

Participant Observation of a Farmers-Herders community in Anguwar Jaba Keffi Nigeria

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Abstract- The case study examined how farmers and herders coexist peacefully in a rural community. Participant observation method was used to study Anguwar Jaba Community. The community is largely a farming community with pockets of herders living in surrounding hamlets. Several theories explain how individuals coexist within an environment. Amongst these theories are the Behavior setting theory and Sense of community theory. The study used a phronetic iterative approach and abductive reasoning in its analysis with emphasis on field notes by the researcher. The narratives were presented in the following categories: study site, observers' position, establishing rapport, field data collection, the villagers and their religion, occupation of the people, village buildings, community organizing, inter marriages, market days, how the farmers and herders benefit each other, and a typical day in the village. It was found that possible reasons for peaceful coexistence is that both farmers and herders understand their roles and responsibilities, they also understand each other's limits on land use in the community. The findings suggest that allowing the herders to own lands at the outskirts of the village is a major incentive to peaceful coexistence. There is clear leadership structure in the village, both farmers and herders work together to ensure security in the village. Grievances are reported and addressed timely.

Index Terms- Farmers, Herders, Participant Observation, Peacebuilding

I. INTRODUCTION

Fulani communities constitute nomadic pastoralist that live in northern Nigeria and other west African countries. Herding of cattle has been the occupation identified with Fulani pastoralists for centuries but in recent history they have been forced to sedentary living combining animal rearing, subsistence farming and occasionally grazing their cattle throughout the Nigeria's middle belt mostly during dry seasons (Arcgis.com, 2021). Nomadic pastoralist and farmers in Nigeria have for long been experiencing conflicts but the scale of the conflicts have increased due to increased population, urbanization, climate change and competing claims for natural resources such as water and land. In the past problems between farmers and herders were resolved within the communities by the community leaders, but recently the problems have escalated to widespread violent conflicts (Gürsoy, 2020). The Fulani have lived with Hausas amicably for a very long time (Bbc.com, 2021).

II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories explain how individuals coexist within an environment. Amongst these theories are the Behavior setting theory and Sense of community theory. The Behavior setting theory emphasizes that individuals are influenced by the environment they live, in varieties of ways (Jimenez, Hoffman & Grant, 2021) and according to, McMillan & Chavis (1986), the Sense of community is "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through commitment to be together"

Research Questions

1. How is a typical day is spent in a farmer-herder community?
2. What strategies should be adapted to reduce the conflicts between farmers and herders?

Methodology

Participant observation is a qualitative research method where the researcher consciously joins or participates in the activities or location of the group that is the subject of the research. Participant observation is a form of "learning by doing" (Walle, 2015). Participant observation takes place in the natural setting of the group observed. The observation can be either overt (with the knowledge of the group being observed) or covert (without the knowledge of the group being studied) (Karl, 2016). According to, Walle (2015) the methodological approach by Joseph Howell (1972) indicated that participant observation can be broken down into five interrelated components which are "(1) establishing rapport, (2) going to the field, (3) recording data, (4) analyzing data, (5) integrating/consolidating".

Study site

The participant observation was conducted in Anguwar Jaba, Keffi Local Government Area in Nassarawa State of Nigeria. The Anguwar Jaba community is located about 79 kilometers away from Lafia, the State capital of Nassarawa State, Nigeria and about 6.1 Km from Keffi town, which was founded around

1800 by a Fulani warrior leader Abdu Zanga (Britannica, 2009). The Geographic coordinates of Anguwar Jaba is located on Latitude (width) 8°53'08.0"N (8.8855600°) and Longitude (length) 7°54'45.0"E (7.9125000°) (Nigeria.Places-in-the-world.com, 2021). The population of the area is estimated to be about 2000 residents. The settlement has a central village comprising more than half of the population while several hamlets dispersedly located around the main village. Farmers constitute more than three quarters of the population and almost all of them are Muslims. There are very few Christians located along the way to the Anguwar Jaba village.

Observer's position

As an individual interested in the relationship between herders and farmers, the researcher chose to visit a community Anguwar Jaba where farmers and herders are living peacefully. The observer visited the location and stayed throughout two days to interact with the people casually.

The observer visited the area in the past and was keen to understand how they live together but has never consciously conducted a study. This period, the researcher went as a

participant observer without informing the people, he is conducting a research.

Establishing rapport

The researcher gathered information about the community from a key informant (a friend) who is an indigene of the community. The entry to the community was easy and the people did not perceive the researcher as total stranger. The key informant himself did not know the intention of the researcher was to conduct a participant observation research. On arrival in the evening the researcher was introduced by the key informant to his colleagues in the village as a friend visiting him from Abuja city, a rapport was instantly built as discussions on life in Abuja ensued. The researcher was well received by the villagers and there was no perceived change in behaviors as no one was aware of the research.

Field observation

As Muslims people can go to the toilet each time they are preparing for daily prayers, the researcher used this opportunity to record his thoughts using his phone. Also, in the late evening the researcher had opportunity to record in detail his thoughts on his phone for whole day's engagement in the community. The recording was transcribed after returning to the researcher's residence in Abuja.

