ABSTRACT

How have variables of terrorism, politics and ethnicity complicated the increasingly devastating conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria? What short and long term policy suggestions can aid the management of these conflicts, in light of the looming 2019 general elections in Nigeria? These are some of the questions to which this study would attempt to provide answers. The descriptive survey method was adopted for the study, primary data were gathered using structured and semi-structured focused group discussion guides to conduct interviews with law enforcement officers, village heads, researchers with specialty in study area, and focused group discussions with groups of farmers and herders respectively, in selected states in northern Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data were content analyzed.

The study found that politics, and ethnicity are also sentiments that color the conflicts, and evidence exist supporting the argument that the conflicts may have been high-jacked by the Boko Haram terrorist network to advance its agenda. The study concluded that government, civil societies, local and international development agencies, human right organizations and non-governmental organization, and even more importantly the two groups – farmers and herders, must be committed to ending the conflicts through productive dialogue. One recommendation relating to the implementation of the National Livestock Transformation Plan is ensuring that cattle owners and herders buy-in to the plan, as this will largely determine the success of the transformation plan.

Key Words: Killer-Herdsman, Terrorism, Farmer, Herder, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Communal and groups conflicts, particularly those between groups of farmers and herders, have arguably become the new norm in Nigeria. From mere observation, one can argue that in the last almost half a decade, these conflicts have occurred at least once every month, on the average, leaving in its wake, increasing human casualties as well as wanton destruction of valuable government and private properties. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that “in the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 Nigerians have died in violence involving herders and farmers” (ICG, 2018:4).
While these conflicts between farmers and herdsmen are predominant in the north-western, north-eastern and north-central geopolitical zones of the country, herding activities in some other parts of the country; particularly south-east, south-west zones, have also led to agitations by community members and leaders, and a few confrontations with the herders; who are mostly Hausa-Fulani. In the south-south zone, there appears an apparent fear that these nomadic herdsmen would soon migrate into the zone, in search of pasture and water for their cattle. Although, it can be argued that the one major reason for the arguable indiscriminate grazing of cattle across almost all six geopolitical zones of Nigeria is the desertification and effects of climate change in the north, many have also feared that the activities of the herdsmen may have assumed a terrorist dimension. This fear is further confirmed by the frequency of attacks by the herdsmen on villages and individuals, the increasingly sophisticated weapons used in such attacks, and devastating nature of the casualties that result from such attacks.

Aside the conflicts described above, which result mainly from conflicts over economic livelihoods and lifestyle patterns, scholars agree that there are other forms of conflicts that seem also predominant in the old northern region of Nigeria. Some of these are religious conflicts between Christian groups and Muslims, as well as between sects within the Islamic religion (i.e. Sunni Muslims vs. Shiite Muslims); identity conflicts (Birom vs Hausa/Fulani); religious fundamentalism evident in the continued war against Boko Haram and efforts to reclaim several communities in the ravaged by the spite of the Boko Haram terrorism, as well as resettle people displaced from these communities, whose number also keeps growing.

Although many scholars (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009; Oguamanam, 2016) have attempted to investigate the cause of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen as a consequence of competition over scare resources; mostly land and water, which influence the livelihood and lifestyle of these groups, only very few, if any, have attempted to interrogate the growing concern and very likely links between these many attacks and terrorism in Nigeria. It is important to mention that ‘northern Nigeria’, as repeatedly used in this study covers all the twenty states (including the Federal Capital Territory) in the North-west, North-east and North-central geopolitical zones of Nigeria. While the study would focus primarily on the farmer-herdsmen conflicts in the north, we would also refer to other states and zones of Nigeria, to allow for better appreciation of the arguments and submissions made in this study.

BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Conflicts in many parts of Nigeria, and particularly in the North has largely assumed a violent condition, which has made these conflicts more significant, particularly with regards to the consequences they have on communities, individuals and the state at large. While it may be argued that the Northern region of Nigeria is known for hospitality and peaceful co-existence among its various groups and religious inhabitants, it is important to also mention that conflicts in this part of the state are a result of complexities of politics and socio-economics that have characterized the state for several decades, particularly since Nigeria’s independence. The International Crisis Group (2010: 1) also confirmed this assertion by observing that conflicts in
the north of Nigeria are a “product of several complex and inter-locking factors, including a volatile mix of historical grievances, political manipulation and ethnic and religious rivalries”.

