

**FARMER-HERDERS CONFLICTS AND NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC
SUSTENANCE: TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS
APPROACH FOR ENDURING PEACE AND STABILITY**

By

**PROF. OLAYEMI D. AKINWUMI, KANA, A.A. EBINI PH. D, OYIBODE GABRIEL C.E. PH. D,
ERUNKE CANICE E Ph.D**

Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Email: erunke@gmail.com. Tel: 08065595472

&

MUSA FARUK BOYI KURAM

Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, Maiduguri, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this study is to examine the nexus between herders-herders conflicts and the extent to which the evolution of stakeholder's approach to the crisis can enhance enduring democratic consolidation, peace and stability in Nigeria. The unending clash between transhumant herders and peasant farmers, which has persisted for some time now, is believed to have negative after-effects on the nation's democratic project. This is in view of several lives that have been lost, rising cost of food items, excruciating poverty, increasing rate of destitution and myriads of other social problems. This trend has challenged the notion of national integration and the question propping in the minds of critics is whether the Nigerian state can survive this onslaught in the face of escalating conflicts. This study is an exploration of existing works of scholars and experts in the broader discipline of herders-farmers crisis. Essentially, the study relies on secondary sources of data collection for investigation. The study found that the predisposing factors to the conflict is mixed and finds expression in the nature of Nigerian political system, apparent dearth of political will to tackle conflicts as well as a retinue of other socio-economic and cultural variables known to be at the centre of the crisis. The paper sums up by suggesting ways through which the ensuing herders-farmers imbroglio can be mitigated so as to ensure the consolidation and sustenance of the nation's democratic endeavors in the 21st century and beyond.

Keywords: Conflict, Democracy, Farmers, Herders, Peace, Sustainability, Stability.

Introduction

Since the twilight of 2017 and 2018, the tempo of conflicts between nomadic farmers and transhumant herders, usually known in public discourse as "Fulani herdsmen" has heightened substantially. The notoriety or otherwise of the violent attacks, killings and displacement of rural communities due to increasing skirmishes between the two dominant forces have doubled markedly (Adibe, 2020). To many scholars and practitioners, especially studies having to do with emerging political developments in Nigeria, the fear has been that the rising tides of conflicts namely, farmers-herders crisis could have very devastating socio-economic, political, and cultural consequences on not only the affected communities, but also on the entirety of the Nigerian state system. It was Kwaghga (2018) who alluded that aside from the exponential insecurity situation this conflict has brought about in the country, there are also other strands of socio-economic implications. This phenomenon, among other things, has driven the monumental upsurge of food insecurity and food shortages, displacement of large cache electoral constituencies and of persons eligible enough to vote during general elections; created lack of access to education, critical social infrastructures such as good roads networks, electricity, housing, health, among others. To a very large extent, majority of electorates, if not all, have been practically disenfranchised from their respective communities where the voting opportunities are statutorily domiciled.

Akinloye (2020) has reported that between 2017 and 2020, the transhumant pastoralist herders have conducted well over 654 separate attacks. These attacks is believed to have engulfed more than

2,500 who have died in the process, while about 250 plus persons have been kidnapped along sides. Buttressing the position put forward by Akinloye (2020) has claimed that herdsmen assaults against farming communities have not only been regular, but also systematic and targeted, and that the prevalence of conflicts in this context appears to have some form of starched-earth campaigns as well as ethnic underbelly as major push factor.

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2018) averred that the prevalence of violent attacks are common around Nigerian states such as Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa and many other neighboring states (Niger state inclusive). Again, the ICG has stated further that some of the states of the federation such as Adamawa, Taraba, Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara, have until recently been very peaceful. The resurgence of herdsmen and the accompanying clashes between the latter and farmers is what still a big puzzle for scholarly investigations is.

What is even more disturbing in the attacks by herdsmen is the burgeoning increase in the spate of human displacements. Sunday (2021) has averred that, following repeated attacks in Benue state, for instance, no fewer than 600,000 persons and residents have been displaced across the three senatorial zones of the state. The result of displacement such as this is evident in the upsurge of a number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps scattered all over Benue state. Corroborating what Sunday (2021) has claimed about the incessant menace of herdsmen attacks and the corresponding manifestation of artificial camps meant to help give succor to victims, Shior (2021) cited in Sunday (2021) has insisted that statistics of IDP camps are enormous. According to Shior, said inter alia that:

We have carried out a general statistic of IDPs in all the communities in Benue state.... The number of local farmers that were displaced and the camps that house them is peaked at over 500,000. However, due to the numerous fresh attacks on our communities, the statistics we conducted recently shows an astronomical increase to around 100,000 displaced persons. There are still others that have not been captured at the moment. Nonetheless, I can tell you that we have over 600,000 at the moment (emphasis added) (2021, n.p).

