

## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO FARMER- HERDER CONFLICT IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA: A STUDY OF BENUE AND NASARAWA STATES, 2012-2016

**Ahmed Usman (PhD)**

Department of Political Science  
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State  
Phone: 08036359285  
Email: [uthmaan01@yahoo.com](mailto:uthmaan01@yahoo.com),

**Ahmed Tijjani Mohammed**

Registry Department  
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State  
Phone: 07067733217  
Email: [ahmedtijjanim@gmail.com](mailto:ahmedtijjanim@gmail.com)

**Corresponding Author: Ahmed Usman**

### **Abstract**

*Farmers and Pastoralists are two principal land resource users primarily involved in crop production and animal husbandry respectively. Historically, the two groups had hitherto co-existed in all manners of complementarities. However, effects of environmental degradation had forced the pastoralists out of their usual traditional ecological zones, migrating south-ward to the North-Central and Southern Nigeria in search of greener pasture. This phenomenon, combined with other factors such as population increase ignited a destructive competition for land resources, leading to the present perennial clashes between the two warring groups. Thus, the Nigerian government has severally been accused of being tepid, lackadaisical and indifference in the response to the conflict. Hence, this study assesses the level of the responses by the Nigerian government to the conflict in Benue and Nasarawa states in North-Central Nigeria. Survey research method was adopted with 350 questionnaires randomly administered to respondents in the purposively selected affected communities. In addition, Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion techniques were equally employed to obtain empirical information. The secondary data was*

*sourced from array of published documents including Journals, reports and newspapers. The quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used to analyze the data obtained from the field. The findings reveal that the conflict has not been adequately responded to, by the Government. The study therefore recommends settlement schemes (grazing reserves/ranches) as viable options for a more sustainable solution to the conflict.*

**Keywords:** Farmers, Herder, Government, Assessment, Response

### **Introduction**

Clashes and skirmishes between Herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria, is one of land resource-based conflicts which has caused analysts and policy makers in Nigeria sleepless night. For instance, over the last twenty-five years these clashes occurred severally, between 1997 and 2010, there were a total of 18 reported attacks, with most of them taking place in North Eastern Nigeria. Thus, the four-year period between 2011 and 2015 saw an escalation with 371 incidents (Nwanze in Financial Nigeria, 2017). The pervasiveness of the clashes in the recent years is, indeed quite alarming with high rate in the North-Central.

According to the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017), this conflict is primarily caused by the environmental resource scarcity that induced movements of herders from the northern part of the country southward. Some scholars such as Okoli et al., Odoh & Chigozie as well as Abbas, cited in Muhammed et al. (2015:24) relate the conflict with “global climate change. To them, this was largely responsible for forcing pastoralists to move southwards in search of pasture for their livestock”. Similarly, ASUU (2018:1) posited that “severe changes in climatic conditions which triggered a large hunger for land and consequently, hardship in the availability of feed for cattle was a significant causal factor”. In a closely related narration with the preceding views, Gambari et al (2018:10) state that:

In the far north, the impact of desertification as well as the crisis of energy, which has resulted in deforestation, coupled with climatic uncertainty and lower rainfall have made it more difficult to sustain increasing populations, pushing many farmers and pastoralists with livestock southwards. This has happened gradually over a period of decades-with an apparent increase over the past decade-and has added to pressure on land and water in central and southern Nigeria.

Eromo cited in Idowu (2017) maintains that an official report in Nigeria indicates that more than 35 percent of land area of 923,768 square kilometers is threatened by desertification affecting the livelihoods of more than 40 million people. Besides the changes in climatic conditions which is seen as a natural phenomenon, it is imperative to note that, there are Man-induced factors such as weak government policy and institutional frameworks particularly the case of Land tenure system in Nigeria, increased large scale agricultural investments, increased land

occupation by private individuals due to the population increase etc. all these have combined to make land not just scarce but competitive. Tenuche and Olarewaju, (2009) have opined that essentially, the land tenure system in vogue in Nigeria is a precipitation of farmers-herdsmen conflict. Thus, taken account of these multiple factors, ASUU (2018:2) remarks correctly that:

The farmers-pastoralist conflict is an outcome of a combination of environmental ecological crisis, and socio-historically derived problems which the ruling class of Nigeria, in its different wings, has been manipulating to suit its economic and political goals.

