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6

**Resurgent Violent Farmer-Herder
Conflicts and 'Nightmares' in
Northern Nigeria**

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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 Nigeria? The descriptive survey method was adopted for the study; gathering primary data from law enforcement officers, village heads, experts, and groups of farmers and herders in select states in Northern Nigeria, and all primary and secondary data were content analyzed.

The study found that politics, ethnicity, religion, economic livelihoods and cultural lifestyles are variables that complicate farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. The study concluded that government, civil societies, non-governmental organisations, 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-Herdsmen, Terrorism, Farmer, Herder, Conflict

Introduction

Communal and group 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) (2018) reported that “in the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 Nigerians have died in violence involving herders and farmers” (p. 4).

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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 Fulani. In the South-south zone, there appears an apparent fear that these nomadic herders 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 the 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 (Biom vs Hausa/Fulani); religious fundamentalism evident in the continued war against Boko Haram and efforts to reclaim several communities ravaged by the Boko Haram terrorists, as well as resettle people displaced from these communities, whose number keeps growing.

Although Oguamanam(2016), Ofuoku and Isife(2009) have attempted to investigate the causes of conflicts between farmers and herders as a consequence of competition over scarce resources; mostly land and water, which influence the livelihood and lifestyle of these groups, only very few scholars, 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 nineteen states and the Federal Capital Territory

(FCT) in the North-west, North-east and North-central geopolitical zones of Nigeria. While the study will focus primarily on the farmer-herdsmen conflicts in the north, we will 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 dimension which has made these conflicts more significant, particularly with regards to their consequences 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 Nigeria are a result of complexities of politics and socio-economics that have characterized the nation for several decades, particularly since Nigeria's independence in 1960. The International Crisis Group (2010p. 1) also confirmed this assertion by observing that conflicts in the north of Nigeria are a "product of several complex and interlocking 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 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 insecurity in the region, despite the Federal government's amnesty programme 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 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 gains. Osah (2014) summarized such activities simply as war-lordism.

In many other parts of the Nigerian state, particularly across much of the Northern Nigerian 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.

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 herders, 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 1970 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 behaviour in an individual, relative deprivation would also likely result in collective violence from a social groups.

Relative deprivation therefore is the difference between what people think they deserve, and what they actually think they can get. Therefore, since, according to Gurr (1970, p.24) "the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members of a collectivity," 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 does not 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 herders have also resulted from sufficiently prolonged and increasingly sharply felt deprivation, especially on the part of the herders, which has pushed them beyond anger to taking up arms against, not just farmers, but the state as a whole. While arguments of discrepancies in what herders 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 to 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.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey 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 Focus-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 herders respectively. Four focus group discussions were held with two groups of farmers and herders each, with 12 participants in each group also purposively selected from Chikun and Kafanchan, as well as Birom and Barkin-Ladi communities in Kaduna and Plateau states, respectively, where there have been recurrent clashes in these states. Data were collected using tape recorders, and later transcribed as well as content analyzed in order to draw conclusions for the study.

Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflict

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; Poverty, underdevelopment and uneven growth, weak governance, lack of transparency, and limited trust in institutions, and prevalence of politicized groups.

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.” 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, among others. The “precipitants” or “accelerators” of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria 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 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.

Manu, Bime, Fon, and Nji(2014) identified the major causes of such conflicts as: competition over land and conflict of culture. Baye (2002), corroborating this view, also observed that encroachment into grazing land, cattle trespass, as well as leadership struggle between the communities are other sources of conflicts. Bello (2013), also enumerated the causes of farmer-herder conflicts as 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 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 bush burning as the causes of conflicts between farmers and herders.

Data from the interviews and FGDs, also mirrored the perception from related literature. Respondents identified the trespassing by herders and their cattle on farmers’ farmlands; cattle rustling; selfishness of farmers who cultivate their farms on grazing fields; political instigation; sheer negligence; illiteracy; government encroachment into farms; stubbornness of Fulani; bigotry, hatred, and anger. Others include obstruction of cattle routes and access to water sources; greed; trouble mongering; among others, as responsible for the onset and rising level of pastoral/ agricultural conflicts. A recurrent factor identified by most interviewees was vengeance. A top official of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association in Southern

Kaduna, in an interview on May 28, 2015, reported:

Somebody whose father and senior brother was killed when he was 15, by the time he is 25years, they would tell him that this is the man who killed your father, he is going to revenge. A Fulani man, if you kill somebody even after 50 years, he can still revenge.

In the same vein, an official at the Divisional Police Headquarter in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State, in an interview on the June 2, 2015, also reported:

Some of the conflicts are intentional by the pastoralist... they are intentional in the sense that sometimes you would see a child under the age of 10 controlling up to 100 cows, it would be difficult for a child of that age to control such a large number of cows. Sometimes too, these pastoralists would intentionally just bring the cows to go and destroy their crops so that there would be problem.

Continuing with this line of explanation, findings from the focused group discussions also revealed mischief and trouble-making as some of the causes of conflicts between farmers and herders, painted a scenario of the herders intentionally grazing their cattle on farm land so as to provoke farmers to retaliate, hence leading to often violent conflicts.

