



Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts in Nigeria: Implications for Peace and National Security

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Abstract

Conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have become a common feature of economic livelihood in Nigeria. In recent times, the country has witnessed series of violent clashes arising from the activities of the farmers and nomadic herdsmen, who move about on a daily basis with their cattle in search of water and green pastures. These conflicts, without doubt have become the most potent threat to Nigeria's peace and national security. What makes the conflict very disturbing are, the frequency, the level of destruction and sheer brutality. The conflicts have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today pose a threat to national survival. Thousands of people have been killed, communities have been destroyed and so many farmers and herdsmen have lost their lives and property in an extended orgy of killings and destruction that is not only continuously destroying livelihoods but also affecting national cohesion. Thus, this paper examines the causes of the incessant clashes between the farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria, and as well highlights its implications for peace and national security. Hence, the paper focuses on causes, effects and implications of farmers-herdsmen conflicts on Nigeria's peace and national security and strategies to curb such conflicts. The paper went further to

proffer some recommendations that if Nigerian government and stakeholders take will in no small measure address the menace.

Key words: *Farmers, Herdsmen, Conflict, Peace, National security.*

Introduction

Nigeria is currently going through a very challenging phase in its history. Economically, challenges like acute unemployment, and the exchange rate crisis and the attendant runaway inflation confront the country; official corruption adversely affects the workings of government. However, insecurity appears to have been the most formidable challenge. The most widely known security threat to Nigeria's corporate existence was the Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgents, who once controlled vast swathes of territory in their quest to establish a caliphate, have caused the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of millions of others. Less known to the international community until now is the menace of farmers and herdsmen conflicts. These conflicts have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today poses a threat to national survival. Thousands of people have been killed, communities have been destroyed and so many farmers and herdsmen have lost their lives and

property in an orgy of killings and destruction that is not only destroying livelihoods but also affecting national cohesion. Each day, we witness more reprisal killings that are simply making the possibilities of peaceful resolution more difficult. Rural banditry is becoming the norm in the Nigerian hinterland and has been transformed into a vicious criminal activity. The result is that the scale of loss of both human life and herds has been escalating and the victims are on all sides—subsistence farmers, commercial farmers and herdsmen.

One of the outcomes of this process has been blockage of transhumance routes and loss of grazing land to agricultural expansion and the increased southward movement of herdsmen has led to increased conflicts with local communities. This is particularly the case in the Middle Belt—notably in Plateau, Kaduna, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, Taraba and Adamawa States, and more recently, some states in the south east and west of the country.

Conceptual clarification of terms:

Farmers:

Farmers are those who live permanently in settlements, gaining their livelihoods mainly from crop production, sometimes with domestic animals providing supplementary income and practice crop farming (Hussein, 1998).

Herdsmen:

Herdsmen are owners or keepers of herds of animals like cattle. They usually move their herds from one place to another in search of pasture and fresh water. In Nigeria, it is predominantly the occupation of the Fulani ethnic group. In other words, they own and rear cattle for commercial purposes. According to Idowu (2017), the Fulani (also called Peul or Fulbe) are people of obscure origin that expanded eastward from Futa Toro in Lower Senegal in the 14th century. They are concentrated principally in Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal and Niger. Their indigenous language is known as Fula and it is classified within the Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo language family. They constitute the fourth-largest ethnic group in Nigeria with an estimated population of over seven million (Burton, 2016). However, Abass (2012) notes that they are the mainstay of the meat and milk industry, accounting for about 90% of cattle ownership in Nigeria. They are also the major suppliers of skins, bones and horns (Adeoye, 2017).

Conflict:

According to Nicholson (1992), conflict is an existing state of disagreement or hostility between two or more people. By this, it means two or more parties do not have an accord and are as such on two different parallels on the same issue. Conflict therefore, is seen as the product of the existence of incompatible goals, interest and pursuits in which the actors involved may employ the use of violence or not. It usually occurs when the interest of a group is articulated, aggregated and put forward in opposition to the goal or targets of another group.

Peace:

Peace varies from one culture to the other and is affected by the values, visions, perceptions and cultural realities of the people (Best, 2010). According to Jacob (2004), peace is the absence of war or a state of absolute freedom from violent

disturbances such as riots and all other forms. Peace therefore, is a period of quietness, devoid of war, disturbances and violence.