Consequently, Adeoye (2017:130) remarks that “farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria has demonstrated a high potential to exacerbate insecurity and food crisis, particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts occur, with reverberating consequences nationwide”. The two conflicting groups however, are apparently relevant to the productive sectors of the Nigerian economy. In the words of Blench (2004: viii) “both are food producers and both compete for a similar resource”. According to Idowu (2017), the incessant clashes has widened the scope of the conflict with deadly incidents being increasingly reported in the affected areas of the country, raising fears that the violence could widen ethnic chauvinism and threaten the brittle unity that exist among Nigeria’s diverse ethnic groups.

The Nigerian government by way of response had attempted to mitigate the problem from the root, particularly through its policy and programme of settlement schemes. Although the settlement scheme was a very initiative of Khalifa Muhammad Bello, the son of Usman Danfodio which was replicated by the colonial administrations and upheld by the Northern Regional Government. However, the successive post colonial administrations have also at one point or the other developed programmes that would impact on viable

solution to the protracted impasse between the nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study assesses the level of government's responses to the conflict with specific reference to Benue and Nasarawa states in North-Central Nigeria.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The first effort at mitigating the conflict between Farmers and Pastoralists from the root was the establishment of the Northern Region Grazing Reserves Law of 1965 (Awogbade, 1987). Although efforts were made in the past during the pre and colonial eras to settle the nomadic Fulani but, there was less or no significant impact. The law however, provided an impetus for the government of northern region to establish about 417 grazing reserves and demarcation of Livestock routes (Burtali) in the northern states (Ibrahim, 2017). The question arising from this therefore is to what extent these grazing reserves have been effectively managed?

Furthermore, the establishment of National Commission for Nomadic Education in 1989 through decree 41 now replaced as Nomadic Education Act, Cap No 20 laws of the federation was another move in addressing the problem of pastoral Nomadism in Nigeria. The main goal of the commission was to economically and socially integrate nomadic pastoralists into national life, through the provision of relevant, functional and mobile basic education and livelihood skills provision (Kwaja&Bukola, 2018). The programme was designed to help the pastoralists modernize their techniques of rearing cattle to maximize their economic potential, including dairy processing and marketing, animal vaccinations, and modern herding techniques (Kwaja &Bukola, 2018). This programme could not achieve the desired objective due to the lackadaisical attitude of Nigerian government in the implementations and executions of its programmes.

It has always been the dominant feature of the Nigerian Government while responding to violent crises to deploy security agents in the trouble spots or areas. Hence this approach is a temporary and palliative measure in resolving security challenges in Nigeria. The approach however does not seem to provide permanent and lasting solutions to the problem of security in the country. For instance, in Plateau State, a special Task Force-Operation safe Haven (STF-OSH) has been deployed since 2001 to restore law and order. Paradoxically, the security challenge in Plateau State still persists despite the presence of special security forces in the state for a long period of time. Also, due to the recent clashes between the farmers and herders in states such as Benue, Kaduna, and Taraba, Chief of Defense Staff General Gabriel Olonisakin on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2016 announced the deployment of "Operation Accord" to put an end to the colossal killings in those areas (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The establishment of Great Green Wall Agency (GGWA) by the Federal Government in 2013 was a response to the African Union on Great Green Wall Initiative introduced in 2007. The Initiative however, was a response to the economic, political and security challenges posed by climate variability and environmental degradation in African continent. It set out to create an 8000km (nearly 5000 miles) of trees along the southern Sahel, accompanied by rural development and ecosystem management initiatives, to combat the encroaching desertification of the Sahara desert that has been responsible for the migration of herders from the Northern part of the country to the North-Central region in search of water and pasture (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Another mechanism put in place by the Federal Government in addressing the lingering conflict between farmers and herdsman in Nigeria, was the Inter-ministerial technical committee alongside a political committee on Grazing reserves set

