

THREATS TO AQUATIC AND TERRESTRIAL FAUNAL RESOURCES IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS FOR MITIGATING FUTURE TRIBAL AND BOUNDARY CONFLICTS

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Resource conflicts are persistent the world over since the lives of the people, to some extent, depend on the outcome. In present day Nigeria, a lot of skirmishes between Fulani nomads and some host communities over grazing land for cattle are in the front burner. A Southward migration of nomads for grazing lands has been met with stiff opposition from host communities. The Niger Delta is the main resource hub of Nigeria due to its petroliferous on shore and offshore areas. The pollution of the creeks and inland waterways and the depletion of aquatic species due to eutrophication is clearly the major cause of oil infrastructure vandalization and sabotage. In the Sahel Savanna in the far north, climate change, human development, effects of land use practices and mismanagement of established grazing reserves have brought great stress on the land available for crop growth and sustenance of animals. This state of affairs underscores the sharp resource divide amongst the ecological zones of Nigeria and the potentials for conflict generation. The coastal areas no longer enjoy the rich aquatic resources due mainly to oil pollution effects on the ecosystem. This situation is exacerbated by the conquering posture of the South-bound nomads which tends to bring about tribal and boundary conflicts. This paper focuses on the unfolding scenarios in Nigeria due to unplanned resource management. The situation is not beyond remediation. The starting point is the restoration of existing reserves in the north and education of the herdsman. The Niger Delta pollution problems must be clearly and transparently pursued. The bottom line is the management of available land and water resources especially the aquatic and terrestrial zoological resources.

Keywords: Aquatic, Terrestrial, Resources, Conflicts, Threats, Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

Anthropogenic disturbance is a major driver for biodiversity loss. This is especially true for subtropical and tropical forest ecosystems. Nigeria is not spared from this state of affairs. It has over 170 million inhabitants most of which are farmers who derive their sources of livelihood from forest and water resources. The recent emergence of global problems including climate change, biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, globalization, and infectious disease emergence demands integrative approaches breaching disciplinary boundaries. Nigeria has about nine ecological zones. Of these zones, the Sahel Savanna has a vast land with the least of the forest resources in terms of productivity, needed for the sustainance of farming activities and animal husbandry. Due to climate change effects, desertification in the north, herdsman are heading southward looking for better grazing grounds which are limited due to farming activities. The destruction of crops and farms by herds of cattle are resisted by host communities thereby straining tribal and boundary harmony. As fishing communities turn towards subsistent farming for survival on limited land occasioned by oil spills, the encroachment of herds of cattle on this farms become a great source of conflict between the farmers and the herdsman.

In the Niger Delta region, especially Ogoniland, major conflicts between government forces and youths from the area have gained international attention. These conflicts arise

from the claims by the rampaging youths that the source of their livelihood which is mainly fishing is being wiped out. Governments, on the other hand appears oblivious of this fact hence the tagging of these youths as militants. Studies have shown that the quantity of oil spilled over a fifty year period is between 9-13million barrels, which are equivalent to 50 times the Exxon Valdez spills.

Does Nigeria require setting up grazing reserves elsewhere outside the operational region of herdsman or does the solution lie in restoring and maintaining already established reserves in the North? Does the oil spill in the Niger Delta about 50 times the quantity of Exxon Valdez spills show environment-friendly practices? Can there be a paradigm shift from the coercive and subjugative stance to the persuasive and palliative measures in all these? These are the perspectives being examined in this paper.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Moretimore and Wilson (1965) noted that the farmers in northern Nigeria have cultivated up to 83.5% of the land. Around Katsina, with 119 people per 135 square kilometers, farmers plow 66-75% of the land, while the remaining bush land is extensively grazed, if grass grows. Further researches have shown that for all classes of land use, except uncultivated land, grazing has intensified in Nigeria. For the uncultivated land, primary grazing-sites are diminishing because sedentary farmers inhabit the land. With an increase in population,



Figure 1: Massive slaughter of cows during recent conflicts in North central Nigeria.

grazing changes from surplus, to subsistence, and to survival methods of land exploitation (Awogbade, 1980). Urban or rural expansion impinge on access to grazing-sites causing herders, farmers, and builders to struggle for areas with known quality land. In the fadama floodplains, conflicts resulting in loss of life are common. Clashes in these wet-lands escalate when farmers deny animals access to water and verdant grass (Galaty, *et al.*, 1980b). Recently, conflicts between farmers and herders have resulted in bloody skirmishes in southeast Nigeria and are ongoing in North Central Nigeria.

