

## Herdsmen's/Farmers' Conflicts and Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*There have been age-long rifts between farmers and pastoralists though their relationship is both symbiotic and competitive in nature; hence this has often times led to crises which heightened tensions and religious intolerance. Consequently, many villages have been deserted which has affected the socio-economic activities as well as students' enrolment in schools. It is against this backdrop that the study examines the extent to which farmers'/herdsmen's clashes affect sustainable development in Nigeria. To collect data, interviews were conducted in some selected states in Nigeria where the scourge of terrorism was felt greatly. The sample size for the interview was 20 where the interviewees were purposively selected based on their experience in the subject matter and questions were asked through focus group discussion. The study found that government insensitivity to the plight of both farmers and herders is responsible for the crises which have negative impact on sustainable development. The study therefore recommends that conflict management mechanisms should be instituted, and also sanctions should be imposed to forestall future conflicts.*

**Keywords:** Crises, Farmers, Herdsmen, Nigeria, Government, Religious Intolerance, Tension, Sustainable national development

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### 1. Introduction

There have been strong relationships between herdsmen and farmers in their respective communities over the years. Their relationship is said to be symbiotic rather than parasitic in some respects and competitive in others. Herdsmen take their cattle to the grassy farmlands and help farmers to fight weeds and get manure from cows. According to Montz (2010), "The relationships between farmers and herdsmen have been so cordial that farmers and herdsmen rely

on each other in the production of agricultural produce. Hussein (1998) opines that there has always been a competitive relationship between farmers and herdsmen which often leads to conflicts. Farmers' and herdsmen's relationships have also been seen as complementary in nature that in most cases have led to chaos (Mwamfupe, 2015). But in recent times, the relationship enjoyed by both farmers and herdsmen has gone sourer such that both engage in a fight which always claims lives and properties. Unfortunately, these fights have led to religious and ethnic crises where member of one faith or ethnicity claims that his or hers are superior to the others. According to Umar (2002), pastoral agriculture in Zamfara where many lives were lost and property destroyed due to Fulani herders' perception that the Hausa farmers were *kado* (meaning infidels or unbelievers).

However, uncontrolled conflicts threaten the sustainable national development in Nigeria as many lives and properties worth millions of naira have been destroyed in the last five years. Hence, this affects the living standards of citizens in terms of food security, reduction of the labor force, uprooting people from their ancestral home, low number of children enrolled in schools and the destruction of schools which have long negative effects on the areas and the country at large. According to Asogwa and Okafor (2016), conflicts pose a very disturbing threat to Nigeria's national security. It is estimated that Nigeria loses about \$14 billion annually to these clashes. In February 2016 about three hundred people were massacred and a further seven thousand people were displaced in four communities in the Agatu area of Benue State (SBM Intelligence, quoted in Abada, Okafor and Ofobuike, 2018).

In Nigeria, the fight between herders and farmers have reached an alarming rate as many communities in Nigeria have been abandoned due to incessant attacks from herders which often times results in mass killings of people and the destruction of properties worth millions of naira. For instance, months ago not less than ten people were killed in Plateau State which was linked to cattle grazing which was later transformed into religions tensions (Punch, 2018). These crises not only affect lives and properties but increase the incidence of poverty, reduce children enrolment in schools, commerce, internal security, low level of agricultural production, religious and ethnic intolerance to mention but a few, which have negative effects on the development of Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the extent to which farmers'/ herdsmen's clashes affect sustainable national development.

### **1.1 Literature Review**

Many researchers, analysts, policy makers, and opinion leaders have argued about the causes of farmers'/herdsmen's clashes and their consequences on sustainable national development. In order to understand the nature, causes and consequences of these clashes between farmers and herdsmen, it suffices to review some of the literature.