III. FINDINGS

The key findings of the participant observation are presented as follows.

Villagers and their religion

The people in Anguwar Jaba are mostly Hausa farmers and Fulani herders. There are also very few tribes in the village, this includes Tiv, Mada, and Apawa. The village have largely a youthful population, with youths and children constituting the majority. It was observed that there is almost a balance between the number of women and men in Anguwar Jaba and neighboring hamlets. Although on the streets, majority of the people seen are male, but each house might have an average of three women staying mostly indoors. The dominant religion in the village is Islam, the population is mostly Muslim (all of them Sunni). There are few Christians in the village located in the houses as you approach the village and few others (Christians) are within the village as workers in a government owned clinic, government primary school and very small medicine shops. There are seven mosques within the radius of two kilometers from the center of the village. There are also three churches at the outskirts of the village.

Occupation of the people

The occupation of the villagers is mostly subsistence farming. Farmers grow mainly food crops such as maize, Guinea corn, rice,

cassava, and millet. Other crops grown are yams, benniseeds, and beans. The villagers have mangoes and cashew trees scattered around the hamlets, some of these trees are owned by residents while others are wild trees. Most of the farmers have relatively small farm lands, measuring few plots to few hectares. Farmers in the villages mostly use hoes for farming, but in some instances, small hand ploughs are used.

Another observation is that the daily lives of the people vary according to gender, age, and tribal inclination. The Fulani women, from the herders, often sell yogurt mostly during rainy season when the cattle are at home and the grasses are green, but during dry season there are no cattle the young herders take the cattle for pasturing to the southern part of Nigeria. The women resort to selling mangoes, water melon, tomatoes, cucumber, sweet melon and sometimes buying yams from the farmers to resell in the city when there is no yogurt to sell. The young Hausa men, from farmers, often engage in farming during rainy season and go to cities to find construction work during dry season. Most of the youths from the farming community have multiple skills, in addition to farming, this includes masonry, bricklaying, and carpentry.

Village Buildings

The houses in Anguwar Jaba are quite scanty. There are no restaurants, no guest houses, no cinemas, or modern entertainment arena (except a small TV stand where viewers can pay a token to watch football. The primary school has an open field football pitch

with sticks as goal post). The houses within the village are a mix of mud and cement blocks constructions, with galvanized roofing. Some of the houses do not have ceilings, this makes it hot in the afternoon. The villagers prefer staying outside their houses in the afternoons. The galvanized roofing is mostly owned by farmers, while the grass thatched houses are owned by herders. The houses in the hamlets around the villages are mostly red mud huts, that are conically shaped with thatched roofing. In some instances, the entire houses in a hamlet are made of sticks and the huts are close to each other. The central mosque is large and elegantly built with blocks in the middle of the village by the main road. The chief's palace is opposite the mosque but not any different from other buildings in terms of design and building materials. It was observed there are people sitting always sitting around the chief's palace and the central mosque.

Community organizing

During the observation, it is obvious that the farmers are the ones living in the heart of the village while the herders are living in the outskirts of the village. The community is led by a leader called "Zaki", a metaphorical title meaning a lion. The "Zari" reports directly to the traditional ruler of Keffi kingdom called "Sarkin Keffi". Within the village there is a clear leadership structure, most of the community leaders are farmers and a few herdsman are also in the village leadership structure. The farmers occupy all the strategic positions in the cabinet of "Zaki" while the herders are appointed as leaders of the area, they domicile. In addition, the herders are also allowed to organize themselves in the best way they see fit, giving smaller responsibilities to their kinsmen within their area (hamlet). Overall, each leader of herdsman, called "Ardo", is responsible for maintaining peaceful coexistence within his area called "Anguwa". Regular meetings are held on Fridays after the Muslim "Jumaat" prayers.

Inter- marriages

Both farmers and herders take up marriage responsibility early, it is observed that most of the young men marry and have children in their early twenties. While women marry and start having children as teenagers. Marriage is like a competition amongst the youth, it is common to see young men marrying more than one wife to a maximum of four. Women also compete for children, the more the merrier. Issues of infertility is rare in the village. Divorce rates are low and marrying divorcees is highly encouraged and appreciated by the community. In fact, the bride prices for divorcees are almost same with spinsters. There are few inter marriages between farmers and herders. Naming ceremonies are simple and well attended usually early in the morning. Kola nuts and sweets are offered to guests at marriages and naming ceremonies. A ram is slaughtered for every naming ceremony. Some individuals slaughter a cow during weddings.

Market days

The village does not have a market, its residents go to the Keffi Market every four days to sell their farm produce. Fulani herders sell their yogurt at the Keffi market or by roadside along the market, almost on daily basis. If the market days fall on Saturday,

youths from herder's community come out to enjoy a night out with friends in the village. On market days young Fulani herders from neighboring hamlets often come inside the Anguwar Jaba village to stylishly cut their hair before proceeding to the Keffi town in groups. Dressing on Fridays or market days is often very colorful for the Fulani herders, they dress in reflective primary colors, never forgetting their sticks and hair combs. Some even carry well adorned cutlasses as part of the fashion.

