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COMMUNICATION AS A PANACEA FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION BETWEEN FARMERS AND HERDSMEN IN WUSHISHI LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS IN NIGER STATE

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Abstract

Conflict is a disagreement or clash between opposing parties, individuals or groups and communication is the process of sharing information, ideas, and feelings between individuals, groups, or organisations, it involves the transfer from a sender to a receiver through various mediums and channels. The destructive capacity of every conflict makes it a vice that should be avoided. Therefore conflict has become permanent life threat and in some cases has reversed development globally. In doing this, we begin to appreciate the role of communication in promoting human relationship. This paper takes an examination on the communication as panacea for conflict resolution between farmers and herdsmen in Wushishi local government. The objectives of the research are to investigate types of communication used in conflict resolution, to examine the effect of communication between farmers' and herders, to identify the types of communication tools used in conflict resolution and to establish the challenges associated with communication tools in conflict resolution. Descriptive survey design was adopted as research design, 300 is the targeted population of the research comprise 150 farmers and 150 herdsmen's, descriptive statistics was used in data analysis. The finding shows that understanding perspective is one of the role of communication, , active listening to each other is one of the types of communication used in conflict resolution and lastly the finding shows that misunderstanding and misinterpretation of information is one of the challenges facing conflict resolution. In conclusion if there will be steady communication between farmers and herdsmen's it will reduce the conflicts. the recommendation is that government should designate some areas as grazing field to the nomadic herdsmen's in Wushishi local government

Keywords: *communication, panacea, conflict resolution, farmers, herdsmen's and Wushishi Local Government*

Introduction

Communication is sharing of feelings, ideas, and opinions which can be intellectual, personals, spoken, or written in nature. Communication motivates, informs, suggests, warns, orders, changes behavior, and establishes better relationships, to make interaction meaningful and make oneself understood. By this, Amiara (2019) holds that communication is an important factor

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that promotes social relations among people especially those with diverse interests. Therefore, the importance of communication in a social gathering shows that it stimulates and promotes love, understanding and development hence Best(2020) opines that communication is the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups and potential parties in a conflict situation. It is a process of interacting and relating with others, meaning that parties into conflict still talk. Communication is a means of peace building, confidence and trust which promotes healthy relationship between/among people. Hence it is often believed that when people interact and relate with one another, it helps to remove doubt, suspicion and hatred. Managing global conflicts it must requires a multifaceted approach encompassing conflicts prevention, mediation, peace building, and the use of various tools such as diplomacy, peace-keeping and sanctions. It also involves understanding the root causes of conflicts, fostering trust, promoting dialogue and supporting long- term peace processes.

It is on this note that one may add that the importance of communication in the resolution of conflict has to do with the degree to which the message or information communicated will be understood by the parties

Conflict

Conflict is mostly conceived as the absence of peace and the breakdown of order. However,

Scholars of social conflict have made several attempts to dissect the concept, especially on the analysis of what constitute violent conflict and how it is inimical to peace. Indeed, conflict is actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interest (Oladotun and Emmanual, 2019).

Conflict resolution

The resolution of conflict has widely come to refer to the actual tackling of prevailing disagreement that translates to violence conflict. In other words, conflict resolution is seen by Chika (2019), as "a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflict through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict" Iwuoha, (2020), indicate that by conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behaviour is no longer violent, nor are attitudes hostile any longer while the structure of the conflict has been changed. However, Mawoli and Adamu, (2020), use conflict resolution to refer to: An outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solutions which includes, negotiation, mediation, arbitration and in some cases litigation, naturally acceptable to the parties, self - sustaining in the long run and productive of a new positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile, adversaries and; Any process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved. Therefore, Conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties have been met with necessary satisfiers, and their affairs have been allayed (Best, 2020).

By this however, conflict resolution appears to be a constructive solving of all the factors that translated into violent behaviour with the intention that all those underlying factors that led to the outbreak of conflict are once addressed. The resolution of conflict entails an adoption of variety of approaches such as grass root community-based activities, communication, good governance,

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collaboration, negotiation and many other pro-active methods like conciliation, arbitration, accommodation, confrontation/fighting and problem-solving.