National Security:

National security cannot be narrowed down to defense and military might alone. It is wider than that. Iredia (2011) defines national security as the ability of a state to overcome any form of its challenges no matter what the challenge is. He averred that national security is wider than military might, defense or law enforcement and pointed out rather basic dimensions like job, water and food security. Similarly, Abubakar (2005) argues that recent international debates have raised the need to see security in the broader sense as “the struggle to secure the most basic necessities of life such as food, fuel, medicine, and shelter.” This broader view of security from the perspective of human physiological needs is important to physical and national security and overall peace and development, as social unrest arising from the absence of such basic-human security can indeed lead to security problems and conflicts.

Brief history of farmers-herdsmen conflict:

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen should not be regarded as a recent phenomenon or something peculiar to any state, country or sub region. According to Blench (2003), the conflict between farmers and herdsmen dates back to the earliest written records, and this is mythically symbolized in many and different cultures.

Heathcote (1983) in his summary argues that, scholars like Ibn Khaldun and Toynbee (1958) see the historic conflict between ‘the desert and the sown’ as one originating from the economic contrast between the two modes of livelihoods. The two historians see the conflict mainly as phenomena which are common to North Africa and South West Asia. According to Heathcote, both scholars attribute the conflict to the contrasts in the obvious wealth and life style, between the oases and river lands, and the desert hinterlands, which were so marked, and where cycles of feast alternated with famines from droughts or plaques, whether of insects’ pests or plant diseases (Heathcote, 1983).

In a note shell, the conflict between farmers and herdsmen cannot be reduced nor limited to any geographical region or even to any particular historical phase. It is nevertheless important to note that the conflict has always been endemic in some regions and communities where the environmental, economic and social

conditions have combined to predispose the two groups to a competitive encounter as the case in Nigeria.

Causes of incessant clashes between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria:

The violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria do not constitute an alien phenomenon. Empirically, evidences have revealed various reasons or causes of incessant clashes between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. According to Nneka et al (2018), some of the factors that influence the conflict include; damaging or grazing on crops, changing climatic conditions, long-standing disagreements, scarcity of fresh water, and lack of access to grazing fields, increasing urbanization among others. In the same vein, Njoku (2018) stresses that the recent ugly phenomenon of incessant clashes between farmers and herdsmen is as a result of multi-dimensional issues or causes. According to him, the causes include the following:

Impact of climate change: Climate change has been identified as one of the major causes of intractable violence clashes involving farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. Blench (2004) observes that the ecological dynamics engendered by climate change tend to drag various land users into conflictive relations in the context of resource scarcity and want. According to Olaniyan *et al* (2015), the encroaching desert to the traditional abode of the pastoralists in the Sahel region has been identified as a factor for the continued clash as herders migrate southward where the grass is much available and often intrude into spaces long claimed or cultivated by settled farmers. In the same vein, Okoli et al.,(2014) and Abbass, (2012), relate the causes of conflict to the global climate change and the contending desertification and aridity that has reduced arable and grazing lands, forcing pastoralist to move southwards in search of pasture for their livestock. Climate change has also meant that the availability of arable land to graze on is waning. The desire by each group to protect its interest and occupation amidst scarcity of land often result in conflict between the farmers and herdsmen.

Scarcity of fresh water: It is obvious that the world's water demand grows every year in order to meet up with increasing population. Exacerbated by climate change, fresh water scarcity is creating security concerns in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the semi-arid region (Audu, 2013). He further argues that availability of water which is a major resource needed for agriculture is decreasing as a result of changes in global climatic conditions. Farmers and

herdsmen who are the main agricultural practitioners in Nigeria depend on water resources to sustain their vocations, hence access to water become more competitive and has led to violent conflicts on a regular basis between farmers and herdsmen. Jacobs (1980), notes that fresh water scarcity and insufficient rainfall are causes of social and economic ruins which have left the herdsmen at the mercy of farmers' communities. Ofem and Inyang (2014) observe that contamination of stream by cattle have led to clashes.

Damaging or grazing on crops: The vociferous complaints by farmers that cattle belonging to herdsmen destroy their farm crops while grazing appears to be one of the major causes of incessant clashes between herdsmen and their host communities in Nigeria. The damaging or intentional grazing on crops has been pointed out as the most predominant cause of conflict between farmers and herdsmen (Adebayo & Olaniyi, 2008). In a recent study, Adeoye (2017) found deliberate grazing of cattle on crops, farmers' encroachment on grazing reserves, water holes and cattle paths and indiscriminate bush burning by herders as notable causes of conflict between the groups. Similarly, farmers' encroachment on cattle routes have led to clashes between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria (Nformi et al., 2014).

