Symbiosis Between Pastoralists and Agriculturalists Corralling Contract and Interethnic Relationship of Fulani and Nupe in Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

“Corralling contract” is the indigenous fertilization system commonly practiced in the African Sahel and its southern periphery. In this article, the practice of the corralling contract between Fulani pastoralists and Nupe agriculturalists in the Bida region of Niger State of central Nigeria is examined. The attempt is to find out how the farmers and herders arrange the corralling contract, how they utilize this instrument and how it influences their social relationship. Findings suggest that pastoral Fulani groups have different strategies to maintain socioeconomic relations with specific villages through the adoption of corralling contract in order to ensure resources entitlement. While some groups can well manipulate the relationships with various villages through the adoption of the corralling contract, some groups prefer a more stable situation and just got the minimum advantages. Higher social status, larger herd size and longer history of interaction which allowed trust to be built are the factors contributing to the popularity and bargaining power of a pastoral group.

KEYWORDS
Corralling Contract, Fulani, Herder-Farmer Relationship, Nigeria, Nupe, Resources Entitlement, Traditional Institution

INTRODUCTION

Coexistence of farmers and herders in the semi-arid Africa has been described as symbiotic. Although confrontation occasionally occurred, in most cases they could be regulated in such a way that the peaceful cohabitation of the groups as a whole was not endangered. In West Africa however, conflicts over the use of scarce natural resources between farmers and herders are said to be on the increase in recent years. The occurrence of such conflicts is generally attributed to two factors: the changing patterns of resource use that lead to increasing competition for resources; and the breakdown of traditional mechanisms governing resource management and conflict resolution. The generalization of increasing conflict gives an impression that the traditional mutual dependent and mutual beneficial forms of farmer-herder interaction that well-functioned in the past does not work anymore now. This

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perspective justifies direct interventions and implies new structures for new institutions for the cooperative management of natural resource use and conflict management.

Observations have been made in respect to the Nupe farmers and Fulani herdsmen in the Niger State of Nigeria. Case materials suggest, at least with the specific case of the Nupe farmers and the Fulani pastoralists in the field site, a perspective that contrary to the increasing-conflict view. Even though limited natural resources are shared and their production system is gradually converging, tension seems to be absent and their relationship shows no sign of deterioration. The farmer-herder interactions are frequent and mostly cordial. The traditional institutions governing natural resource use and conflict resolution are being preserved and are still functioning fine.

This paper focuses on the corralling contract which is one of the most important traditional institutions between farmers and herdsmen that have been practiced down through the ages. Corralling contract refers to the contractual agreement between farmers and herdsmen to maintain livestock on croplands for a specified time period. Following the great reduction since mid-1980s and finally the withdrawal in 1997 of fertilizer subsidies by the Nigerian government, the corralling contract has become more important for resource-poor farmers who cannot afford fertilizer. Meanwhile, the decreasing availability of grazing resource due to the extension of cultivated area outpacing population growth also make herdsmen rely more on the corralling contract as the tool to ensure access to resources. The corralling contract has gained more attention in recent years. Although it is not a new phenomenon, some scholars described it as a newly emerging traditional institution. Most researches focused on the ecological impacts of manure on soil fertility; very few examined the socio-economic implications of the corralling contract. While the contract is an institution that requires the agreements of both sides, most researches took only the farmers’ perspective. Nevertheless, field observations revealed that farmers are rather passive in the adoption of corralling contract. The preconditions for them to adopt the practice are the presence of herdsmen in nearby area and the location of village that is in an environment suitable for cattle stay when herdsmen come for the season. Therefore, the perspectives of herdsmen are indispensable for the thorough understanding of the corralling contract. However, there is no research the author could find so far that explains how the farmers and herdsmen reach to the corralling contract and how the details are being arranged. This paper intends to provide a detail account of this important institution.

Research has been done on both sides to investigate the implementation of this traditional institution. The main questions here are: how do the two groups arrange the corralling contract; how do they utilize this instrument and how does it influence their socioeconomic relationship? Findings suggest that Fulani groups adopt different strategies to maintain social relations with specific villages in order to ensure resources entitlement. Their “popularity stakes” and the amounts of payment they can get through the contract vary greatly from each other. The competition for Nupe farmers to host a Fulani group is keen and costly therefore villagers have to combine collective efforts. Contrary to traditional depiction, richer and influential farmers do not necessarily benefit more from corralling contracts and there is no significant sign that Fulani herdsmen claim more payment in cash or in kind than in former years.

CORRALLING CONTRACT

Ecological Benefits Brought by Corralling Contract

Corralling contract, or manure contract, is an indigenous fertilization system commonly practiced in the semi-arid area of West Africa (Asanuma, 2004; Neef, 2001). It is also known as “parcage system” in the French literatures and locally as “hogggo system”. Hogggo in Fulani language means the cattle enclosure where cattle herds are kept overnight. When individual or group of farmer and herder enter into the contractual agreement, the herder has to corral his cattle overnight on the farmer’s field for a specific period of time at the farmer’s request. In return the farmer pays the herder in cash or in kind and allows livestock to graze on the crop residues on his fields.
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