While it may prove difficult to conclude that the many increasingly violent conflicts in Nigeria are restricted to a few particular factors, much of the conflicts in Nigeria arguably relates to identity and resource. The recurrent vandalism and mostly violent militant activities in Nigeria’s Niger-Delta region are largely consequences of arguable exclusion and disagreements over resource control. Initially stemming from agitations and protests from Ijaw and Itsekiri communities over arguable exploitative government-supported activities of industries drilling the regions rich oil resources without producing any tangible benefits for indigenes of these communities, rather such drilling activities largely resulted in environmental decay and insecurity in the long term for these communities, some of which Adekanye (2007) identified as operations of transnational oil companies whose activities had caused huge damage to agricultural crops, destruction of fishing farms, and pollution of portable water. In response to the activities of the industries in this region, the indigenes of these communities; especially the young people, have continued to vandalize drilling installations, and carry out activities that have deepened the insecurity in the region, despite the Federal government’s amnesty program in 2010. These agitations have simply gone from protests over exploitation to demands for a fair share, and even total control, of the mineral wealth of the entire region. Most recently, it can be argued that those original goals and objectives underlying the Niger-Delta conflict have been being displaced by much newer ones, which include, but certainly aren’t limited to, hostage taking and demand for huge ransom, among others, many of which have also arguably been high-jacked by criminal elements to make private gain. Osah (2014) summarized such activities simply as war-lordism.

In many other parts of the Nigerian state, particularly across much of the Central and far Northern region, violent conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have literally become a ‘nightmare’ for residents of rural communities as well as for the Nigerian state generally. Although much of these conflicts initially were identity and resource based, including efforts to preserve means of economic livelihoods of farming and herding by competition over pastures and grazing fields for cattle, access to land and water, evidences in the recent past reveal that these conflicts have been complicated by myriad of factors including ethnicity, politics, religion, as well as terrorism propagated by the Islamic religious group turned terrorist namely the Boko Haram. While conflicts of the latter variety taking after the name of the group instigating them (i.e. Boko Haram) wear the religious mask of Islamic fundamentalism (terrorism), the conflicts involving herdsmen and farmers are about conflicts over economic livelihoods and cultural lifestyles as earlier identified. The two forms of conflicts have come to assume much greater intensity and salience in present day Nigeria than ever, claiming hundreds of lives of people some of whom are members of the Nigerian military, and destroying properties worth several billions of naira and belonging to the state and private individuals. These conflicts in the Niger Delta and other parts of the country, including the North, continue to heighten insecurity in the state and arguably reinforce the state’s inability to solely provide long-term solutions to such identity and resource conflicts.
While the background provided in this section will allow for a more robust understanding of the nature and manifestations of conflicts in Nigeria, this study will focus on what we have identified above as economic livelihood and cultural lifestyle conflicts between groups of farmers and herdsmen, particularly in northern Nigeria. The increasingly changing nature of these conflicts and the growing causalities resulting from them, have put such conflicts on the priority list of security operatives and the Federal government generally. Hence, the causes, dynamics, and consequences of these conflicts will constitute the main focus of this study, including a body of recommendations for policy action within the Nigerian state.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The relative deprivation thesis espoused by Ted Robert Gurr, in his classic text; ‘Why Men Rebel’, provides a rather adequate theoretical basis for this study. Drawing from quantitative analysis of 1,100 "strife events" occurring in 114 "polities" over a period of five years (1961 to 1965), Gurr argued that just as frustration would most likely lead to aggressive behavior in an individual, relative deprivation would also likely result in collective violence from a social group. Relative deprivation therefore is the difference between what people think they deserve, and what they actually think they can get. Therefore, since "the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members of a collectivity" (Gurr, 1970: 24), it means that the greater the intensity and scope of deprivation, the greater the violence by the members of the collectivity. Deprivation however, does not necessarily lead to collective violence, just as frustration doesn’t necessarily lead to individual violence, rather, ‘sufficiently prolonged and sharply felt’ deprivation would lead to anger and eventual violence, although a number of other variables, as culture, the society, and the political environment, are also worth interrogating.

In application, one could argue that the endemic, changing and increasingly devastating nature of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have also resulted from sufficiently prolonged and increasingly sharply felt deprivation, especially on the part of the herdsmen, which has pushed them beyond anger to take up arms against, not just farmers, but the state as a whole. While arguments of discrepancies in what herdsmen think they deserve and what they actually think they would get from the various debates and discussions around policy making and remaking on grazing and ranching, may be sufficient to provide some understanding into the conflicts between these groups, the Fulani culture of communality and vengeance, the highly tensed Nigerian society and current political circumstances, both of the President being a cattle-breeder, and Fulani by ethnicity, may also provide some useful insight to understanding the increasingly complicated nature of these conflicts.