Population explosion: Another major cause of the violence is population explosion of both humans and livestock which is based on the hypothesis of Thomas Malthus in his 1798 work on eco-scarcity and population pressure entitled 'an essay on the principle of population' in which he proposed that population and resources are initially in equilibrium, but while populations grow exponentially, food production increases only linearly. According to him, population will grow (exponentially) faster than food production which would grow at arithmetic progression and population growth will reduce the availability of natural resources because population grow faster than food supply, and poor people will impoverish the soil and natural resources by overuse and this will induce competition and conflict over means of existence (Malthus,1789). . As growing pressure on natural resources caused by human population increase, growth in the population of herd (Bruesers, Nederlof and van Rheenen. 1998), due to improved conditions of the cattle often compel the pastoralist to seek for more pastures beyond their limited range (Bello, 2013). Population increase has made the competition for space and land to become fiercer (Olabode & Ajibade,2010; Adisa, 2012).

Influx of foreign herdsmen into Nigeria: The influx of foreign herdsmen and their cattle into Nigeria, particularly in recent years as a result of the impact of climate change as well as growing insecurity in the Sahel region, has aggravated the problem of clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the country. There has been “red alert” on hotter earth as carbon dioxide emissions result in recorded higher global warming (Muanya, 2017). As already stated, global warming has given rise to intense drought, desertification and deforestation in the Sahel region. This has given rise to the influx of foreign herdsmen from different countries such as Chad, Niger, Mali, Senegal and Ethiopia into Nigeria and further southwards into the Middle Belt region and southern part of Nigeria for grazing their cattle. This has resulted in stiff competition for available land spaces as well as lush vegetation between herdsmen and host communities, thus leading to bloody clashes in many cases.

The influx of many foreign herdsmen into the country has been attributed to the existence of many porous borders within Nigeria’s territory (Njoku, 2018).

Possession and use of sophisticated weapons by herdsmen: The possession and use of sophisticated weapons by some herdsmen is of recent development. Traditionally, the Fulani herdsmen were noted for carrying their swords and sticks as means for controlling and protection of their cattle and themselves. Odivwri (2017) observes that herdsmen of today are sometimes more armed than soldiers on “Operation Lafiya Dole”. The use of these weapons by herdsmen to attack and kill people in host communities is believed to be one of the factors that cause conflict between the two groups.

Effects and implications of farmers-herdsmen conflicts:

The incessant farmers and herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria have grave effects and implications for the country. The implications include the following:

Loss of many lives and properties: The incessant clashes between the farmers and herdsmen in the country have provoked bloody crisis nation-wide. The conflicts have resulted in the death of thousands of rural dwellers over the past two decades (Ogundipe and Oluwole, 2016). According to Olayoku(2014), the major implication of the perennial conflicts, attacks and counter-attacks between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria is massive death toll of many innocent lives and actors involved in the conflicts. This has brought about monumental loss of lives and destruction of valuable properties (Tenuche and Ifatimehin, 2009). In a related development, Mercy Corps (2015), points out

that the ongoing conflict between farmers and herdsmen is costing Nigeria at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually.

Loss of cattle and farm crops: Another severe consequence of this conflict is loss of cattle and crops. Herdsmen lost their herds to angry farmers and bandits who take advantage of the conflict to steal cattle from the pastoralists. On the side of farmers it is not uncommon to read about the destruction of crops on the farms and harvested products by the angry mobs of pastoralists. Moritz, (2010), opines that the herdsmen and farmers clashes disrupt and threaten the sustainability of pastoral farming and crop production in West Africa. These according to him reinforce circles of extreme poverty and hunger, and destroy social status, food security and affect mostly the most marginalized groups that include women and children of a teeming population like Nigeria.

Distrust between farmers and herdsmen: Burton (2016) notes that majority of the members of the expanse Fulani ethnic group are solely pastoralists without connection to militant violence. Even these peaceful ones, however, are largely viewed with suspicion and anger by the sedentary communities on whose land they take their cattle, largely as a result of the actions of the violent group. This has created distrust and altered the mutual relationship that has existed between them and most of their host communities.

Threat to peace and national security: The conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria have been described as the “emerging threat to national security and unity”. The violent clashes had been viewed as “hydra-headed in nature” and which poses serious security challenge in the country (Onani, 2017). The phenomenon has impacted negatively on the nation’s security. According to Njoku (2018), the incessant clashes between the herdsmen and farmers across the country had tended to provoke inter-ethnic hostilities particularly between the Fulani and other ethnic groups, and so pose serious national security challenge, as the onslaught continued unabated.