Gamgum (2018) conducted a study on the herdsmen and farmers conflicts in Nigeria: another dimension of insecurity. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources coupled with content analysis techniques to analyze the data. The study found that the conflicts created tension not only in areas where there was direct confrontation between the disputants, but the conflicts terrorized every community and put them on alert to ensure that both short-term and long-term solutions were provided to return the state to a violence-free community. The study therefore recommended that institutional approaches should be used to settle grievances while the parties involved should exercise restraint. Bello (2013) carried out a research on herdsmen and farmers conflicts in North Eastern Nigeria: causes, repercussions and resolutions. The research was conducted in Yobe state with a four-stage cluster random sampling procedure which was used to select respondents for the study and relevant data was collected using structured questionnaires. The test-retest method was also used to test the reliability of the instrument. The study recommended that the government should make policies that will help Fulani herders to secure land for grazing so as to reduce the spate of conflicts. The study also concluded that both farmers and herdsmen suffered as a result of their conflicts that ranged from physical and economic to socio-psychological. The study failed to show how sample size was decided, and also the result in Yobe could not be representative of the whole of the North-East since Yobe state is just one state out of six states that constituted the north-east. Ofuoku and Isife (2010) conducted a study on the causes, effects and conflict resolution of nomadic cattle herders' conflict in Delta state, Nigeria. Data was collected through structured interview. The study also used simple random and positive sampling technique. The study found that the conflicts led to reduction in crop yield and income of farmers/nomads, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties and loss of grains in storage. The study therefore recommended that Local Communities Farmers Association (LCFA) and the extension institutions are to ensure that all

the identified stakeholders be brought together under common forum and included in decision making and allow them to participate actively in the planning process. The study failed to adopt relevant research techniques and methodology to arrive at the conclusions. Ukamaka, Danjuma, Mbolle, Achonam and Mbadiwe (2017) carried out a study on livelihood issues in herdsmen-farmers' conflict among farming communities in Kogi state, Nigeria. Data was collected by the use of structured interview and focus group discussion, and descriptive statistics and factor analysis were adopted to analyze the data. The study revealed that crop farmers were predominantly male and with a mean age of 51 years practicing subsistence farming with specialization in the production of yam, cassava, maize and other arable crops. Also the study found that non-adherence to the law, livelihood and cultural interference are the main causes of crises. The study therefore recommended that the government should adopt a strategy and orient the farmers and herdsmen to the need to live peacefully and adhere to regulations that have to be one with the use of land. The study failed to show the population of the study areas and how it arrived at the sample size it used to conduct the structured interview and focus group discussion; the data collected was not sufficient for analysis. The work would have been more appreciated if it had adopted a robust research technique such as regression analysis with a structured questionnaire to complement the interview. Okoli and Atelhe (2014) carried out research entitled "Nomads against natives: A political ecology of herder/farmer conflicts in Nasarawa state, Nigeria". The study adopted a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources. The study revealed that the situation was made worse by changes in the climate.

The paper therefore recommended that effective regulation should be formulated by the government via effective and efficient land use laws and administrations. The paper is limited by the inability of the researchers to conduct interviews. Apenda (2016) conducted a research on an assessment of the impact of farmers-herders' conflict on food security in Benue state, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design to generate cross-sectional data through the use of questionnaires, focused group discussions (FGDs) and oral interviews. A sample size of 320 farmers was taken from the affected population. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The study found that people were killed, properties such as farm land and schools were destroyed which resulted in a low level of farm output and human capital loss. The study therefore recommended that the government should formulate policies that would take care of

the pastoralist's location that must be in consonance with the world best practices. The study failed to show the tools used to generate sample size coupled with the fact that there was no table showing regression and the results of its analysis. Abada et al. (2018) conducted research with the title "Political Economy of Cattle Colony: Between Herders-Farmers Conflicts and Sustainable Development". The study employed qualitative techniques of research to analyze its data and the study revealed that conflicts between herders and the farmers have negative effects on the contribution of the agricultural sector which depleted internally generated revenues and loss of manpower that would have assisted to maintain national development in Nigeria. Familugba and Adedayo (2020) carried out a study on indigenous conflict resolution strategy and sustainable development in Nigeria. The results of the study showed that indigenous conflict resolution contributed immensely to resolving many ethno-religious and societal conflicts. The paper concluded that indigenous conflict resolution strategy had played important roles in resolving major ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. Alonge and Okunade's (2014) study with the title "Ethnic Conflict and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Role of Peace Education" found that the issue was nationwide problem and went beyond ethnic conflicts and its threats to lives and properties increased, but mechanisms to avoid crises so that resources are put in use for such activities can be geared towards bringing about sustainable development in all spheres of life. The study therefore recommended that peace education should be introduced to schools so as to teach them to embrace peace.