The Niger Delta consists of diverse ecosystems of mangrove swamps, freshwater swamps and rainforest and is considered the largest wetland in Africa and among the ten most important wetlands and marine ecosystems in the world. But due to oil pollution and contamination, the area is now characterized by contaminated streams and rivers, forest destruction and biodiversity loss in general, making the area an ecological wasteland (Kadafa, 2012). Oil spills that pollute the creeks, surface and groundwater bodies and the effects of dams on downstream, excessive use of sulphate fertilizers were reported as some of the threats to water resources development in Nigeria (Idu, 2015). An extension of this finding is the effects on downstream migration of fish and other marine faunas. It has been estimated that 24 out of 224 mammals, 10 out of 831 birds and 2 out of 114 reptiles known to exist in Nigeria are endangered (WRI, 1992). An estimated 9million – 13 million (about 1.5 m tons) of oil has been spilled in to the Niger Delta ecosystem over the past 50 years; 50 times the volume spilled in Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska 1989 (FME, NCF, WWF UK, CEESP-IUCN 2006). In 2004, Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas pipeline transversing through Kala-Akama, Okrika mangrove forest leaked and set ablaze and burnt for three days. The local plant and animals within the areas were engulfed (Nenibarini, 2004).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Farmers-nomads conflicts

A bill for the setting up of grazing reserves elsewhere in the country is a matter before the national assembly. The debate is raging based on which part of the country one comes from and in all prima facie issues are being overlooked. The sponsors of the bill believe that the chronic scarcity of

pasture is the primary cause of nomadic pastoralism and invasion of farmlands by the nomads down south. Grazing reserves in Nigeria started during the pre-colonial era (Bako and Ingawa, 1988). By 1964, the government had gazetted about 6.4 million hectares of the forest reserve, ninety-eight percent in the Savanna. Sokoto Province had twenty-one percent of the land, followed by Kabba, Bauchi, Zaria, Ilorin, and Katsina, with 11-15 percent each (Awogbade, 1982). The Wase, Zamfara, and Udubo reserves followed in succession. Records show that the establishment of these reserves witnessed colossal failures due to mismanagement, inadequate infrastructure and the failure of the nomads to adapt to a sedentary life styles.

The above accounts clearly show that the starting point in the solution of the pasture issues lie in the restoration of the mismanaged reserves and setting up of new ones if necessary. It is to be noted that making this a national issue can only breed further regional mistrust. The mindset of the protagonists of pastoral extension nationwide assumes that the Fulanis will remain herdsmen in perpetuity. This line of thinking surely obscures government vision for the Fulani development in the future. The following short term and long term measures have been proposed.

- i. Enforcement of land reform and protection of the already demarcated grazing reserves for the intended users especially in the North where the practice is not alien to the people.
- ii. It should also be within the government scope to ensure better stoking rates through improved herd quality. The Fulani should be made to appreciate the value of improved stock rather than keeping large number of herds for the sake of it.
- iii. A long term road map for the acquisition of skills and occupational diversification should be in place by all concerned states in the North. The expansion of grazing reserves with a view to perpetuating pastoralism is sheer myopia. This can only be achieved through intensive education which is presently hampered by nomadic life.
- iv. Establishment of cattle ranches as this is the modern method of raising cattle in leading producers of beef and cattle products globally.
- v. Establishment of ranches in the south should be through private negotiation with host land owners and not through government fiat or law.

The Niger Delta imbroglio

The lack of development in the region and perceived injustice over the sharing of revenues from oil often triggered conflicts between the host communities and oil extracting companies on the one hand and between the host communities and the state on the other. The adverse effects of these conflicts on the Nigerian economy, and the need to tackle decisively the challenges in the region, led to the introduction of the Ministry of Niger Delta and an Amnesty Programme for the Niger Delta militants.

In the policy thrust, among other things issues and challenges that must be overcome include environmental degradation and pollution. The medium term objectives and targets for the Niger Delta Regional Implementation Plan are hinged on the following five pillars:

- Reduction of oil-related conflicts in the region
- Enhanced and sustainable development of human and physical infrastructures.
- Diversification of the region's economy from oil and gas to agriculture, manufacturing, and knowledge based.
- Consolidation of post-amnesty projects and programmes.
- Preservation and conservation of the environment (Report No 293 Annual Report Ministry of Niger Delta).

With the above measures put in place, one would like to see an expedited remediation of the ND environment. The recent vandalization of infrastructures by groups claiming to Niger Delta Avengers is of major concern. The palliatives should be effectual and the coercive measures must be played down.

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