up by President Good Luck in April, 2014. The political committee was chaired by the then Executive Governor of Benue State Gabriel Suswam. However, the committee resolved at reviving and improving all the existing grazing reserves and cattle routes that have been encroach upon by farmers. To this end, the committee recommended for a release of N100 billion to the 36 states of the federation by the Central Bank of Nigeria exclusively for the stated purpose, yet no state has been able to construct a ranch, reserve or address the issue of stock route. Although, the House of Representative had since 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 2017 set up a committee to investigate the State Governments on allegations that the funds have been looted for a time frame of four weeks but a report to that effect has not been published (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The formulation of a “comprehensive livestock development plan” by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) in the year 2015 under the Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari was another measure to curb the incessant conflict between the herders and farmers in Nigeria. However, in August of the same year, the committee constituted by the Ministry recommended short, medium and long term strategies including development of Grazing reserves and stock routes. However, when the Government announced its plan on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2016 to map grazing areas in all the states, some Governors particularly from North-Central and Southern extraction opposed the plan which they saw as favoring Fulani herders (International Crisis Group, 2017).

However, following several meetings by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the National Economic Council in the year 2017, the Federal Government came up with a new plan tagged ‘the National Livestock Transformation Plan.’ The plan was built on six key pillars: economic investment, conflict resolution,

law and order, humanitarian relief, information, education and strategic communication; and cross-cutting issues (Adeyemo, 2018).

Accordingly, among the Federal Government initiatives on how to end the lingering conflict between the farmers and herdsmen in the country is the controversial Ruga Settlement Scheme. The programme was approved by President Muhammadu Buhari in May, 2019 with about eleven states indicating interests to pilot the scheme. The states include Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba, Katsina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara and Niger (Friday et’al, 2019). According to the permanent secretary, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Mr. Mohammed Umar, the Ruga settlement will attract a lot of investment to Nigeria and it is our belief that in the next five years, each Ruga settlement will provide nothing less than 2000 employment opportunities (Friday et’al, 2019).

At the level of state governments, the responses vary perhaps largely due to the different nature of the conflicts. The responses of the state governments are more of ad-hoc and reactionary the same as the federal Government. They are more interested in setting up commissions of inquiries as well as peace and reconciliatory dialogue committees. These are usually post conflict resolution mechanisms. For instance, in 1997, the Gombe State government set up a farmers and herdsmen conflict Resolution committee (International Crisis Group, 2017) and his eminence Sultan of Sokoto’s Committee on Tiv farmers/ Fulani cattle Rearers Relationship in Benue state (Ephraim, 2014).

It is quite unfortunate that there have not been any serious measures taken by state governments in Nigeria to mitigate the long standing feuds between the farmers and pastoralists not until few years back when some state governments began to enact laws

regulating open range grazing. For instance the FCT has banned rearing of animals in the major cities while states such as Benue, Taraba, Edo and Ekiti have banned all open grazing in the states.

### **Structural Functionalism**

According to Gabriel Almond one of the chief proponents of Structural-functional approach, every political system performs certain function (Francis, 1999). What then political system means? Simply defined by Max Weber, a Political system refers to “a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Varma, 2007: 210). Political system therefore, performs numerous functions as espoused by Almond, the input functions comprises interest articulation and interest aggregation while the output functions consist of rule-making, rule-application and rule adjudication. Also, the function of political communication and system maintenance were carried out by the political system (Francis, 1999).

Thus, inferring from structural functional approach, it is expected of the Nigerian government to address the lingering farmers-herdsmen conflict from the institutional point of view. The legislative organ in collaboration with executive branch possesses the constitutional power to bring a lasting solution to the lingering problem of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. The theory emphasized the capacity, ability and the will of a political system in terms of maintenance of stability in the political, economic and social systems through striking a balance between input and output mechanisms. The Nigerian state as a sovereign entity therefore, has the legitimate power to intervene in the conflict between and among different groups in the country with the aim of amicable resolutions to the conflict at stake.

Thus, persistent conflict between farmers and the pastoralists in Nigeria has by and large exposes the weak status of the Nigerian state in terms of responsiveness and responsibility

of a government. The Nigerian government has practically demonstrated its inability to handle the crisis situation of farmer-herder conflict and this signifies that the system is not properly functioning.

