**EFFICACY OF CONFLICT SENSITIVE REPORTING IN MANAGING THE FARMERS- HERDERS CLASHES IN NASARAWA STATE**

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**BEING A CONFERENCE PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA FROM FEBRUARY 25TH -28TH 2024.**

**ABSTRACT**

The violent clashes between Farmers-Herder have become a common security challenge in Nasarawa State resulting in loss of lives, destruction of properties and displacement of others. This study was conducted to ascertain the efficacy of conflict sensitive reporting in managing the Farmers-Herders clashes in Nasarawa State. The study is anchored on conflict theory supported by the social responsibility theory while the secondary data was relied upon for analysis. The study established that conflict sensitive reporting is capable of making positive contribution towards peaceful management and resolution of the clashes between Farmers-Herders in Nasarawa State by creating a platform for accurate report of the clashes. Conflict sensitive reporting is also capable of diffusing tension, reducing and containing the long age conflict between Farmers-Herders in Nasarawa State. In addition, conflict sensitive reporting is capable of bringing the conflict or clashes between Farmers-Herders to the plane of discussion with proposals for resolution, in order to bring about development in Nasarawa State. Although conflict sensitive reporting is often faced with the challenges of language use in the media, elite sources and lack of interest in peace oriented stories, the study concludes that conflict sensitive reporting is crucial in managing the farmers-herders clashes which has become a major security challenge in Nasarawa State, by way of creating a platform for the farmers and herders to express their grievances despite the challenges of language use in the media, elite sources and lack of interest in peace stories. Based on this, the study recommends that farmers-herders should be educated or sensitized on the dangers of engaging in violent clashes pointing out the negative part of violent clashes using the most appropriate and decent language and conflict sensitive reporters should always engage the farmers and herders when sourcing for information on the clashes.

**Keywords**: Conflict, Efficacy, Reporting, Sensitive, Farmer & Herders.

**INTRODUCTION**

Conflict sensitive reporting is the deliberate use of journalism to promote a culture of peace in conflicts by taking an advocacy, interpretative approach, that concentrate on story frames that highlight peace initiatives; tone down ethnic and religious differences, prevent further conflict, focus on the structure of society; and promote conflict resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation.

Conflict-sensitive reporting is critical in managing conflict situations (Popoola, 2015). Conflict sensitive reporting is a form of journalism that focuses on restoration of peace rather than promoting violence. The media has been at the center of conflict reportage, as it plays an important role in diffusing tension, reducing and containing conflicts. It is imperative to state the measures journalists in Nigeria need to take while reporting a conflict situation to avert crisis and contribute towards peace and conflict management.

The long age clashes between farmers and herders in Nasarawa State which has been on the increase requires immediate solution, following the failure of various interventions such as dialogue between the stakeholders as well as the use of security personnel to maintain order. According to Ugwu & Enna (2015), a major factor responsible for conflict in Nasarawa State is the relationship between farmers and the herders who migrate largely as a result of climate change. This view is enhanced by Musa & Ibrahim (2021) submission that the competition over the scarce land resources among herders and farmers, coupled with the increasing population of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Lafia, the State capital and in most Local Government headquarters, remain a great challenge.

Series of clashes have been experienced in Obi, Doma, Keana and Awe Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State since 2017 leading to the displacement of communities, loss of lives and livelihoods. Furthermore, over 45 people were killed on 18th December, 2021 in Obi and Awe Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State when the herders launched a deadly attack on the farmers (Premium Times, 2021).

The high rate of destruction occasioned by frequent violent clashes between farmers and herders as well as the level of destruction of lives and properties in Nasarawa State because of increased death as well as eviction of many people from their homes, has left the State volatile to conflicts and as Odiegwu et al (2019) observed, most journalists’ reports cover the farmers and herders clashes particularly the offensive attacks, reprisal attacks, public protests as well as government intervention efforts but excluded conflict sensitive communication which is crucial towards managing the conflict. Based on the gap observed, this study set out to examine the efficacy of conflict sensitive reporting in managing the farmers- herders clashes in Nasarawa State.

**Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the efficacy of conflict sensitive reporting in managing the farmers- herders clashes in Nassarawa state. The specific objectives of the study include to:

1. find out the causes of the farmers- herders clashes in Nassarawa state
2. ascertain the efficacy of conflict sensitive reporting in managing the farmers- herders clashes in Nassarawa state
3. identify the challenges of conflict sensitive reporting in managing the farmers- herders clashes in Nassarawa state

**Conceptual Clarifications**

The concepts of conflict sensitive reporting and framers-herders have been reviewed in this section of the study.

**Conflict Sensitive Reporting**

Conflict sensitive reporting focuses on restoration of peace rather than promoting violence. It is a brand of journalism that gives recognition to people who condemn violence. In the words of Dunu et al (2018), conflict-sensitive journalism is a new paradigm of conflict reporting. It is the deliberate use of journalism to promote a culture of peace in conflicts by taking an advocacy, interpretative approach, that concentrate on story frames that highlight peace initiatives; tone down ethnic and religious differences, prevent further conflict, focus on the structure of society; and promote conflict resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation.

Howard (2003) in Adisa (2012) described conflict sensitive journalism as:

A conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying

to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides but is engaged in the search for solutions. Conflict sensitive journalists choose their words carefully.

In conflict sensitive journalism,words like Fulani in the case of herders or herdsmen. Being conflict sensitive enables the journalist or reporter to be accurate and balanced as much as possible when reporting on conflict. According to Karlon (2018), conflict sensitive journalism stresses four key concepts such as: truth-seeking, active accuracy, a focus on relevance, and good writing. It also recognizes access to information, freedom of expression, and the safety and security of its practitioners as requisites.

Truth-seeking is a sacred commitment every conflict sensitive reporter must make to his or her audience. It is a commitment not only to produce stories but to seek and make known what is previously unknown so that people are aware of matters that actually impact their lives.

Active accuracy and a focus on relevance, meanwhile, are at the heart of conflict sensitive journalism practice. These are not new concepts, but truly old ones whose meanings have somehow degraded over time due to the exigencies of the market. Active accuracy involves the pursuit of truths and, beyond the ubiquitous quote and attribution, the actual evidence of these truths.

A focus on relevance, meanwhile, is conflict sensitive reporter’s commitment to always put the needs of the audience first. Here, a reporter’s choice of what to write and how to write it favours relevance to the reader over values like prominence, currency, or oddity (Karlon, 2018).

**Farmers-Herders Clashes**

Farmers are people who own or manage a farm. This implies that farmers work primarily on the farm for the purpose of subsistence, sustaining, and maintaining their life. Herdsmen on the other hand are people or group of people who own or keep herds of domesticated animals (Agaku, 2024). Farmer-Herders clashes therefore refer to the series of violent clashes and disputes over arable land resources across Nigeria between farmers and herders. This is very common in Nasarawa State. There is conflict whenever the herdsmen fail to properly control their cattle and consequently graze on the crops of the host communities. Similarly, Kajo (2019) argue that attempt by the farmers to register their grievances is thus resisted by the herdsmen which results to violent clashes between the two (2) parties.

Furthermore, Oli (2018) opined that herders often clash with farmers and their host communities over cattle destruction of crops; farmers’ encroachment on grazing reserves and indiscriminate bush burning by nomads which normally leads to loss of crops. It is important to note that the struggle for survival and protection of economic livelihood is responsible for the violent clashes between farmer and herders across many communities in Nigeria including Nasarawa State.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The study is anchored on the social responsibility theory. The theoryoriginated in the United States in 1947 from the Hutchins Commission Report on a Free and Responsible Press. The enquiry by this commission became necessary because the press was not behaving the way it was expected to behave. Historically, the press had abused the extreme freedom which it had been enjoying throughout the centuries when the Libertarian Theory held sway (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012).