METHOD

This study adopted the descriptive survey research method in data gathering and analysis. Primary data were generated from three states; Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa, selected
purposively from the North-west and North-central zones. Interviews and Focused-Group Discussions were methods used in collecting data from law enforcement officers, rural community leaders, experts in the subject area, and separate groups of farmers and herdsmen respectively. Four focused group discussions were held with two groups of farmers and herdsmen each, and with 12 participants in each group, also purposively selected from communities in Chikun, Kafanchan, Birom, Barkin-Ladi, where there have been recurrent clashes in these states. Data were collected from respondents using tape recorders, and later transcribed as well as content analyzed in order to draw conclusions for the study.

CAUSES OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS

The National Working Group on Armed Violence (NWGAV) and Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), in a 2013 report identified some of what they described as the major ‘drivers’ of armed conflicts in Nigeria;

a. **Poverty, underdevelopment and uneven growth:** Nigerians have continued to live in abject poverty, despite the vast natural and mineral resources with which the state is blessed; the gap between the elite and the rest of the population has continued to widen and the oil-rich regions of South-East and South-South have remained masked pockets of deprivation.

b. **Weak governance, lack of transparency, and limited trust in institutions:** The growing level of corruption and unaccountable governance are major drivers of armed violence in Nigeria. The actions and inactions of government have also been identified as the causes of the levels and extents of armed violence in Nigeria. Nigerians have increasingly lost confidence in the ability of the state to protect them, especially as the states security apparatus has, arguably, become an instrument for criminality and violence, and in some cases have appeared incompetent to stem the rising tide of violent conflicts in the state. This situation has led to the establishment of many private security initiatives – community watch groups, security companies, high walls and barbed wires, personal arms and weapons – which have also had severe implications for the state and level of insecurity experienced in Nigeria, as well as increase the duration and intensity of conflicts.

c. **Politicized Group:** The heterogeneous composition of Nigeria has been argued to be the major cause of armed violence within the state. Although the mere heterogenous nature of the state is not sufficient to induce tension and violence, tensions can rather be managed through responsive, inclusive and broad-based political, social and economic institutions which bind diverse groups together instead of drive them apart. The deliberate politicization of ethnic and religious groups and the overlap between these groups are what combine, with the deep seated socio-economic inequalities, to plunge the state into armed violence.

Although the drivers identified above constitute a broader explanation for the many violent conflicts that have assumed endemic nature in the Nigerian state, there are other specific factors that directly link to the frequent confrontations between farmer and herder groups in these rural
northern communities. Adekanye (2007) identified three sets of variables in his theoretical framework for comparative explanation of conflicts, which will be helpful in understanding the complex factors that fuel farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, namely: the ‘structural-cum-predispositional variables’; the ‘accelerators’ or ‘precipitants’; and the ‘triggers’ or ‘catalysts’.

Using Adekanye’s postulation, the structural or motivational factors responsible for farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, may be similar to factors responsible for other types of conflicts across the African continent and particularly in Nigeria, such as differences in ethnicity and religion; cultural lifestyles that permit the possession of small arms by the generality of the public for mostly ceremonial purposes; economic livelihoods that depend on competition over scarce water and land resources for cultivation and cattle grazing; and the “emergence of grass-root war economy left behind by long and protracted civil wars and other conflicts, coupled with the rise of war-lords with interests in the system of plunder, profit and power thrown up by this” (Adekanye, 2007:219), a condition that may be responsible for the growing terrorist activities in many of these communities that have arguably suffered exclusion and underdevelopment for too long.

Also, the ‘precipitants’ or ‘accelerators’ of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, appear equally similar to those of other types of conflicts, which Adekanye (2007: 220) identified as; “economic development, modernization, urbanization, social mobilization, population growth, migration, and the like”. Other accelerators that may, however, be more specific to conflicts between farmer and herder groups include; rising poverty, declining access to land and water in the arid region, demographic pressures caused by migration and massive refugee movements and leading to a situation where there are more people than available resources, intensity in the availability and proliferation of sophisticated small arms and light weapons within the Nigerian state, exclusion, rising insecurity, to mention a few. One characteristic of conflict accelerators is the persistence in occurrence and re-occurrence of these factors in the region under investigation, making the region highly prone to spontaneous and sporadic conflict outbreaks.