### **Methodology**

The data for the study were obtained from two principal sources namely primary and secondary. For the primary source, information related to the efforts of the Governments in tackling the crisis in the affected communities in Benue and Nasarawa States were obtained from the Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions conducted among all the categories of people such as Traditional Rulers, Ardo of Fulani, Local Government Officials, Women and Youth Groups. Also, in order to augment and strengthen the result of the findings, field Household questionnaire survey was carried out only among the residents of the affected non-Fulani communities. This is because reaching out to Fulani on the household basis was very difficult, considering the fact that great number of them had left the areas only the few ones around were interviewed and engaged in the focus group discussion. The secondary data was sourced from an array of academic published documents such as reports, journals, and newspapers of which some were physically accessed and others retrieved online.

The sampling size for the study was difficult to be determined hence purposive sampling technique was adopted. To this end, two affected Local Government Areas of Benue and Nasarawa States were purposively selected. The Local Government Areas were Agatu in Benue State and Nasarawa in Nasarawa State and the reason for the selection was largely informed by the incessant clashes between Agatu community and Fulani in the two respective states. However, Agatu LGA has ten (10) Council Wards and Nasarawa LGA has four (4) affected Council Wards which include Loko, Udeni, Guto-Aisa and Tunga-Bakono. The



above stated councils wards are the areas where Agatu speaking tribes can be found in Nasarawa Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. Thus, twenty five (25) questionnaires were randomly distributed among the respondents on household basis in each of the fourteen (14) council wards and all the distributed questionnaires were

returned totaling three hundred and fifty (350).

The study adopts triangulation or mixed method of data analysis in which information obtained or collected from questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively while data obtained from Interview and Focus group discussion were qualitatively analyzed.

## **Results and Discussion**

**Table 1: Demographic Data of the Respondents**

<b>State</b>		
Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Benue	250	71.4
Nasarawa	100	28.6
Total	350	100.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	321	91.7
Female	29	8.3
Total	350	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 30	121	34.6
31 – 40	123	35.1
41 – 50	57	16.3
51 – 60	43	12.3
61 and above	6	1.7
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

**Table 2: Respondents' views on seriousness and determination of the president Good luck led administrations in responding to Famer-Herder crisis**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very serious and determined	119	34
Serious and determined	132	37.7
Not at all	99	28.3
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

Table shows the rating of the President Good-luck led administration in responding to the lingering crisis between the Famers and herdsmen. However, 34% of the respondents felt that Good-luck administration was very serious and determined in responding to the crisis during the period 2011-2015. Accordingly, 37.7% of the respondents were of the view that the administration was not

very serious and determined in responding to the crisis under same period while 28.3% of the respondents did not identified at all with any effort of the administration in tackling the menace. Thus, in a focus group discussion organized in Obagaji the Agatu LGA headquarters, the participants differ in opinion concerning the effort made by Good-luck administration in responding to the

crisis. Although they unanimously agreed that the only effort of the administration was

mere deployment of the security personnel at the time of clashes between the two groups.

**Table 3: Respondents' view on seriousness and determination of the president Muhammadu Buhari in responding to Famer-Herder crisis in Benue and Nasarawa States**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very serious and determined	181	51.7
Serious and determined	44	12.6
Not at all	125	35.7
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

Similarly, table 3 also depicts the respondents' rating of the present administration since its inception in 2015 so far in responding to Famer-Herder crisis. Thus according to the above table, 51.7% of the respondents believe that the President Buhari led administration has been very serious and determined in responding to the crisis between the pastoralists and the Agatu farming community. Equally, 12.6% of the respondents believe that the government of president Buhari has only shows signs of seriousness and determination in responding to the crisis while 35.7% of the respondents believe that the administration did not show

any seriousness and determination in combating the menace at all.

However, in an interview with one of the youth leaders, who believed that, the president Muhammadu Buhari led administration appeared to be more sincere and honest in addressing the problem. This is because the administration has intensified efforts in providing security personnel such as military and mobile police men in all of the communities. Also, the federal Government has established an Air force base in Obagaji, the Agatu Local Government Area headquarter for surveillances.

**Table 4: Respondents' knowledge on whether there were prompt responses in the trouble spots by the Nigerian security personnel at the time of the clashes between farmers and herdsmen since the beginning of this administration of Muhammadu Buhari**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	192	54.9
No	145	41.4
No idea	13	3.7
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

Table 4 above indicates that 55.6% of the respondents believe that in the present administration of president Buhari the response of the security personnel to the trouble sports in the crisis ridden communities at the time of clashes were prompt. On a contrary, 40.3% of the respondents have said otherwise indicating none or late arrival of the security personnel at the time of clashes between the two groups

while 4.1% which is highly insignificant do not even have the idea on whether there were prompt responses or not by the security men in the affected areas at the time of clashes between the groups.