Furthermore, Okunna & Omenugha (2012) specified the basic principles or tenets of the social responsibility theory to include:

1. The mass media have to accept and carry out certain duties or obligations to society
2. Setting high or professional standards of truth, accuracy, objectivity, balance and in formativeness is the best way for the media to fulfil these obligations
3. The press should regulate itself in accordance with the law and established institutions of the society within which the press is operating
4. There should be a multiplicity of media voices, that is pluralism, to reflect and represent the diverse categories and viewpoints in society
5. Journalists and other professionals who work in the media should be accountable to society not only to their employers and others who could exercise economic control over them
6. The people have the right to expect the press to perform creditably and a higher authority is justified if it intervenes to make the press do this and to ensure that the media are serving the public good.

The social responsibility theory emphasizes the moral and social responsibility of persons and institutions that operate the mass media with a view to redirecting the press to follow the right path. The theory provides a backing for this study as it shows that conflict sensitive reporting is a moral obligation of the media to manage the farmers and herder clashes in Nasarawa State.

**Methodology of the Study**

This is a qualitative study that relied on secondary data from books, journals, online sources, documents and newspaper publications.

**Review of General Literature**

In this section of the study, the general literature related to the study have been extensively reviewed

**Causes of Farmers and Herdsmen Clashes in Nigeria**

The clashes between farmer and herders in Nigeria are caused by certain factors. Bello (2013), enumerated the major causes of farmers and herders clashes to include: destruction of crops by cattle, cattle rustling by farmers, burning of range lands, increasing rate of cattle theft which is often accompanied by violence, antagonistic perception and beliefs among farmers and herders are responsible for the clashes due to failing institutions and fierce competition for available resources.

Similarly, Tukur (2013), asserts that the causes of farmers and herders clashes in Nigeria include: destruction of crops, contamination of streams by cattle, zero grazing of land, disregard for local traditional authorities, female harassment, harassment of nomads by host communities especially youths, indiscriminate bush burning, defecation of cattle on roads and cattle theft.

Okello (2014), also emphasized that the clashes between farmers and herders have intensified with dwindling natural resources which has greatly contributed to the violent clashes between farmers and herders. In addition, Ingawa et al (1999) in Aniche & Ngwu (2019) stresses that the major causes of farmers and herders conflicts in Nigeria are:

1. Changing resources access rights whereby traditional access rights to communal grazing and water resources are being obstructed by the individual tenure of arable farmers. This is particularly severe on the traditional routes, which become favorite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas.
2. Scarce resources which have resulted to a significant reduction in available livestock feed. Besides, the high value crops introduced by National Fadama Development Program (NFDP) like tomatoes and onions produce almost no crop residues for livestock feeding.
3. Decline in internal discipline and social cohesion as adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods and the authority of the traditional rulers is broken down.

Another contributing factor to the farmers-herders clashes is the fact that grazing resources including pasture and water are found in different places at different times of the year, which necessitates the need for constant mobility among cattle herders for opportunistic resource use. The review indicates that the causes of farmers and herders clashes in Nasarawa State range from destruction of crops by cattle, cattle rustling by farmers, scarcity of natural resources, grazing on crops to land availability.

**Conflict Sensitive Journalism and Conflict Management: The Nexus**

Conflict sensitive reporting, which is new paradigm in the journalism practice is an interventionist to peace and conflict management. This is in line with the view of Popoola (2015), that the main duty of peace-oriented and development media enabling media is to raise conflict to the plane of discussion with proposals for resolution, in order to bring about development, realizing the societal peace is a strong condition for development to the society.