The conflict ‘triggers’ or ‘catalysts’, which often arise out of vague and unanticipated circumstances, and immediately spark off farmer-herder conflicts are mostly identified as the main causes of these conflicts. Some of such ‘triggers’ include; trespassing of cattle over cultivated land and vegetation, mysterious death of one or more cattle, outright cattle theft or rustling, contamination of stream by cattle, sexual harassment of women by nomads, over-grazing of fallow land, harassment of nomads by youths of host communities, indiscriminate defecation by cattle on roads, among many others.

Several scholars have identified drivers of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria as largely falling in one or more of the three categories of the ‘structural-cum-predispositional variables’, ‘accelerators’ or ‘precipitants’, and the ‘triggers’ or ‘catalysts’ discussed above, although more of these factors fall under the category of conflict triggers as opposed to the other two categories. Manu et al. (2014) identified the major causes of such conflicts as; competition over land and conflict of culture. Baye (2002), corroborating this view, also observed that the demarcation of
grazing and cropping land in the grass field during the colonial period is highly contested now by the rapidly growing population in need of more land for agriculture and rural development, and again cultural changes between the largely heterogeneous farmers and herders are also a major source of conflict. Other sources of such conflicts are encroachment into grazing land, cattle trespass, as well as leadership struggle between the communities. Bello (2013), also enumerated the causes of farmer-herder conflicts as follows: destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructure) by the herdsmen; burning of rangelands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment; and increasing rate of cattle theft. Ofuoku and Isife (2009) also identified the causes of these conflicts as including; destruction of crops, contamination of stream by cattle, over-grazing of fallow land, disregard for traditional authority, sexual harassment of women by nomads, harassment of nomads by host youths, indiscriminate defecation by cattle on roads, theft of cattle, stray cattle, and indiscriminate busy burning. While it is agreeable that the triggers provide more compelling argument for the major causes of these conflicts, it is important to under the broad context in which these triggering circumstances occur, as this provides a more critical understanding of not just the causes, but also the nature of the conflict, and can also be helpful in thinking about solutions.

TERRORIST-DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT

The dawn of the Buhari-led administration, the large success of the Nigerian government in the anti-terrorism campaign in the northeastern region appeared to have coincided with a sharp increase in the frequency and widespread occurrence of incidents of clashes between farmer and herder across the country. While many have advanced various arguments and explanations for the unfortunate trend, two things, at least, remain subject to wide speculations, and unfortunately may remain just speculations for a long time. The first pertain to a possible terrorist dimension of these conflicts which I will attempt to explore in this section, and the second pertain to the possible political interests that arguably complicate the conflicts between farmers and herders and have made them more endemic in the recent past, and I will explore this second issue in the subsequent section.

Although lacking empirical evidence, at least at the time of this study, there are a few indicators that allow for speculations that terrorists may have high-jacked farmer-herder conflicts as another viable means to spread their propaganda, and I will attempt three explanations for this assumption. First, not just have violent attacks become more frequent in several parts of northern Nigeria, but also the devastations and casualties have more than doubled and the weapons for used in these attacks are much more sophisticated military weapons. Media reports reveal that many of the alleged Fulani herdsmen, many of whom have allegedly confessed to be members of the Boko Haram sect, were arrested in possession of sophisticated military weapons. For instance, a commander of one of the military operations in northern Nigeria, in a report by the Vanguard (2018), asserted that about 40 herdsmen, some of who were armed with AK-47 assault rifles and approximately 3,000 cattle at Kwatan Gyemu community in Benue state were ambushed by troops. The commander asserted further that “troops engaged the armed herdsmen,
who fled using cows as shields. Some of the cows were killed while some of the herdsmen escaped into the surrounding bushes with gunshot wounds. Also, in an earlier but related report, Punch (2016) reported that the Nigeria Police had declared a ‘war’ on herdsmen bearing arms, noting that this action was imperative “following allegations that Fulani herdsmen use dangerous weapons such as AK47 and other guns whenever they are embroiled in violent clashes with farmers over grazing areas for their cattle”.

In the interviews conducted in this study, law enforcement officers, they confirmed the use of such weapons in the conflicts. One of the key officers in the Plateau state Police command asserted that:

Some of the weapons which we have recovered from some of the criminals in the cause of our duty range from prohibited fire arms, even AK-47 is prohibited, and we recover some of these things from them. They are using it! … All sorts of weapons are being used by these people who persistently refuse to listen to our calls to lay down arms, so that peace can reign supreme.