### **1.2 Overview of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria and the number of attacks**

Benue is one of the 36 states in Nigeria, located in the northern central part of Nigeria with many tribes but predominantly occupied by Tiv. It has a vast farmland and this brought about interaction between the indigenes who are predominately farmers and the Fulani, a nomadic pastoralist. The agricultural activities of the indigenous people coupled with large arable farmland attract a lot of people to Benue state which include the pastoralist Fulani who are predominantly Muslims. Their quest for conducive environments where they can comfortably raise and cater for their cattle make them move from one place to another where there is water and no infestation of flies. According to Iro mentioned in Apenda (2016) "the Fulani use mobility as a production strategy to access water and pasture and possibly markets. In order to

cater for their herds they most often go to farms where foods and water are available for their cattle but these movements oftentimes make the herds move into the farms and damage the indigenous crops which degenerate into chaos and heighten tensions which result [in] religious crises”. Apenda (2016) pointed out that “before now, conflict between the herders and farmers, took a dimension that could be referred to as dangerous, involved the use of traditional weapons such as machetes, bows and arrows. The nature of weapons used now include but are not limited to locally made pistols, Dane guns, rifles sub-machine guns, light machines guns and improvised explosive devices (IEDS)”. According to AOAV, NWGAV quoted in Apenda (2016), “Islamic terrorist groups to which Fulani herders are close, look to Chad, Niger and Cameroon for their weapons”. Corrupt security personnel sometimes give out their weapons for short periods of time to penetrate their dastardly acts (Fefa & Tough, 2015).

Nassarawa state is another state that partly constitutes the north central part with amalgamation of many tribes which include Hausa-Fulani, Tiv, Jukun, Gbayi, Egbura, Doma, Alago, Milgili, Kambari/Kanuri, but is dominated by the Eggon. The state lies within the savanna grassland region of central Nigeria. Nassarawa state is endowed with vast arable land but with sparse population which resulted in the movement of agricultural practitioners to the state making the state good for grazing. As the trend increases, this led to struggle for farmland and a stiff competition for the scarce land resources which led to confrontation and heightened tension. According to Adogi quoted in Okoli and Atelhe (2014), existing conflicts between farmer/herder relations is believed to have political undertone because of the dimension it assumes. This politicization of the situation was achieved through ethno-religious and parochial sentiments which different groups employed as an opportunity to wage war against their host communities. Also there was a rift between farmers and herders in Nimbo, Enugu state. The clash caused the death of many farmers and herdsmen as many crops were destroyed and cattle were killed. The conflict started after many protests by the host community with respect to constant destruction of their farms by the cattle reared by the Fulanis, where scores were massacred by 500 armed Fulani herdsmen in the early hours of April 25, 2016 (Premium Times, 2018).

In Ondo state, there was a ceaseless havoc wrecked on the produce of farmers coupled with violence caused by the Fulani herdsmen (Sahara Reporter, 2016), where lives and properties were destroyed.

Sunday Trust (2013) reported that there was a series of clashes between farmers and herdsmen on January 1<sup>st</sup> in Jukun, Taraba state where 5 people were hacked. On January 15<sup>th</sup> in Nasarawa state 10 people were killed; on January 20<sup>th</sup> there was a clash in Nasarawa where 25 people were hacked. Also, on January 24<sup>th</sup> the clash between Fulani and farmers in Plateau state claimed the lives 9 people; on February 7<sup>th</sup> another crisis was witnessed between Fulani and Eggon people in Nasarawa where not more than 30 casualties were recorded. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, there was a clash between Fulani and Tarok in Jos, Plateau where 18 people were killed; on March 28<sup>th</sup> there was another black day where 28 people were massacred in the fight between Fulani and farmers in Riyon, B/Ladi, Jos, Plateau state. Also, on March 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> there were clashes between Fulani and the natives in Bokkos areas of Bokkos local government Jos that left 18 people dead. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, policemen and people were murdered in clashes that left 6 dead. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, farmers and Fulani clashed in Guma LGA, Benue State where 3 people were murdered. April 10<sup>th</sup> witnessed another clash between Fulani and Tiv farmers where 28 people were killed. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, there was a fight between Fulani and Egbe farmers in Kogi State where 5 people were gruesomely killed. May 4<sup>th</sup> Fulani and Farmers clashed in Plateau State where 13 people were killed also Jukun and Fulani clashed in Wukari, Taraba State on the same day which left 39 people dead. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, Fulani and Agatu clashed in Benue State where 50 people were gruesomely massacred. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, Tiv and Fulani clashed at Benue-Nasarawa boarder.