In consonance with the writings of Sunday (2021) and the further insinuations made by Shior (2021), Duru (2016) had earlier documented that nearly 7000 residents were earlier displaced by the transhumant herdsmen in Benue, especially the Agatu communities. The most affected areas in Agatu include Akokalo, Akwu, Ocholonya, Adagbo, Ugboku and Aila communities. Again, the after-effect of the displacement in the aforementioned rural settlements have given rise to IDP camps in places such as the Ochi Idoma square in Otukpo, Ugbokpo, Adoka, Ojantele, Ikobi and many other adjoining communities.

To many scholars and public analysts, it does appear that herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria are more common around the North-Central and some parts of the North West geo-political zones. Hassan (2022) for example, has indicated that in Southern Kaduna axis of Kaduna state, well over 148 rural settlements housing a retinue of peasant farmers have come under the sledge hammer of cattle herders, while 200,000 of residents have been displaced. Empirical evidence from the works of Hassan-Wuyo (2022) has shown that farming communities such as Kamaru in Chawai Chifdom, Kaura local council; Ungwar Rimi, Ungwar Magaji, Ungwan Makara, Kurmin Masara, Zamandabo, among others. In all of these attacks by herdsmen, several lives have been lost, while properties worth colossal sums of monies have gone down the drain in the wake of the pandemonium.

In the same token, Bello and Abdullahi (2021) have maintained that conflicts involving herdsmen and peasants in Zamfara state are not new. The crisis has spanned several years and has engulfed several lives, population displacement, low agricultural production and/or productivity, low voter turnout during general elections (ostensibly because of fear), among others. In tune with what Bello and Abdullahi (2021), Kugelman (2012) had earlier warned that herdsmen-farmers imbroglio, if not properly checked, could snowbell into not just shortages of food infrastructure in the affected places. He went ahead to also deduce that conflict of this magnitude has the potential to affect the national economy, erode democratic dividends and bring about mutual suspicion. What has happened in Zamfara state largely is the extreme

cases of attacks on farming communities, rustling and/or stealing of cattle in droves and some cases, outright massacre of rural residents in their quantum numbers.

It can be said here that owing to the violent flare-ups occasioned by quite a number of reprisal attacks by host communities, the menace has skyrocketed. The multiplier effects of reprisals have grown sporadically and has since expended in scope. It goes therefore without saying that all well-known settlements in Nigeria where there are herdsman has now been affected in the cross fire. As it were, the conflict is being felt around states like Katsina, Sokoto, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo states, respectively.

In this study, conscious efforts will be made to examine concepts of conflict, the underlying theoretical underpinnings relevant to the study of conflict, the predisposing factors to herdsman-farmers conflicts and the nature of government interventions put in place to check the conflicts. First, let us examine the concept of herders-farmers conflict as is applied to this study investigation.

Conceptual Issues

Conflict

The concept of conflict has defied unanimity in terms of conceptualization and explanation. Scholars of international political studies have, however, attempted to define the concept differently and based on their different shades of opinion, and depending on their respective ideological leanings (Schwarz, Axt & Milososki, 2006).

Singer and Small (1972) have defined conflict as a dispute involving individual and the state where the latter is seen as superintendent in the course of disputes. To Singer and Small, conflict in this sense could mean the engagement of two separate forces – the state and non-state entities, where the outcome of conflicts goes in favor of the state in the event of violence and injuries as the case may be. This definition has however been criticized as being too simplistic, and hence, lacks the flavor that rightly qualities for conflict. What Singer and Small (1972) seem to be saying is to consider conflict as mere superiority of one entity over the other.

In the same vein, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) cited in Dwan and Holmvist (n.d) has viewed conflict differently. According to SIPRI, conflict unarguably, is considered as the use of armed forces – military or paramilitary, in the events of uprisings, usually leading to deaths. This definition again, appears mechanical, and hence, places premium on complex system of military dictatorship and the inordinate application and use of fire arms in every conflict situation. In the opinion of this study, there can be conflict without bloodshed. Conflicts take the form of different interests, ideology, narratives and arguments. To talk about conflict as necessarily a function of rancor and acrimony is largely unscientific, and hence, do not sufficiently address the question of dialogue and other varieties that could ensure peace and tranquility in a complex society such as Nigeria.

