Chapter 1

Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria: Approaches to Media Coverage of Conflict and Climate Change Issues

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the media coverage of violent conflicts and climate change issues in Nigeria from the perspective of human rights journalism. Nigeria has had a chequered history of violent conflicts, especially since it achieved self-rule from Britain in 1960. These conflicts have been wide-ranging and cross-cutting (political, ethnic, religious, communal, among others). The Nigerian media have equally had a long history of the coverage of these violent eruptions across the country. However, the mainstream media’s approach to the coverage of these issues have tended to be on the physical coverage of the conflicts to, almost, neglect of some of the underlying causative factors, such as climate change. The phenomenon of climate change globally is significant, especially in developing countries, such as Nigeria. In recent times, the threats that are posed by climate change have been enormous. Some communities across the country have been sacked by its devastations, especially from the norther corridors of the country. This has therefore necessitated the forced migration of some of these communities, especially the Fulani herdsman and their cattle to other...
Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the media coverage of the spate of violent conflicts against the backdrop of the Fulani herdsmen/farmers in Nigeria. Although violent conflicts are still rife and wide-ranging, natural resources, such as land, is a major cause of conflict. The chapter asserts that, while much attention is being given to the media coverage of conflicts caused by the struggle for land, the challenges that climate change pose are not being given equal press coverage. The United Nations sponsored climate change conference in Paris in 2015, which brought together world leaders and governments of about 190 nations was not only meant to draw attention to this looming catastrophe but to get a consensus on how to reduce greenhouse emission. This chapter avows that there is a correlation between climate change, land and the phenomenon of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Plateau State and Nigeria. For about two decades now, the Nigerian state has witnessed the scourges of desertification and afforestation, especially across the Sahel region, which is eating deep into Nigeria's northern corridors (Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa, Borno, Yobe, Gombe and Bauchi states, among others), such that rivers and grazing fields are drying up, farmlands are no longer as fertile as they once were, heatwaves have continued to threaten both humans and cattle, hunger and disease are on the increase, and the rising sea and water levels are causing flooding, among other impacts (Abugu & Onuba, 2015).

This phenomenon has resulted in forced migration of the Fulani, especially and their cattle in search of greener pasture across the Middle Belt and southern region of the country. The Nigerian mainstream media approach to the coverage of conflicts and climate change issues is not adequate; they often don’t focus on preventing those phenomena before they occur. In keeping with the social responsibility of the media, which have the responsibility to inform as well as to educate the members of the parts of the country for greener pasture. This situation always resulted in conflict, which is often violent. This chapter argues that, although the federal government of Nigeria through its Ministry of Environment have come out with programs and policies/initiatives aimed at combating the menace of this phenomenon, and the media, apart from the fact that they have not fully keyed into these programs to step them down for the audience, there is the urgent need for them to review their approaches toward the coverage of these conflicts. This chapter advocates a human-rights-journalism-based approach to the coverage of these conflicts because of its diagnostic approach, which gives a critical reflection of the experiences of the victims of human rights violations in all its ramifications.
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