Conflict-sensitive reporting is a blueprint for the media to foster peace in conflict situations. The situations is a peace journalism strategy designed to ensure adherence to ethical and professional journalism. Similarly, Adisa (2012), argued that conflict sensitive journalism is a kind of journalism that focuses on restoration of peace rather than promoting violence. The implication is that conflict sensitive reporting is effective in managing the farmers-herders clashes with a view to restore peace in the affected communities.

It is important to note that conflict sensitive journalism gives recognition to people who condemn violence. Popoola (2014), explains that conflict sensitive journalism now has taken center stage in conflict reporting. Thus, media can embrace conflict sensitive reporting by encouraging the coverage of only aspects of conflicts that foster peace and discarding issues in a conflict that may promote violence and further escalating the conflict.

The role of media, in conflict-ravaged communities, is to provide a platform for peace and conflict management without which development is a mirage to such community. Bamidele (2013), notes that the role of the media, during conflicts or conflicting situations, is to provide independent and true worthy information which can contribute to the process of reconstruction and reconciliation. To this end, Adelabu (2015), enumerates five points for media to consider in peace and conflict management:

1. The need to always treat the victim(s) of the conflicts with dignity and respect.

2. Media should respect the views of their sources.

3. Media practitioners should always identify themselves during reporting conflict.

4. Media should respect all the parties involved in the conflict.

5. Media should not take position or side in any conflict while reporting it.

From the foregone, it is obvious that a conflict sensitive reporter must detach himself/herself from the subject matter reported on. The reporter should only provide different perspectives for the public to make meaning.

**Challenges Facing Conflict Sensitive Reporting**

Conflicts pose different challenges for journalism practice. It is a hostile environment for journalists as they are faced with risks and dangers including death, injury, harassment and imprisonment. Metin (2006), argues that some of the obstacles to the practice of conflict sensitive journalism include: language use in the media, news framing, using elite sources, and ownership structure of media organizations.

1. **Language use in the media:** Language is important in the communication process. If you want someone to understand, you have to speak in the person’s language. Adisa (2012) in Gever & Essien (2017), argued that the media language could contribute to conflicts. Furthermore, a conflict sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict sensitive journalist takes no sides as he/she is engaged in the search for solutions.
2. **Using elite sources:** The use of elite sources is a major limitation in the practice of conflict sensitive journalism as journalists often struggle to give more time to the voices of the voiceless as additional sources of valuable information in the society.
3. **Lack of readership/viewership of peace stories:** This is a challenge in conflict sensitive because the audience members (readers/viewers) are not interested in peace stories compared to those on violence and conflict.
4. **Resource constraints:** Most media houses are constrained by financial resources to send reporters to conflict areas. As part of efforts to ensure the safety of a journalist reporting conflicts, media organizations with the financial muscle like use helicopter and drones however, media organizations with meager resources cannot do same.
5. **Safety of journalists is not guaranteed:** The safety of conflict sensitive journalists is not always guaranteed especially during crisis as the parties involved sometimes vent their anger on them. This challenge has made practising journalists to shy away from peace journalism.
6. **Hostile Sources:** In the face of conflict or violence, most people expected to provide credible information on the causes and damages caused by the crisis are not willing to speak to the press for security reasons and out of the fear of reprisal attack.

Drawing from the above, the challenges of conflict sensitive reporting range from lack of readership/viewership for peace stories, dependence on elite sources, resource constraints, safety of peace journalists is not guaranteed to hostile sources as they affect the practice of Peace Journalism for peaceful co-existence.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study concludes that conflict sensitive reporting is crucial in managing the farmers-herders clashes which has become a major security challenge in Nasarawa State by a way of creating a platform for the farmers and herders to express their grievances despite the challenges of language use in the media, elite sources and lack of interest in peace stories. . Based on this, the study recommends that farmers -herders should be educated or sensitized on the dangers of engaging in violent clashes pointing out the negative part of violent clashes using the most appropriate and decent language and conflict sensitive reporters should always engage the farmers and herders when sourcing for information on the clashes.

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