Another police officer who headed the Divisional Police Headquarter in one of the communities, responding to a question on the kinds of weapons used in these attacks exclaimed;

Sophisticated! Should I mention? They use AK-47, in fact, they use military weapons. Both sides; the indigenes (farmers) and the pastoralist, they all have these weapons.

Although law enforcement officers observed that both groups used sophisticated weapons in these conflicts, the farmer groups had a slightly contrary opinion. A farmer in one of the focused groups reported that:

They use guns, sophisticated weapons. A farmer cannot go to farm with a gun. Who gives him money to buy gun. The Fulani’s (herders) sell their cattle and buy things with which to kill the farmers… It depends on the circumstance. When they get to a place where the people are weak, instead of using the guns to arouse attention, they would just bounce in, break the door and cut them into pieces and set fire on the building. Where they cannot penetrate, they would set fire on the building and burn the people alive.

Evidences appear to abound indicating that farmers are more vulnerable in the incidence of clashes with herdsmen, and are arguably, if at all, forced to take up arms in defense of themselves in the event of such conflicts. In fact, beyond the use of sophisticated weapons, some of the herdsmen who were arrested had charms on them. Information Nigeria (2018) reported that, not only were the arrested suspects in possession of charms amongst other ammunitions, but one of the officers in the military troop that made the arrest observed that one of the arrested herdsmen; Usman, was shoot severally, but only sustained injuries. Another interesting discovery was that, although Usman and his gang were arrested in Guma area of Benue state, but they confessed that
their meeting point was “near a river under a mango tree in the Awe Local Government Area of Nasarawa State”.

Secondly, while it may be difficult to conclude on the issue of the use of sophisticated weapons, it is important to mention that other factors like the nomadic nature of the herders and the porous borders and arguably inadequate and inefficient border security are other factors that heighten the possibility of terror infiltrating the conflicts, and such factors may also explain the vulnerability of the farmer groups in the face of the conflicts with herders. Illegal arms traffickers, migrants and refugees, are arguably consequences of porous Nigerian borders, and they join with the uncontrollable cross-border, extra-territorial nature of the pastoralists themselves to significantly militate against government policies to manage these conflicts, while also providing a channel for the influx of members of terrorist cells into the country to participate in the conflicts.

Finally, media reports in Nigeria in the recent past seem to prove some of the arguments made above. The Punch Newspaper (2016) reported Senator Heineken Lokpobiri; Nigeria’s Minister of State for Agriculture asserting, in a speech to the Nigerian Senate Committee on Agric and Rural Development that;

"We have discovered that the herdsmen, attacking Nigerians across the country, are not Fulani but another gang of Boko Haram insurgents from other countries… Those arrested cannot speak Fulani or any other Nigerian language. Fulani herdsmen are going about with their legitimate business, looking for something to take care of their family."

While this may not be sufficient to completely exonerate the herders from the many killings and destructions across the country, it is possible that terrorists and other criminal elements may have high-jacked the tensions among these groups to advance and achieve other ends. Recent happenings provide another fearful twist to the entire discourse on the conflicts, one that led the declaration of Nigerian Fulani Militants as the new biggest internal security threat to peace in Nigeria after Boko Haram terrorist group (Global Terrorism Index, 2018).

OTHER COMPLICATIONS OF THE CONFLICT

The conflicts involving farmers and herders in Nigeria has unfortunately been complicated by a number of other factors aside terrorism as we have tried to argue in the previous section. The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria, and arguable continuous competition, particularly among variables of ethnicity and politics, are factors that seem to influence every area of the Nigerian state, including the multiple conflict situations with which the state continues to contend. It is arguable, and highly probable that activities the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, insurgency in the North-East region, and farmer-herder crisis in many parts of Nigeria are implicated by ethnicity as much as by other such factors as economy, politics, cultural marginalization, social inequalities, and exclusion, among others.
While it may be imperative to underscore the argument that ethnicity, as a major cause of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, may not have received sufficient empirical inquiry, it is important to also note that scholars have implicated ethnicity in explaining such conflicts; identifying them as not necessarily resource-based conflicts but also ethnic conflict involving the two groups, since herder and farmer groups have very different values, customs, physical and cultural characteristics (Tonah, 2006). Ofuoku and Isife (2009) corroborated this view by observing that the arguably minority status of Fulani nomadic herders in many host communities, coupled with their unique culture and sense of solidarity tend to isolate from the farming population, such that the tension and competition between these groups are heightened and ethnicity colors most of the conflict between them.