Herdsman-Farmers

In political discourse, the concept of herdsman or herders and farmers are intertwined in their usages. Herders or herdsman refers to a set of pastoralist semi-nomadic cattle rearers, especially of the Fulani extraction whose primary mainstay is keeping and rearing of livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys, chicken; in some cases, they farm yams, cassava, maize, sorghum, beans, etc, as additional means of sustenance) (Okoro, 2018). As part of their economic struggles for survival, the herdsman are known to be always on the move from one region, state and country to another. Essentially, they seek for greenery and lush vegetations, water and other critical consumables for their animals. In spite of these starling qualities, quite a number of scholarly writings such as the works of Oghuvbu and Oghuvbu (2020) have criticized the supposedly noble objectives of the herdsman. The grouse of some of these scholars point to the fact that cattle herding and other animals has taken a whole new dimension. The problem with this evaluation, among other thing, is the way and manner foreign cattle herders seem to

have infiltrated the Nigerian state. These mercenaries, in collaboration with resident herders in Nigeria have in the main become a huge albatross to the collective peace of the Nigerian state. Evidence from various sources prove that the herds now graze on people's farms at will, mow or cut down crops owned by farmers, rape women in and outside of farming communities; kill and maim whoever comes their way, among other heinous acts of criminalities. To Oghuvbu et al (2020), it does appear that the general interest and expectations of the herders are more at variance with those of the farmers. This is demonstrated in the incessant attacks being orchestrated by the herdsmen on the farming settlements in some parts of the country.

On the other hand, Okoro (2018) has noted that farmers, who are usually and characteristically associated with agricultural production and crop management, are groups of persons who are actively or otherwise engaged in the cultivation, nurturing and production of food crops, either for consumption or for cash purposes. The concept of farmers to a large extent encompasses all men and women who raise crops, vineyard orchards, livestock and poultry. The problem with this concept is that farming activities in Nigeria today is holistic, and involves a wide spectrum of the rich, the average persons and social groups, the power elites, serving or retired military and para-military personnel, cooperative groups, teachers and so on. It will therefore be explicitly wrong to ascribe farming and all it entails to rural settlers only. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the work will dwell more on rural peasants. These groups, rather than the other power elites who also engage in farming are, and indeed, have become the most vulnerable endangered species when we talk of herders-farmers conflict as in the case of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

In conflict discourses, a number of theories have been used or applied to be able to drive home the core debates within the context of evaluation of political phenomena. Popoola, Brimah and Olawale (2020) for example adopted the conflict thesis as underpinning where he viewed herders-farmers clashes as an off-shoot of conflicts. Okoro (2018) on his part attempted his theoretical explanation of conflict as a product of frustration and aggression as earlier propounded by John Dollard, Neal Miller and many other conflict scholars. Again, Kwaghga (2018) centered his own perspective on the structural functionalist framework as basis for explanation. While all of these theoretical standpoints can be said to be of immense importance in the understanding of conflicts, they have however, failed to explain the push factor which is more or less a consistent driving force to the escalation of conflicts between contending forces (inclusive of herdsmen and farmers) in the Nigerian state of late.

From the classic works of Stanojoska and Petrevski (2012) the push theory is mixed. Thus, the explanation of the push theory posits that a number of factors congeal to stir up herdsmen-farmers conflicts. To Stanojoska and Petreveski, agree that the forces of globalization, global economic crises, political uncertainties, terrorism and terror activities, climate change, ethnic factors as well as ideological war fares, all congeal to drive increasing conflicts, especially around sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria inclusive). Of all these socio-economic and environmental challenges, it can be said that globalization lies at the heart of the discussion. This is possible probably because, globalization and all it portends has changed the way people interact, behave and relate with the outside world. Accordingly, the forces of globalization has intensified and increased people's consciousness and awareness about their socio-economic fortunes, how to change their circumstances, move to other favorable environments and take possession of opportunities in relation to available natural resources in the new environments. The accompanying opportunities for migration by persons and groups coupled with the changes in group interests an ideology has primarily been the basis for conflicts.