The Farmers and Herders Crises in Nigeria:

The most notorious conflict in Nigeria today is between the indigenous farmers and the Fulani herdsmen across the states in the nation. The Fula people popularly known as Fulani in Hausa language are diverse in culture and widely dispersed. Majority of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry and wetlands in the country. They are rated the world's largest nomadic group. The dispute between the farmers and herders began as the farmers accused herders of failing to control their cattle and of damaging their crops. In turn, the Fulani accused farmers of stealing and killing their livestock. The crux of their disagreement which triggered off the dispute include: land and water use, obstruction of traditional migration routes, livestock theft and crop damage. Their conflict is not entirely new in the nation, thus; it existed but was restricted to the northern part of Nigeria and later spread to almost every part of the nation due to environmental devastation which led to the widespread migration of the Fulani from the north. There are recent records of herdsmen attacks on farmers in Nigeria especially in Wushishi local government in Niger state

Since the return by Nigeria to civil rule in 1999, violence related to herder's farmer's conflicts has assumed alarming and disturbing proportions with thousands of people either killed or displaced and property worth millions of naira destroyed. Herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria has not only taken enormous toll on the country but has spawned the proliferation of ethnic and religious-based militia groups, which in turn has aggravated inter-ethnic tensions and impacted adversely on the country's agricultural sector.

Therefore, is against this background that the researcher aims to find out how communication can help build understanding, facilitate dialogue, and encourage collaboration among farmers and herders in Wushishi local government councils.

Statement of the problem

Farmers- herder's conflicts, particularly in regions like Nigeria, can escalate significantly, leading to wide spread negative impacts, including loss of life, displacement, and economic disruption. Resources scarcity, political factors and ethnic tensions contribute to these escalations with lasting consequences for communities. With effective communication such as, active listening, empathy, and clear expression are crucial for de-escalating and resolving conflicts between farmers and herders. It helps parties understand each other's perspectives, validate feelings and find common ground, leading to more constructive dialogue and untimely, solutions that meet everyone's needs.

The scarcity of natural resources had led to conflict which is triggered by competition over the meagre resources available the herdsmen maintained that they are free to move around the country because of freedom of movement, the farmers see this movement most especially when such movement is into their farmlands as invasion and infringement on their communal and personal properties inherited from their grandparents. Also, there are those that argued that climate change puts

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pressure on the herders to migrate to other regions leading to localized conflicts and tensions. Hence, climate change induced rainfall shifting patterns/amount and desertification reduces croplands and grazing lands which forced the Fulani herdsmen to migrate and, in some cases, settled permanently in an attempt to find pasture for their herds. While the argument of climate change appears to be a compelling narrative that explains the cause of conflict between the herdsmen and farmers, there are those that argued that conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria could be traced to an increase in human population and growth in cattle. This is because ineffective communication hinders farmers ability to resolve conflicts by creating misunderstanding, distrust, and escalating disputes.

Research Questions.

1. What are the types of communication used in conflict resolution between farmers and herders?
2. What are the effects of communication between farmers and herders?
3. What are the types of communication tools used in conflict resolution?
4. What are the challenges associated with communication tools and conflict resolution?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate types of communication used in conflict resolution.
2. To examine the effect of communication between farmers and herders.
3. To identify the types of communication tools used in conflict resolution.
4. To establish the challenges associated with communication tools in conflict resolution.

Research methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Singh (2018) defined descriptive survey design as a method of investigation which attempts to describe and interpret what exists at present in the form of condition, processes, trends, affects, attitude and belief. It is concerned with the phenomena that are typical of the normal condition. Descriptive survey is suitable for this research study that investigates an existing condition or event with a given population.