Strategies to curb farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria:

The conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria have continued to escalate as evidenced by recent killings in some communities across the country. These clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram in the north east, a threat that is capable of snowballing into a serious threat that could set the country ablaze. Therefore, for Nigeria to get rid of this menace that constitute threat to national security, the Nigerian government and

stake holders need to go back to the drawing board to fashion out a more effective strategy to curb the menace. This can be achieved through the following:-

Strengthen Security for Farmers and Herdsmen: There is need to improve security for both herders and farming communities. Careful analysis of the conflicts indicates that allegations of cattle rustling are at the heart of some of the clashes. Hence the need for government and security agencies to sustain campaigns against cattle rustling and rural banditry; improve early-warning systems; maintain operational readiness of rural-based police and other security units; encourage communication and collaboration with local authorities; and tighten control of production, circulation and possession of illicit firearms and ammunition, especially automatic rifles, including strengthening cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries' security forces (Crisis Group, 2017).

Support Community-based Conflict Resolution: Local and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms have proved effective in both averting violence and helping communities recover from conflict. Forums that allow various constituencies – farmers, pastoralists, community vigilantes and state security agencies – to monitor, identify, discuss and manage potential threats can be particularly helpful. These also can be used to help farmers and pastoralists explore mutually beneficial ways to coexist. Wherever possible, state and local governments should support or establish such mechanisms, especially across the worst-affected areas. For their part, local politicians, ethnic, religious and community leaders, as well as representatives of pastoralist and farmer associations need to speak out against violence. The media should try to provide more balanced coverage that avoids inflaming tensions through stereotyping, unfair generalizations and sensational reporting (Crisis Group, 2017).

Establish Grazing Reserves and Encourage Ranching: There is urgent need to reform and improve grazing arrangements. This will entail developing grazing reserves in those states where governments have already earmarked lands for this purpose; formulating and implementing the ten-year National Ranch Development Plan proposed by a stakeholder's forum facilitated by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in April 2017; and encouraging livestock producers' buy-in through easier access to credit from financial institutions (Crisis Group, 2017).

Combat Desertification: Some estimates suggest that during the twenty-first century, two thirds of Nigeria's eleven far northern states could become desert or semi-desert regions. Besides provoking considerable economic and livelihood losses, this would force many more pastoralists to migrate southward, risking more conflicts with the growing farming communities. Hence there is need for governments at both federal and state levels to step up

implementation of programs under the Great Green Wall initiative for the Sahara and the Sahel, a trans-African project designed to restore drought-and-desert degraded environments and livelihoods including in Nigeria's far north; and developing strategies for mitigating climate change impact in the far northern states (Crisis Group, 2017).

Strengthen Regional Cooperation: Some dimensions of the herder-farmer conflict can only be fully addressed within a regional framework. Nigeria should therefore, work with Cameroon, Chad and Niger (the Lake Chad basin countries) to regulate movements across borders, particularly of cattle rustlers, armed herders and others that have been identified as aggravating internal tension and insecurity in Nigeria (Crisis Group, 2017).

Conclusion:

Evidences indicate that herdsman-farmers conflict is prevalent in the country. The escalating conflicts are among Nigeria's most pressing security challenges. This could potentially generate bloodshed on an even wider scale unless Nigeria's government makes ending this violence a national priority. State governments also need to formulate and implement steps to address the needs and grievances of all sides transparently and equitably. Strengthening law enforcement, supporting local conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, establishing and protecting grazing reserves would all make a significant and immediate difference. In the longer term, the greater challenge will be curbing the arms influx and, crucially, addressing the environmental trends that are forcing herders south. Failure would spell greater danger for a country already battling other severe security challenges

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are made for possible policy implementation:

- i. Effective regulation of grazing and farming activities in Nigeria through efficient land-use laws/ legislations and administration;
- ii. Creation of grazing reserves and dedicated grazing routes in order to solve the issue of herd's encroachment on farmlands and vice versa;
- iii. Mitigation of desertification and drought in the far North by the government, communities and individuals in order to forestall mass movement of pastoralists towards the north-central belt and the south of the country;
- iv. Sensitization of stakeholders – farmers and herdsman alike – on the need for mutual co-existence and peace; this would help to forestall needless provocations and opportunistic violence;

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