nation. The solution will also be proffered to the already existing solutions which may have been given by the government of Nigeria. This also is necessary because climatic change which

is the global issue today needs to be addressed towards restoring the climatic hazards which is already taking place in one way or another which is affecting the world and the human lives.

Traditional and Conventional Grazing in Nigeria

Grazing of animals in Nigeria is an aged long practice among the farmers in Nigeria. Though some regions of the country like all the Northern parts of Nigeria took it as business while the Southern part of Nigeria mainly took it as a kind of subsistent farming. In the Southern part of Nigeria where it is mainly for subsistent and micro farming, there is no such problem among the farmers or village dwellers as regards to destruction of cultivated crops or other things. Infact the owner of the cattle or the animals are penalized heavily when the animal is seen going or moving about freely in the village circle or when it enters any farm land. The task force will apprehend and cease the animal until the owner comes to pay some amount of money in exchange for the roaming animals belonging to him/her. Here the animals are kept in the compound of the owner and its forage or food is given to them from time to time from waste that comes from the home. Sometimes some of the animals or cattle are taking out for feeding outside the compound with rope tied on the neck or one of the legs for sedentary grazing in the bush. This animals or cattle are sometimes being taking to another place after some hours and then brought back to the compound in the evening in a manner that prevents them from straying into cultivated farm lands (Chukwuemeka, Aloysius and Eneh, 2018). The only time or situation you will see a roaming animal is the one that belongs to the deity of the area concerned, though it is no more seen due to growth in civilization.

From the above we see that the animals are fed with grasses and waste foodstuffs from the houses or compounds, this ensures for adequate feeding of the animals. These animals being reared at home are not for commercial purposes unless when the animal gives birth which are taking to market for sale. The animals are consumed when it suddenly dies, in this case some members of the village people are consulted for "mercy buying" of the animals, especially when the animal is cattle or big goat. It is sold for any amount to the group of villagers who agreed willingly to buy it, to avoid being a total lost to the family or the owner of the animal. Finally ,as of today the southern parts of Nigeria consume more of the cattle meat being produced by other regions of the country so it is needed despite the crisis going on.

Many scholars affirmed and agreed that raising or herding of cattle or any other animals in Northern part of Nigeria, especially among the Fulani ethnic group differs greatly from the Southern part of the Nigeria. According to Ezeownuka and Igwe (2016) the Northerners especially the Fulani tribe are the largest pastoral nomadic group in Nigeria, herding cattle, goats, sheep and so on. Unlike the Southern part of Nigeria, the Fulani herdsmen keep and sustain their herds both for subsistence and commercial purposes. They do this or raise their animals through open grazing. Many factors can be responsible for the open grazing in the Northern part of Nigeria, at least for the fact that 90% of the population are into animal husbandry, again they are doing it in great quantity and for commercial purposes. Logically there may be no enough land for daily rearing of the animals among the herdsmen and seasonal changes, hence the clashes among them and the need for migration into other parts of the country for proper feeding of their animals.

This calls to mind the story of Abram and Lot in the book of Genesis 13: 5-13 (The New Jerusalem Bible):

Lot who was traveling with Abram, had flocks and cattle of his own, and tents too. The land was not sufficient to accommodate them both at once, for they had too many possessions to be able to live together. Dispute broke out between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and those of Lot....Accordingly Abram said to Lot, "we do not want discord between us or between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land open to before you? Go in the opposite direction to me: if you take left, I will go right, I will go left."So Lot chose the all the Jordan plain for himself and moved off eastwards. Thus they parted company.

Moses was also a herdsman as was seen in his early life where he was rearing the animals of Jethro his father in-law for years. The above narratives shows that pastoral nomadic life was as old as man and that it did not start in Nigeria, it is practiced all over the world both as source of income and as a cheap source of food or animal proteins consumed all over the world.

Fulani tribal group who dominate the Sahel region are the best known and most numerous of all the pastoral groups in Nigeria. They do this mostly through open grazing as of now in Nigeria this involves young men who go about with the animals in the plain open land feeding them with forages seen in the fields. Chukwemeka, Aloysuis and Eneh (2018) noted that their women engage in culinary services, cook and sell animal products for the upkeep of the family.

Sequel to the itinerant nature that is involved, the Fulani keeps migrating from one place to another. And as such they do not have permanent abode or owe lands for settlements, rather they live in camps which are shifted frequently as they migrate from place to place. But today, with increase in population, developments, agricultural intensification, environmental degradation and climatic change going on every day, the society today do not accommodate anymore the type of pastoral nomadic life being practiced by herdsmen.