The targeted population in this study is 300 which comprises 150 farmers and 150 herdsmen in three zones in Wushishi local government council in Niger state

Table 1: Targeted Population Size

S/N	Population	Proposed No of farmers	Proposed No of herdsmen
1	Wushishi Zone	50	50
2	Zungeru Zone	50	50
3	Akare Zone	50	50
	TOTAL	**150**	**150**

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Face to face structured interview were used to collect data for this studies. The methods allow researchers to obtain detailed information that might not be available through other research.

With the permission of the research area and respondents, the interview was recorded. The researcher also took notes as the interviewees talked. A brief explanation was given by the researcher to ensure a clear understanding of the research aim and the research questions

The data collected from the field was analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and frequency distribution.

Results

Research Question 1:

Role of communication in conflict resolution between Farmers and Herders in Wushishi local government?

Items	No of Responses	Percentage
Understanding perspective	60	**20%**
Expressing needs and interest	50	**16.7%**
Establishing trust	61	**20.3%**
Facilitating negotiation	46	**15.3%**
Managing emotion	43	**14.3%**
Creating a positive environment	40	**13.4%**
TOTAL	**300**	**100%**

In the table above, 61 responded which is (20.3%) response that, one of the role of communication in conflict resolution between farmer and harder is establishing trust between the two parties, 20% of responded which is 60 are with opinion that understanding perspective is one of the role of communication in conflict resolution between farmers and Fulani herders. One of the role of communication in conflict resolution between farmers and herders is expressing need and interest of the two parties which 50 responded which is (16.7%) are with opinion

While the remaining 46 responded which is (15.3%) responses that facilitating negotiation between farmers and herders is one of the roles of communication in conflict resolution, lastly 43 (14.3%) and 40 (13.4) responded that managing emotion and creating a positive environment are one of the key roles of communication in conflict resolution between farmers and herders.

The finding is line with the finding of Amiara (2019), that investigated the Role of Communication in Post Conflict Peace Building, stated that effective communication is crucial for resolving conflict between farmers and herders by enabling the two parties to understand each other's perspective, express their needs, and negotiate mutually agreeable solutions. It also fosters empathy, trust, and collaboration, transforming conflicts into opportunities for growth and development among the parties.

Research Question 2

Effect of communication as the prevailing state of crisis between Farmers and Herders in Wushishi local government?

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Items	No of Responses	Percentage
Increased confusion	65	**21.7**
Misinformation spread	60	**20%**
Decreased trust	60	**20%**
Loss of opportunity	55	**18.3**
Delayed recovery	60	**20%**
TOTAL	**300**	**100%**

The Table above, shows that one the effect of communication in prevailing crisis between farmer and herders in Wushishi local government is that it increased confusion between two parties were 65 respondent which is 21,7% agree with the statement. Another effect of communication are misinformation spread, decreased trust and delay recovery which 60 respondent (20%) are with the opinion of the statement, lastly 55 respondent (18.3%) are with opinion that loss of opportunity is one of the effect of communication between farmers and herders in Wushishi local government. The finding is line with the finding of Yahaya, (2019) who examine the role of mass media towards ending Fulani herdsmen's and farmer's conflicts in Benue State. He stated that effective communication is crucial for resolving the conflict between farmers and herders, he mentions that it can foster peaceful coexistence, resolve dispute and promote sustainable land use practices,

Research Question 3

Types of communication tools that are used in conflict resolution between Farmers and Herders in Wushishi local government

Items	No. of Responses	Percentage
Active listening	**68**	**22.6%**
Open ended questions	**-**	**-**
Assertiveness	**-**	**-**
Non-verbal communication	**-**	**-**
Empathy	**50**	**16.7%**
Neutral language	**50**	**16.7%**
Collaborating problem solving	**66**	**22%**
Mediation	**66**	**22%**
TOTAL	**300**	**100%**

From the table above, 68 respondent (22.6%) responses that one of the key communication tools used in conflict resolution between farmers and herders in Wushishi local government is active listening. When the two parties are active in listening to each other it will reduce conflict among them, another communication tools used in resolving conflict among farmers and herders is collaborating problem solving and mediation which 66 respondent which is 22% are with opinion that when the two parties collaborating together in solving the conflict among them it will drastically reduce conflict among them, also when there is mediation between the farmers and herders you will see that it will reduce conflict between them. Another communication tools used in conflict resolution among farmers and herders in

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Wushishi local government is using a neutral language that can both understand between farmers and herders and using of empathy between the farmers and herders, if all are used it will eradicate farmers and herders' conflict, 50 respondent which is 16.7% are agreed with the statement.