Further still, in a focus group discussion with the youth wing of the Agatu community, when this issue was raised, majority of the participants commended the effort of the Nigerian security personnel most especially

for their prompt response at the time of clashes particularly in this present administration of president Muhammadu Buhari although few of them differ.

More so, in an interview with the head of the youth wing of the Fulani group, equally the

security personnel were praised for prompt response. The head of the Fulani youth thus acknowledges the early presence of the military most of the time of the clashes and according to him that has been very helpful in reducing the rate of casualty.

**Table 5: Respondents' satisfaction with the peace and reconciliatory committees set up by the two state governments of Nasarawa and Benue in respect to the crisis**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very satisfied	98	28
Satisfied	118	33.7
Not satisfied at all	134	38.3
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

The Peace and Reconciliation committee was set up by the government of Benue and Nasarawa states towards finding a lasting solution to the crisis between herdsman and Agatu farming community in the two respective states with Hon. Akpa Idub as Chairman and Ardo Buderu as Vice Chairman. However, the committee met on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 together with the Governors of the two states and their deputies where both of the warring parties presented their grievances. To this end therefore, table

5 indicates that only 28.% of the respondents were very satisfied with the committee and 33.7 % was only satisfied while 38.3 % was not satisfied at all. This therefore shows that only few of the members of the community were happy with the outcome of the peace accord. More so, discussing the issue with some members of the community in a focus group, the unanimous view was that with all that had discussed and resolved in the meeting, yet the crisis continues and as such, the committee was discredited.

**Table 6: Respondents' acceptance of the open grazing prohibition law as a lasting solution to the Farmer-Herder crisis in Benue and Nasarawa**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	257	73.5
No	87	24.8
No idea	6	1.7
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

The Government of Benue State has on November, 2017 signed the open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law for the purpose of regulating open range grazing in the state. In view of this, table 6 hence depicts that 73.5% of the respondents felt satisfied with the law. However, against the

preceding opinions, is the view of the 24.8 % of the respondents who considered the law as obnoxious, anti-people, unconstitutional and above all against the fundamental human rights which arbitrarily restricted the movement of certain group of people who are equally citizens of the country.

**Table 7: Respondents' satisfaction with the post crisis response by the Nigerian government in terms of relief materials given to the victims in the affected communities**



Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very satisfied	65	18.6
Satisfied	150	42.9
Not satisfied at all	135	38.5
Total	350	100.0

**Source: Field Data, 2018**

Table 7 shows that only 18.6% of the respondents were very satisfied with the post crisis response by the government, while 42.9% of the respondents were only satisfied and 38.5% were not satisfied at all. This depicts that very few people were overwhelmingly impressed. In specific terms the former Chairman of the Agatu Local Government, stated that beyond deployment of the security personnel to the trouble areas by the Federal Government, the Benue State Government provided the sum of twenty million (#20, 000000.00) while Nasarawa State Government gave a sum of ten million (#10, 000000.00) naira to Agatu communities and each house hold in the affected communities got four boundless of roughing zincs from the money. More so, building materials were equally provided by the Federal Government to the affected communities even though the materials were not enough to take care of all that have been destroyed.

### Conclusion

Inferring from the information generated on government's repose to farmers-herders conflict in Benue and Nasarawa states, it is quite acknowledged that Government at both federal and state levels has indeed responded to the conflict. However, despite the responses by the governments, the crisis persisted. This therefore, indicated that the responses were grossly inadequate hence it is in this regard that all hands must be on deck to ensure that the two warring groups co-exist peacefully. Thus, Government has the major role to play in ensuring this peaceful and sustainable co-existence between the two warring groups. Consequently, as urgent as possible, the Federal Government in collaboration with State governments and other relevant

stakeholders must intensify efforts to judiciously implement the initiated National Livestock Development and Transformation Plan for both ranches development and Ruga settlements as the states government may wish to opt.

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