This calls for conventional ways, acceptable globally in raising or herding of the animals to avoid conflicts and destruction of lives and property in the society. Globally, ranching has been the usual practice by many countries of the world. A ranch according to Wikipedia (2017) is an area of land, including various structures, given primarily for ranching, the practice of raising grazing livestock such as cattle and sheep. Among other things, it is also a method used to raise less common livestock such as horses, elk, ostrich and so on. Ranches generally consist of large areas but may be of any size desired by the owner or organization. Among other things, ranching has some benefits which are needed in Nigeria to curtail the problems of farmers and non farmers in Nigeria. Ranching helps in the production of healthier animals, provision of employment which is highly needed in Nigeria to reduce insecurity. Ranching leads to promotion of peaceful co-existence, this ensures that rearing of animals are done in every part of the country which in effect will reduce the scarcity of cow meat and dairy food. The constant harassment of farmers by terrorists and armed bandits will drastically reduce which will ensure proper supply of agricultural products to the people who needed it and equally ensures stability of the economy (Yinka, 2014).

This conventional and globally accepted way of raising cattle (ranching) is being advocated by the people of Nigeria in the recent time to solve the problem of insecurity ravaging the country farmer and herdsmen crisis. Efforts are being made by the Nigeria government to build ranches being proposed by various state legislators through their anti-open grazing laws. According to Abubakar (2021) the governor of Kastina state (Aminu Masari) confirmed that the state has received N6.25 billion from the Federal government of Nigeria for ranch development projects. According to Abubakar the project is intended to check clashes between farmers and herders which have snowballed into banditry in states across Nigeria's North-west and North-central regions. The projects also involves the construction of feeder roads, slaughterhouses, solar-powered boreholes and police stations on ranches, rehabilitation of existing infrastructure such as dams, dispensaries, veterinary clinics, stock routes and pasture development.

This is done in many other states of Nigeria, apart from solving the security challenges, ranching also provides jobs to many teeming youths. Osogbo (2021) also affirmed that ranching and anti- open grazing has reduced the deployment of young boys for open grazing. This means that any young boy caught herding would be arrested and the adult that hired such person would also not escape justice. From the above analysis, ranching or grazing reserve is being adopted gradually by the people of Nigeria for security issues and in compliance with world best practices. This also confirmed by Bello (2021) that a state may even decide that both ranching and grazing reserve can co-exist side by side, so it is a matter of preference by individual state. Awogbade (1987) also affirms that the current situation of the promotion of grazing reserves is official Nigerian government policy, and is being put into practice by several of the Northern states (Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, Gongola and Borno).

Impact of Open Grazing on Human and Environment Life

The environmental sustainability remains the concern of every human being on the surface of the earth hence the clamour for the protection and care being heard all over the world towards the climatic change. The environment ranges from living and non living things found in the air, sea and underground. The human beings are much concerned by their environment because it is the source of their daily livelihood. The environment has over the years remained a major factor over which man relates with and remained at the centre of man's life (Chuka, 2019). So any threat or challenge to environment is a threat to human life and quality of life in the world. Dryzek (2005) addressing above issue states that:

Environmental challenges are threats to the capacity of the planet to support life, especially human life. The threat in question involve degradation of the global environment through pollution; exhaustion of earth's natural resources (fossil, fuel, minerals, fisheries, forests and croplands); prolusion explosion; scarcity of essential raw materials; disastrous effects of deforestation; increase in global warming; ozone depletion and its concomitant threats to human security. (p. 13).

The global climatic change taking place daily obviously came from the changes taking place in the environmental relations or activities of man on earth which either depletes or builds up the environment. The environmental challenge as is known today is an overall crisis which demands or require a holistic response. These challenges or threats are great danger to the global commons like the oceans, the sea, the ozone layer and the climate system, which are a life support system

for humankind as a whole (Chuka, 2005). With the above challenges to human life and survival, the world has seen or understood the need for global cooperation towards finding solutions to prevailing environmental threats or climatic changes.

Open grazing of cattle from one place to place impacts heavily on the society upon which it is carried out. Grazing of animals in the open fields can result to so many things. According to Chukwuemeka et al (2018) open grazing can result to increase in desertification through long term over grazing, particularly in the semiarid rangelands, water and environmental pollution through animal wastes, increased in greenhouse gas effect, since grazing ruminants produce methane as an end product of rumen digestion. The destruction of farm lands and farm produce are not left out in the impacts of open grazing which are causing terrible crisis in the states of Nigeria.

Beyond the above effects, open grazing is an avenue through which transmission of communicable diseases are transmitted all over the world. The animal diseases and human diseases are easily transmitted due to migration involved in the open grazing. The animals in another region are affected when they are being reared from one place to the other. Equally the herders may contact disease from their animals and humans and transferred it to human being in the process of migration. The herders may at the same time be affected when they come in contact with any communicable disease ranging in region they migrated to. For example the corona virus disease (covid-19) can be contacted by any herder when he migrates to a strange place or region.