It is evident from the study that most of the cases of herders/farmers conflicts are the accumulation of hatred, vengeance, animosity, and deprivation harbored by the Fulani herders towards the farmers who are mostly indigenous. Although at various levels, ethnicity, religion, cultural lifestyle, economic livelihood, land scarcity, water scarcity and politics, in that order of significance, are factors that explain the endemic and increasingly devastating nature of herders/farmers conflicts, especially within the population under investigation.

Other Complications of the Conflict

The continued and increasing proliferation and usage of small arms and light weapons by civilians have further complicated the conflicts between farmers and herders. Law enforcement officers and the military have continued to make arrests of herders in possession of military weapons, and some of them have even confessed to being members of the Boko Haram terrorist group. A commander of one of the military operations in northern Nigeria for instance, in a report by the Vanguard (2018), asserted that about 40 herdsman, some of who were armed with AK-47 assault rifles and approximately 3,000 cattle at KwatanGyemu community in Benue state were ambushed by troops. The commander asserted further that “troops engaged the armed herdsman, who fled using cows as shields. Some of the cows were killed while some of the herdsman escaped into the surrounding bushes with gunshot wounds. Punch (2016), in an earlier but related report, stated that the Nigeria Police had declared a “war” on herders bearing arms, noting that this action was imperative “following allegations that Fulani herdsman 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 for this study, law enforcement officers confirmed the use of sophisticated weapons in the conflicts. One of the key officers in the Plateau state Police command, in an interview on June 2, 2015, asserted:

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 recovered 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 also in the Divisional Police Headquarter in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State, in an interview on June 2, 2015, also 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, as the focus group discussion with a group of farmers revealed that the herders had more access to sophisticated weapons than the farmers, as the Cattle made the herders appear more economically buoyant than the farmers. The farmers claimed that the herders had the option of selling their Cattle and raising sufficient funds to purchase such sophisticated weapons, but the farmers didn't have such collateral. Also, the farmers argued that the mode of attack by the herders depended on the community in question; when the herders got to weak communities, rather than using weapons which would arouse the attention of the inhabitants, they would resort to breaking in, vandalizing properties, macheting people and setting buildings aflame, especially when the herders are not able to gain entrance into the building.

From the study it is evident that farmers are more vulnerable in the incidence of clashes with herders, 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 herders 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 shot severally, but only sustained injuries.

Also, the nomadic nature of the herders, the porous Nigerian borders and arguably inadequate and inefficient border security are other factors that further complicate the conflict and 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 increasing the likelihood of influx of members of terrorist cells into the country to participate in the conflicts. Punch (2016) reported Senator Heineken Lokpobiri; Nigeria's Minister of State for Agriculture asserting, in a speech to the Nigerian Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development:

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 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 seems to legitimize 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).

Garba Shehu, President Buhari's Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, reported on the President's assets to *The Vanguard* (2015) 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 narratives in Nigeria over the conflicts between farmers and herders and possible strategies for resolution. This has resulted in arguments like those of Ajibo et.al (2018, p. 4) who assert 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 have 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 Northern Nigeria, 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 has become Nigeria's gravest security challenge, claiming far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency. Ajibo et.al (2018) corroborated this view by observing that the violent conflicts involving farmers and herders have not only spread southwards to the central and southern zones and have escalated in recent years and threatened the country's security, stability and peace, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, as they resulted in an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016 alone. Putting this side by side Gbaradi's (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 549 deaths in 2017; many were 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 spiral upward than 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 400,000 – an estimated 176,000 in Benue, about 100,000 in Nasarawa, over 100,000 in Plateau, about 19,000 in Taraba and an unverifiable 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 herders displaced from communities in Benue state cannot find enough fodder for their herds in neighboring 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 herders. 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 (International Crisis Group, 2018, 2017; Yusuf and Buhari, 2018; UsmanLeme, 2017;Oguamanam, 2016;Ofuoku and Isife, 2009). 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.

Two, 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 hold both perpetrators, accomplices and sponsors accountable, this would also mean expedited trials for such cases.

Three, although disarmament of militias and vigilantes was recommended by the Crisis Group, local security structures are very vital in such fragile situations, 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 programme 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 for 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 October 30, 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 herders 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 herders 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 herders and encourage transition to ranching in phases, which is the direction 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 herders 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 organisations.

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 Osinbanjo, as well as Governors 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

It is imperative for the various diplomatic missions in Nigeria, local and international human rights groups, humanitarian organisations and development agencies to persuade the Nigerian government to act more decisively and transparently with regards to the many killings in this region. The government must also be encouraged to sustain demands for better protection of communities, increasingly devote more resources to IDPs in camps and communities in Benue and Nasarawa states, while remaining open to advice and technical support from relevant agencies and organisations. The Crisis Group (2018) also further 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 transhuman 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 extent 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, 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 make them much more rational contributors to national development and reduce the spite of illiteracy among pastoral folks.

Conclusion

The farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria has assumed a more devastating and deadlier nature and continues to take increasing toll on both human and material resources, while also deepening insecurity. While it is imperative to get all hands on deck in managing these conflicts – government, civil societies, local and international development agencies, human right organisations 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 to 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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