### **1.3. Causes of Conflicts between Herdsmen and Farmers**

Lack of respect for custom: this is one of the leading causes of conflict between herders and farmers as the visitors have no regard for traditions and agreement stipulating the modus operandi of the herders. According to Ukamaka et al. (2017) staying on the farmland without the consent of the farmers coupled with the belief that they had the right to grazing in any farm caused conflict. Also the herders paid little respect for traditional grazing custom with the claim that land is a common property (Ukamaka et al., 2017).

Interference of livelihood: this includes burning of the farms that belong to their hosts and disrespect for traditional authorities. According to Adebayo and Olaniyi quoted in Ukamaka et al. (2017) grazing on harvested crops, stealing of farmers harvest by herders and destruction of soil are the major causes of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen.

#### **1.4. Farmers-Herders conflicts and their effect on Sustainable National Development in Nigeria**

Conflicts between farmers and herders have been in existence for many years in Nigeria with little or no violence but the spate of the conflicts increased shortly after the inauguration of President Buhari's administration. First, it started with cattle rustling before it degenerated into a full-blown terrorism. It is unfortunate that the conflicts claimed many lives and properties with many indigenous people removed from their ancestral homes. It is no doubt that the conflicts have affected the existing development. For instance, many active young men and women that could help to sustain the country had been killed by the herdsmen. Students in the conflict-prone areas could not go to school again due to fear of the unknown and by extension, this will have a grave impact on human capital development. Also the money that the federal government should have committed to projects that would sustain the development of Nigeria was spent to wage war against those elements despite the millions of dollars spent to fight these nefarious groups. The security architecture has proven to be incompetent in handling this situation, thereby leading to total security breakdown. Since 1960, when Nigeria got her independence from Britain the country has been bedeviled with different kinds of violent conflicts ranging from the ethno-religious killings in the Northern region, the Civil War that lasted for three years resulting in unimaginable destruction of lives and property, occasional electoral violence, communal and border clashes etc. Also, the terrorists have since their emergence in 2009 laid siege on the Nigerian State, thereby causing tremendous damage to human and natural resources of the country despite the seemingly repelling of the sect by the Nigerian military as reported widely in the local media (Adisa quoted in Abada, Okafor & Ofobuikwe, 2018). According to Amaza (2016), the serial attacks by the terrorists had claimed up to twenty thousand people and displaced more than a million from their homes. But while the worst activities of Boko Haram which have attracted national and global attention now seem to be reducing in all capacity, another emerging conflict between the pastoralists and farmers has taken another dimension with its attendant consequence on the national development. However, these conflicts of interests and mutual suspicions between the Fulani Herdsmen and farmers in different communities in Nigeria have clearly exposed the Nigerian security architecture and its incapability to save lives and property of the people. The predicament has become a national issue as many states in the federation are left out in the crises that are ravaging the entire country. The southern states that



are located thousands of miles from the home states of the Fulani herdsmen have persistently been attacked recently by the Fulani herders on agricultural produce which affects the rate of revenue generation in the country (Abada, Okafor & Ofobuike, 2018).

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts eco-violence theory to underpin the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria. The theory shows the nexus between environmental factors and violent conflicts (Onuoha quoted in Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). This theory was developed by Homer-Dixon (1999) which states that non-replenishment in resources, growth in population and inaccessibility of resources lead to scarcity which reduce the economic productivity, hence this leads to migration of people from one place to another which often times results in ethnic conflicts caused by deprivation. One of the tenets of the theory is the assumption that competition for scarce resources causes violent conflicts. This assumption has been worsened by the ecological/scarcity resources across the world. This theory best suits the situation in Nigeria. The Fulani herdsmen believe that land is a common property that is owned by everybody irrespective of your tribe, etc. therefore stopping them from grazing their cows from the farmland can result in confrontation and destruction of lives and properties which has become common in Nigeria.

## **3. Methodology**

Interview was used to generate some of the relevant primary information in Oyo, Kogi, Enugu, Kaduna, Taraba and Nasarawa States through focus group discussion. The reason for interview in these states is because of the incessant fight that ensued between the farmers and the herders which claimed many lives and destruction of socio-economic development and activities. Twenty informants were purposively selected from the villages where farmer/herder clashes occurred within the five geo-political zones because the researchers reached a saturation point where responses from the respondents were insignificant (Kumar, R (2011). Also each of this state is a representative of a geo-political zone in Nigeria. For the secondary data, newspapers, magazines, reports, published materials, internet and live television broadcast were the major sources for the study.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. The analysis of interview response**

#### **Theme I: farmers/herders clash**

**Sub-Theme I: how long did the farmers/herders clash?**

According to the informants:

“The fight wey dey between farmers and the Fulani don dey for long and the thing don waste many people life”. “The problem between farmers and pastoralists was a long aged fight which has wasted many lives and properties worth millions of Naira.” My younger brother was hacked in his farm because of the long rift between the farmers and the Fulani herdsmen and no justice has been served.” “We are living our ancestral home because of government insensitivity to the plight of the common men.”