Politics, like ethnicity, is another unfortunate twist to many of the challenges bedeviling the Nigerian state, especially the farmer-herder conflicts. While this is not restricted to the President Buhari-led administration, it is particularly interesting. The Vanguard (2015) reported that President Buhari’s Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity; Garba Shehu observed that the President, among his assets declared that, “in addition to the homes in Daura, he has farms, an orchard and a ranch. The total number of his holdings in the farm includes 270 heads of cattle, 25 sheep, five horses, a variety of birds and a number of economic trees”. This declaration arguably identifies the Nigerian President as a herdsman and interested party in the many conversations in Nigeria over the conflicts between farmers and herders and possible strategies for resolution. There have also been insinuations in various quarters that the seeming inattention from the government of the day on these devastating conflicts stems from this reality, and this arguable political backing seems to have emboldened the herders to become more mindless in perpetuating violent attacks across the state. Ajibo et.al (2018: 4) was more emphatic in asserting that “ethnic jingoists and politicians have been benefitting in these strives and without doubt have succeeded in creating a divide between the farmers and pastoralist, especially in communities that are less educated”.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

Over the last few months alone, farmer-herder conflicts has cost the Nigerian state a lot in terms of man and materials, as well as worsened the already fragile security situation in the country, particularly in the northeastern and northwestern zones, with even more potency than the Boko Haram insurgency. The consequences of these conflicts will be discussed in this section in three categories, namely; human casualties or lives lost, internal displacements, and material cost in physical and economic terms.

The International Crisis Group (2018) observed that farmer-herder conflicts have become Nigeria’s gravest security challenge, claiming far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency. Ajibo et.al (2018) corroborating similar view by observing that the violent conflicts farmers and herders have not only spread southwards to the central and southern zones and have escalated in recent years and threatening the country’s security, stability and peace, but these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, resulted in
an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016 alone. Putting this side by side Gbaradi (2018) assertion of about 3,780 from 2012 to 2018 deaths of Nigerians by herdsmen aside injuries and abductions, we may conclude that 2016 alone recorded more than half of human casualties from farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria in the last half a decade. Amnesty International (2018) in a press release reported that clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, Ondo and Kaduna resulted in 168 deaths in January 2018 alone and in 2017, 549 deaths, many killed by airstrikes by the Nigerian military in the warring communities, and thousands displaced across Enugu, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Cross River, Adamawa, Katsina, Delta and Ekiti State. The Crisis group (2018) also observed that from January to June 2018, over 260 people were killed in several incidents in Nasarawa state alone, mostly in the southern zone covering Doma, Awe, Obi and Keana local government areas. These statistics show that the toll of human casualties from farmer-herder conflicts, including officers of the Nigerian military, continues to fluctuate more upward than it does downward.

In addition to human casualties, internal displacement has also been on the rise arguably exponentially. The Crisis group (2018) reported that between September 2017 and June 2018, farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria claimed 1,500 lives, and displaced about 300,000 – an estimated 176,000 in Benue, about 100,000 in Nasarawa, over 100,000 in Plateau, about 19,000 in Taraba and an unknown number in Adamawa. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2018) also reported that by the end of 2017 a total of 1,707,000 were still displaced. Although this figure was considered underestimated, the situation significantly deteriorated between January and June 2018, with another about 417,000 new displacements, especially in the north of Nigeria.

Internal displacements and rising insecurity in the Nigeria, in a report by the International Crisis Group (2018), have disrupted agriculture in parts of Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states. Many of the herdsmen displaced from communities in Benue state cannot find enough fodder for their herds in neighbouring Nasarawa state; hence the cattle graze pastures indiscriminately. In the same vein, farmers are unable to work on their farms for fear of attacks from herdsmen. Consequently, the economy is negatively affected as production and distribution of food is increasingly challenged. In fact, Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states are reported to experience an estimated drop in food production by 33 per cent in 2018 as a result of insecurities in farming communities. These are just an estimate from three of the almost two dozen states in northern Nigeria, a region that arguably makes up much of Nigeria’s breadbasket. Increase in such predicament, could affect food production nationwide, further increase food prices, affect agricultural businesses, as well as worsen already widespread rural poverty in many parts of the country. Beyond food production, physical infrastructures, both private and government-owned, have also felt the impact of these rising violent conflicts across the nation. The Punch (2017) and Premium Times (2017) simultaneously reported the assertion of the Benue state Governor; Samuel Ortom that, “a total of 99,427 households were affected, with billions of naira in property losses. In 2014 alone, farmer-herder violence destroyed property worth over 95 billion naira (about $264 million)”.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