How the farmers and herders benefit each other

The herders are allowed to own lands at the outskirts of the villages where they keep their animals. The animal dung is provided by the herders to the farmers during rainy season thereby reducing the need for buying expensive modern fertilizer. Sometimes when farmers need manure on their farmlands, they trade by bater, asking the Fulani herders to stay on their farm lands with their animals for a week or two then the farmers give them salt, potash, and lick concentrates for animals. Other times the farmers keep some of their offal and crop stalks after harvest and farmers use it to feed the animals. Sometimes the farmers pay for animals to plough their farmlands and in some instances, they buy the animals and keep with the herders.

There are no police posts. The security of the village is in the hands of the vigilante group called "yan banga" that is managed by "Zaki" - the village head. Both farmers and herders have their youths volunteering in vigilante groups. The vigilante group for farmers operate separately from the one of herders. Each group is responsible for security in their area. Women from both farmers and herders participate in festivities together especially naming ceremonies, marriages, funerals and so on. Whenever there is dispute, it is amicably resolved amongst the community leaders with adequate compensations where necessary. Sometimes offal from processing maize and millet is sold to herders. There are several other alternatives to fodder for the herders' animals. The farmers and herders understand each other's capacities and comparative advantage therefore the competition for natural resources is minimal. It is not all Fulani herders that want to own land, some perceive land as "death possession" and their animals as "living possession", their logic is that they cannot use living to buy death.

A typical day in the village

Daily life starts as early as 5:00am in the morning, the men from both farming and herding community congregate to the mosques for prayers. After prayers, some people stay a little bit in the mosques while most of them return home. Women begin to come out of their homes around 6:00am to sweep their surroundings. In the morning, some young women prepare palp and fry "akara" - a local beancake and "masa" a traditional maize snack. Young men and women go and greet their parents. Children, women, and men are seen gathering around to buy snacks for the family early morning. Youths prefer taking tea, bread and sometimes eggs at the tea joints, while listening to early morning news on Radio. Some houses, especially large families, make their own breakfast at home but it is often palp and bean cakes. Others warm left-over

food from the previous day for the children. The leftover food is often spiced a little more to make it tastier and more appealing, so children can relish it. The entire community seem to gather outside between 6:30am to 7:30am, thereafter everyone disperses to their farms only to return in trickles around afternoon. Some stay longer in their farms, especially those whose farms are far into the bushes. A few farmers return in the afternoon around 1:00pm to eat before going back to the farms after “Asr” congregation prayers. Late evening around 6:30pm farmers are seen returning from their farms, some of them with hoes proudly hung on their shoulders. Some of the farmers use bicycles and old motorcycles to go to farms. The villagers pray in congregations at about 6:48pm and this was followed by another prayer around 7:59pm. There after the town becomes alive with several activities by children, youths, men and women, families come together under the moonlight. The entire study was conducted in the village of Anguwar Jaba, Keffi. Consequently, the findings will only give insights into strategies adapted by communities to ensure peaceful co-existence between farmers and herders. The researcher spent only two days in the study location hence could not get deeper insights into the community psychology. The researcher’s interpretation may be subjective and may not be replicated. The researcher did not cover the entire aspects of the culture of the village. The research was only to observe what happens in a typical day in the life of the village where farmers and herders live peacefully together.

V. CONCLUSION

Contrary to the perception of the researcher, farmers and herders live peacefully together. The village community organizing is sophisticated, and leadership is well organized. It was found that the herders were allowed to own lands at the outskirts of the village there by given their animal enough space. There is clear leadership structure in the village and both farmers and herders work together to ensure security and peaceful coexistence in the village. Grievances are reported and addressed timely starting at the lowest level of leadership before being escalated to the village head. The community of farmers and herders protect themselves through vigilante community policing without involving formal police system. The farmers and herders understand each other’s capacities and comparative advantage therefore the competition for natural resources is minimal. There are several alternatives to fodder for the herders’ animals, so farmers crops are never vandalized by herders.

The farmer-herder relationship in the community observed is cordial and peaceful. The study aims to contribute to understanding how farmers and herders can co-exist peacefully. It was observed that the farmer-herder relationship can be mutually beneficial if both are able to be educated to how they can optimally use land resources and leverage on their comparative advantage.

Late evening hours are often busy, both farmers and herders come together to mingle, share pleasantries, children share stories and play, young men are seen around spots where tea and “suya” – meat is prepared. As the nights get darker children, young girls and few women that come out return home. The men often remain behind late at night until past 12:00pm. The people are told by the vigilante to return to their homes. The village gets dark at night, the electricity supplied only for a few hours daily. A few men who are called vigilante parade the village after midnight until dawn. The vigilante activity is voluntary, and it is done in shifts and is supervised by the “Zaki”

IV. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

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