Herders and farmers crisis are rampant in Nigeria, farmers fight back when their crops are destroyed by cows, while the herders at the same time destroy the farmers' products, this results to the constant shedding of blood seen in Nigeria between these two groups of people. Though, historically according to Chukwuemeka et al (2018) relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. They lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship with herders' cattle fertilizing the farmers' land in exchange for grazing rights. But tensions have grown over the past few years. Many have been killed and displaced in parts of Nigeria.

Some of the herders and farmers clashes that have taken place in Nigeria are many but some are widely known. The clashes have claimed a lot of lives which were reported by different media both international and national media. Idowu (2017) affirmed that information released by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked the Fulani herdsmen as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world, after the

Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Taliban and Al- Shabaab, showed that in 2014 more than 1200 farmers and ordinary people lost their lives, excluding destroyed properties and burnt houses. In the South-east of Nigeria many herders were seeing carrying weapons while herding their cattle, instead of normal sticks and few little bags. These weapons scare the farmers who watch their farm being destroyed by the cattle. The causes of the clashes are known but the Federal government of Nigeria always failed to address the issue. At certain points the clashes are blamed on the herders that migrated from neighbouring countries that have the same boundaries with Nigeria.

Some notable clashes according to Global Terrorism Index in 2015 resulted in 800 deaths and in the year 2016 further incidents in Agatu, Benue and Nimbo Enugu state. In April 2018 Fulani gunmen allegedly killed 19 people during an attack inside the church, afterwards they burnt dozens of nearby homes. On 11 February 2019, an attack on an Adara settlement named Ongwar Bardi by suspected Fulani gunmen killed 11 people. Then reprisal attack by Adara targeted settlement of the Fulani killed at least 141 people with 65 people missing. The attacks took place in Kajuru local government of Kaduna state. Some speculated that the motive was to destroy specific communities in the local government. There are countless number of killings and displacement resulting from farmers and herders clashes going on daily basis which are not heard or reported by media. And solution to the problem seems not to be in sight, yet many states in Nigeria have enacted anti grazing laws, enforcement remains the problem so that lives may be saved. In the South east these clashes are common and almost seen as a normal occurrence where one or lives must be wasted without being reported to the hearing of anybody except the community concerned.

Suggestion and Conclusion

The exponential growth both in economic activities and population growth of human beings on the surface of the earth necessitated the changes in everything done by human beings which include climatic change or environmental challenges, affect the stability or the capacity of the earth to support life adequately. According to Chuka (2019) environmental challenges is an overall crisis seen as a set of interlocking problems that require a holistic response globally. The realization of these problems by the communities, states, countries of the world elicited efforts leading to the clamour for solutions towards the climatic change taking place daily. Hence the need to combat the sectional and

global rampant environmental degradation and deterioration going on all over the world become very important.

This climatic change is no doubt real considering the inconsistencies in the realm of biosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere. The negative changes in the environment are seriously affecting the herders in Nigeria which led them to migrate from Northern part to Southern part of Nigeria for better forage for their animals. The process of this migration has caused and is still causing a lot of havocs among the communities in the Nigerian societies. This led to enacting of anti-grazing laws by different states of Nigeria to prevent incessant killings and clashes going on among the herders and the farmers in different communities. These ills threaten the peace of the community necessitated the need to create the grazing reserves and ranches in parts of the country.

Again, the government of Nigeria should revisit its proposal on allowing migrants from the neighbouring countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to enter without their permit. These free movements without check will continue to encourage incessant flow of criminals and terrorists, bandits from other countries. This makes the country to be unsafe for the populace and unsafe primarily for economic activities. These free movements encourage the carrying or smuggling of arms or ammunitions into the country. And recently, the reports are that the herders are carrying weapons instead of their little sticks and bags which are normally used for checking and protecting their animals. Many terrorists enter the borders of Nigeria in the name of being herders from neighbouring countries. To end these crises it is good to close the borders from all migrants except after proper checking them and confirming them as genuine citizens of other countries with intention of doing legitimate business in Nigeria.

Again to curb these clashes, governments in all levels from town unions to local governments, to state and federal levels should adopt the concept or principles of Igwebuiké which according to Kanu (2015) entails solidarity between the people governed and the government. To control the clashes between the farmers and herders, the people and the government should work together to end the crisis. Igwebuiké ideology is highly needed in resolving the on-going clashes and at the same time maintaining peace among the people, for the farmers and herders need to co-exist in society for healthy living towards food production. The farmers and their farm need to be protected, again the herders ought to raise their cows for both are source of economic growth in the world today.

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