In the recent past, there have been several researches done and published on the changing nature of farmer-herder conflicts (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009; Oguamanam, 2016; Usman Leme, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2017; 2018; Yusuf and Buhari, 2018). Media reports are released, arguably on daily basis, assessing the conflicts, casualties, and recommending actions for both policy and action. However, critiques argue, and maybe rightly so, that the federal government has not done enough in managing the endemic violent clashes between farmers and herders in many Nigerian communities.

Much of the federal government’s response to these conflicts so far have remained reactionary, namely; deployment of additional police and army units to conflict zones, and launching military operations – Exercise Cat Race and Operation Whirl Stroke – to curb violence in six states. While the first military operation lasted from February 15 to March 31, 2018, the second operation is still ongoing, especially in parts of the northwest and north-central zones, resulting in both military and civilian casualties from the clashes of the military with alleged ‘killer herders’. Conflict resolution mechanisms of dialogues and intervention of traditional leaders in various communities, also seem not to yield the desired result as farmer and herder groups continue to war against each other.

Some of the very timely recommendations, with regards to farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, which will be reviewed in this section, are arguably those made by the International Crisis Group (2018), namely;

1. **Improve Security and End Impunity**

Three measures suggested as crucial for ‘quickly improving’ security arrangements across the conflict zones, include; boosting the numbers of security personnel, particularly in the most vulnerable areas of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states. Not only is it imperative to drastically reduce and redeploy to troubled states, the number of soldiers currently involved in policing activities in the less vulnerable parts of the South East and South West particularly, as well as military and law enforcement details assigned to politicians and privileged few across the country, additional logistics support; in terms of patrol vehicles and especially motorcycles to maneuver difficult rural terrain, gathering and use of intelligence involving closer engagement and communication with locals, are all necessities to which the defense and police sectors should look towards.

Secondly, perpetrators of violence, among both farmer and herder groups, must be held accountable, transparently and objectively. While an independent high-level commission may be another money venture for a few individuals, the ministry of agriculture, in collaboration with state commissions of agriculture, should rather set up committees to investigate major cases of farmer-herder violence since inception of the Buhari-led administration in 2015, and recommend
ways to both perpetuators, accomplice and sponsored accountable, this would also mean expedited trials for such cases.

Thirdly, although disarmament of militias and vigilantes was recommended by the Crisis group, local security structures are very vital in such fragile where residents have arguably been left to the mercy of attackers in the past. Therefore, rather than disarm, comprehensive documentation of arms and training for local vigilante units should be explored. The disarmament program of the Nigeria Police Force, spanning February 22 to March 15, 2018, is laudable to help reed the country of surplus illegal arms in circulation. The security of Nigeria’s land borders should be revamped, and efforts continued against illegal arms production, trafficking and sales.

2. Soften Anti-grazing Laws
Since the rejection of the National Grazing Reserve Bill by Nigeria’s National Assembly in 2016, on the basis that grazing is not a function on the exclusive but the concurrent legislative list, and amidst several criticisms of the bill from Nigerians, state governments appeared to have taken the responsibility of managing the conflicts within their respective states, using anti-open grazing laws. The ‘Prohibition of Cattle and other Ruminants Grazing in Ekiti State Law, No. 4 of 2016’, passed by the Ekiti State House of Assembly and signed into law by the State Governor, Ayo Fayose on 30th October, 2016, marked the beginning of anti-open grazing laws in Nigeria. Since the establishment of the law in Ekiti state, however, anti grazing laws have been enacted in Benue, Edo, and Taraba states, with different levels of enforcement in these states. Benue state however, which employs the use of livestock rangers to drive out herdsmen from much of the state, in the interest of security for the people, has seen heightened attacks from herders, arguably as a response to the seeming insensitive law, which tends to shut the herd out of opportunities to sustain their means of economic livelihood.

Anti-open grazing laws in Nigeria have resulted in several reactions, particularly from the federal government and federal agencies, as well as stakeholders too; many, while praising the initiative, argue that application of such laws in an insensitive manner would only aggravate already existing tensions between groups in these states. Taraba state has paused to amend the provisions of the law to accommodate the interests of herdsmen’ and encourage transition to ranching in phases, which is the direct which others must go to arrive at a workable legislation. Some core areas of this review, identified by the Crisis group (2018) include; land acquisition, procedures for obtaining credit, ranch management training and private-public partnerships in establishing ranches, and sensitization campaigns, among others.