**Theme II: causes of farmers/herders incessant clashes**

**Sub-Theme II: what is the cause of farmers/herders clash?**

According to the informants:

“Herdsmen are evil, they disrespect our tradition through their unruly behaviour and we accept that”. Fulani dey enters our farm with their cows”. Because of the emergence of Fulani man as a president, they believe they own Nigeria by encroaching on the farms and destroy our plants.” “Some herders deliberately cause problem in order to unleash anger on innocent communities in form of reappraisal attack.”

**Theme III: Effect of farmers/herders incessant clashes and mechanism put in place to curb this menace**

**Sub-Theme II: what is the effect of farmers/herders clash and what mechanism put in place to curb future occurrence?**

According to the informants:

“There is population explosion in our town because the herders find this area conducive for them to graze”. The clash don cause problem as many no fit go farm. Even if you go farm wetin you want harvest? Is it the produce wey cows don shop or spoil....? Therefore this fight don make cost of food increase for market.” “The fact is that this clash between farmers and Fulani herdsmen has continued to exacerbate the incident of poverty in Nigeria most especially the people in the affected areas.” “To me government is not sincere with themselves as they plan to introduce ‘ruga’ which the meaningful Nigerians objected”. Nigerian government is not realistic because all the mechanism put together are being objected by Nigerians. “Fulanis are not Nigerians they should go back to where they came from”

## 5. Discussions

From the interview conducted across the country, it is observed that conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have begun and increased over many decades which have made thousands of people flee their ancestral homes to other places seeking refuge. Farmers and herders fight is not new in Africa as there were similar cases, for example, in the Central African Republic. The villagers interviewed were sad about the insensitivity of the government. They were of the opinion that the leadership of Nigeria could have provided permanent solutions to this problem amicably rather the government showed carefree attitude that has led to the loss of lives and the destruction of property. Hussein (1998) opines that there has always been a competitive relationship between the farmers and herdsman which often leads to conflicts. Relationships between farmers and herdsman have also been seen as complementary in nature and have often led to chaos (Mwamfupe, 2015).

Also, population momentum has put pressure on the land and water resources, thereby making it difficult for the leadership to create route for the cattle's and pastoralists, which often times make the cattle and herders to encroach on farms leading to destruction of farms. However, the herders believed that lands are free gift of nature, therefore they can graze their cattle anywhere. Despite the fact that the herdsman can graze their cattle anywhere, they should know that farm is completely out of it. Also many Nigerians believe that herders are not Nigerians therefore they cannot graze their cattle anywhere. This belief has caused a lot of chaos leading to destruction of government and private property such as schools and houses. Moreover, this situation has equally reduced pupil enrolment in schools. The findings also showed that some herdsman deliberately perpetrated dastardly acts by taking their herds to their host farmlands for reprisals.

The herders failed to respect the tradition of their host communities which often times led to conflicts as they believed that they were Nigerians, hence they thought they could graze their cattle anywhere in Nigeria without intimidation. However, it is found that the government has not instituted social control mechanisms to forestall conflicts between pastoralists and farmers. The Nigeria government did not show that it was sensitive to the plight of Nigerians, most especially to the farmers that are always at the receiving end.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Despite the benefit that the farmers and herders could gain which will help to sustain socio-economic development, the government has not reached a conclusive decision on how to end farmers and herders crises in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that the government should establish more police posts with arms and ammunition in the affected communities and should bring to prosecute all the arrested trouble makers so as to forestall future crises. By doing this those who have left their ancestral home will return. An effort should also be made by the government to create modern husbandry for the herders which can attract payment to host communities.

Also the leadership should create awareness and sense of responsibility by pledging to Nigerians that nothing will happen to their farms and properties if leased for modern husbandry. There should be creation of social control mechanisms that will end these crises which include arresting anyone fanning conflicts. The herders should respect the tradition of their host communities to the letter without compromise.

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