The finding is line with the finding of Sule (2022) who investigated the communication as a tool for effective dispute resolution and governance in Nigeria. He stated that, communication could be verbal, non-verbal, or written it should be given more attention in order to get to the root causes, information, understanding and management or resolution of the continued eruptions of dispute. By communicating effectively, the two parties can successfully resolve dispute to bring positive results.

Research Question 4

Problems facing communication in conflict resolution between Farmers and Herders**?**

Items	No. of Responses	Percentage
Misunderstanding and misinterpretation	**50**	**16.7%**
Lack of active listening	**50**	**16.7%**
Lack of clarity	**50**	**16.7%**
Overgeneralisation	**50**	**16.7%**
Defensiveness and attacking behaviour	**-**	
Lack of trust	**50**	**16.7%**
Poor timing	**-**	
Cultural differences	**50**	**16.7%**
Emotional barriers	**-**	
TOTAL	**300**	**100%**

The table above, shows the problems facing communication in conflict resolution between farmers and herders in Wushishi local government. The respondent agree that a lot of problems are facing communication in conflict resolution, one of the problem is misunderstanding and misinterpretation of communication, they agreed that a lot of farmers and herders misunderstood and misinterpret information which lead to conflict between them, secondly is lack of active listening, they responses that farmers and herders are not actively listening to information before taking action which lead them to conflict among them, thirdly is lack of clarify information before taking action, a lot of them taking rumours or here saying without properly clarify information which lead them to conflict between farmers and herders, another one is over generalise, farmers assume that all herders are problem peoples, without knowing that some of them are as good as they are, there is no way you can generalise that all herders are bad, the assumption is wrong. Lack of trust is one of the problems facing communication in conflict resolution, the respondent agrees that lack of trust among farmer and herders, both of them are not trusting each other that is what usually bring conflict between farmers and herders in Wushishi local government. Lastly are the cultural differences between farmers and herders, both the farmers and herders having different cultures and belief which normally lead them to conflict.

The finding is line with the finding of Ali Ahmed (2022) who investigated the effective communication and its effect on interpersonal relationship, conflict

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resolution. He stated that language barrier, cultural barrier, physical barrier, communication channels and ineffective listening are the major obstacles in conflict resolution between farmers and herders.

Conclusion

The role of communication is very powerful and assumes one of the proactive methods that aimed at preventing the occurrence of conflict. In fact, it promotes interactions and relations among people meaning that parties into conflict situation still talk. In other words, the importance of communication can help to remove doubt, suspicion and contribute to the process of confidence building.

The steady communication between farmers and herders is that it discourages prejudice and ill-feeling among them and contributes to the process of confidence building. Communication is a non-adversarial, cheap method of preventing and removing conflict situations, quite within the grip of the parties. Once communication is lost, parities risk getting into deep crisis that cannot be easily resolved.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. State government should engage peace and conflict resolution experts in dealing with issues concerning herdsmen-farmer crises. This will enable effective dialogues, negotiations and of course a win-win resolution, while encouraging early warning mechanism.
2. Government should adopt community policing model to forestall peace in the rural areas as it will enable the police and the community members detect when the herdsmen gain access into the communities to attack residents. Community policing seeks the effective community engagement in the provision of solution to policing issues and also developing partnership in the maintenance of safety and security in the society.
3. Governments at all levels should promulgate legislations outlawing open grazing of cattle while encouraging herders to establish ranches for their cattle.
4. State governments should designate some areas as grazing fields for the nomadic herdsmen and make them pay tax to the state, while warning that any crime involving a Fulani herdsman would attract severe penalties. All Fulani herdsmen operating in any local government should be registered to enable monitoring of their activities and co-existence.

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