3. Encourage Herder-Farmer Dialogue and Support Local Peace Accords
The relevance of continued dialogue, particularly at the community level, between herdsmen and farmers, cannot be overemphasized. Structures have been established in various states to facilitate dialogue between these groups, namely; the Committee on Reconciliation and Development of Gazetted Grazing Reserves in Adamawa state, the Peace Agency in Plateau state and the multi-level conflict resolution committees in Nasarawa state. Not only should these
structures be strengthened, but more states should be encouraged to establish similar structures. Again, the fourteen-person joint committee established by leaders of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) and Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) to recommend strategies for ending the violence and building peace among them, as well as peace accord signed by leaders of five ethnic groups in Lau local government area of Taraba state with the Fulani, to withdraw militias, jointly comb troubled areas, arrest any person(s) found with arms, and set up a peace and reconciliation committee, are all efforts that must be supported by federal, state and local governments, security agencies, and relevant non-governmental organizations.

4. Implement the National Livestock Transformation Plan

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (2018-2027) is the report and recommendation from the National Conference on the Nigerian Livestock Industry, held in Abuja in September 2017, and attended by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) and the National Economic Council, chaired by Nigeria’s Vice President; Professor Yemi Osibanjo, as well as Governor and other stakeholders. The six-point plan focused on economic investment, conflict resolution, law and order, humanitarian relief, information education and strategic communication; and cross-cutting issues. In addition to detailing some of the challenges facing the livestock industry in Nigeria, the plan must go ahead to ensure that these challenges are addressed as much as possible. Also, it is imperative to ensure that cattle owners and herders accept the plan, as this will largely determine the success of the transformation plan, especially as many cattle owners are still apprehensive about the phased movement from open grazing to ranching, considering the necessary investments involved in this transition. The Crisis Group (2018) stressed the need for ‘realistic options’ such as easy access to soft credit for establishing ranches, as well as training for alternative employment in the livestock production and management value chain, as this will cater for the large number of herders who will be rendered redundant by the transition. Also, it is important that the transformation plan begins with consenting states, as ranches established without local consent could be a catalyst for conflict in the future.

5. Strengthen International Engagement

While it is imperative to for the various diplomatic missions in Nigeria, local and international human rights groups, humanitarian organizations and development agencies to persuade the Nigerian government to act more decisively and transparently with regards to the killings, sustain demands for better protection of communities, increasingly devote more resources to IDPs in camps and communities in Benue and Nasarawa states, as well as offer advice and technical support to the Nigerian authorities, the Crisis Group (2018) recommended that the Nigerian government should take more measures to combat desertification and environmental degradation in the arid and semi-arid north, and better regulate transhumant migration in line with international protocols to which Nigeria is a signatory.

6. Education
Although not one of the recommendations by the Crisis group, evidences of the arguable widening gap between the north and south of Nigeria, with regards to education, reveal that nomadic education is really not enough. Also, the spite of conflicts and devastations resulting from kidnap of school children and housing of Internally Displaced Persons in education facilities, has also not been of positive impact to formal education, particularly in the northeast and northwest regions. In addition to committing more vigorously to nomadic education, which is now several decades old, the government should make, as a matter of priority, recommit to making formal education compulsory for Nigerians in the north, especially those of the Fulani tribe, so as not just to give Fulani youth the basic education necessary for alternative employment, but also to arm them with information and knowledge that would much more rational contributors to national development and reduce the spite of illiteracy among pastoral folks.

CONCLUSION

The farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria have assumed a more devastating and deadlier nature, and continue to take increasing toll on both human and material resources of the state, while also deepening insecurity. There is doubt, that with the general elections around the corner in 2019, security can spiral out of control, if the Nigerian state is not able to adequately manage the challenge of farmer-herder conflicts. While it is imperative to get hand on deck in managing these conflicts – government, civil societies, local and international development agencies, human right organizations and non-governmental organization – it is even more important to get the two groups – farmers and herders – and their leadership to sit longer at the dialogue table and indeed be willing to see an end to the conflicts. Also, those who may be economically benefitting from the prolonged and continued violence should be fished out by a combination of efficient law enforcement and intelligence efforts, and made to face the law. This would require much more than lip service, but a firm resolve of all stakeholders, and swiftly too.

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