As a corollary to what Stanojoska and Petrevski (2012), Adibe (2020) have noted that the trajectory of migration of herdsmen spanned over several centuries. From historical standpoint, nomadic pastoralists have encountered challenging environmental conditions, namely, changes in rainfall which has been reported to have dropped from 150 days to well below 120 days. On this premise, Crisis Group (2017) and Udeh (2018) cited in Adibe (2020) have lamented the spiraling state of the Lake Chad from

45,000km² to 3000km² is less than 30 years. This singular factor, no doubt, has propelled and hence, pushed herdsmen downward towards the southern part the country. In addition to the Lake Chad crisis, many northern states in Nigeria have continued to face widespread desertification and desert encroachment. They are states such as Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Borno, Yobe, Sokoto, Zamfara, etc. In these states, evidence has shown that over 70 per cent of land mass has been bedeviled by the maladies of desertification. The migration by the herders that has followed has been said to have imposed greater influence on ensuing conflicts by herdsmen on several parts of North Central states of Nigeria and beyond. What is however not clear is the conspiracy theory that has continued to foster among the Nigerian populace. The theories point to the fact that herdsmen attacks are a direct handiworks of power tussle orchestrated by elites in many quarters in the nation's seat of power. What this theory portends is that the president of the Federal Republic, who himself is of the Fulani descent, could have been an influence to exterminate other ethnic groups due to power advantage. The security architecture, which is believed to be predominantly a "Fulani affair" in the country, there is little or nothing a sitting government can do to stamp out the rising tides of herdsmen attacks on rural communities across the country. Whether these theoretical assumptions are scientific or not, is another puzzle for future study investigation and inferences.

Historical Evolution of Herders-Fulani Conflicts in Nigeria

Conflict emanating from herdsmen and peasant farmers is a recent development. According to Nzeh (2015) and Doyin (2017), the history of the conflict is recent as 2012. Evidence from various sources show that herdsmen and peasant farmers have been co-existing in a harmonious working relationship before this time. What is said about herders and their host communities (farmers in this case) is that while cattle belonging to the herder's act as sources of organic manure by fertilizing the farm lands. In return, the farmers offer their visitors' adequate grazing lands, purchase their cattle and engage in what is termed 'trade by barter'. The latter involves a sort of economic exchange whereby the herders dish out dairy products such as milk and butter in exchange for food items such as yam, guinea corn, millets, etc. It is believed that herders hardly have for farming, so, the exchanges that have occurred in recent past with increasingly violent, flare-ups cutting across all spheres of the nation's landscape. According to Crisis Group (2017) of the 36 Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, at least 22 of the states have witnessed sporadic herder's incursion and conflicts. The devastation occasioned by herdsmen attacks in these states has been unprecedented to say the least.

Reports have it that the first ever known herdsmen attacks in Nigeria happened in Delta, where a certain Mr Benjamin, a Director of Personnel of Isoko local government was killed in January 2013, a number of villages were attacked in Nasarawa state, North Central Nigeria, where over 5000 people were summarily uprooted from their abode and displaced. This figure is outside several lives that were lost in cold blood due to the attacks. The trend of killings since then has grown exponentially while many states of the federation have been badly affected and still counting!

Pre-disposing Factors to Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

Factors propelling herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria are rather complex. The complexity is seen in the dimensions the conflict has taken since inception and the difficulties faced by actors aimed at resolving the quagmire. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) (n.d) in its recent survey of farmer-herder conflict in Northern Nigeria has noted that the inter-play of politics, ethnicity and other issues are rife in the assessment of tensions between pastoralists and peasant farmers in Nigeria. The CDD went further to opine that the conflict per say, has multiple mutative factors considered to be more or less dynamic in orientation and outlook. They include, but not limited to undue political influence by the powers that be, ethnicity, cattle theft, criminalization and framing of ethnic identities, scarcity of environmental resources, and nature of transhumance as well as population explosion.

On the ethnic factor for example, Bagu and Smith (2017) have lamented the rising cases of sensational reporting by journalists working for the various media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, online bloggers, etc. To capture Bagu and Smith's words succinctly opine that:

The narrative emerging from identity framers in the respective media outlets has the potential to ignite conflicts. The protagonists in the conflicts are often presented as nomadic Fulani cattle herders... against sedentary farming communities of several ethnic extractions who are often, but not always non-nomadic herders... (Emphasis added) (2017, p.12).

For an umpteenth time while the conflicts lasted, the conflict between herdsman and farmers appears to have taken ethno-religious dimensions. This is due to inflamed interpretation by the media. The practiced has gained momentum, and hence, continued to worsen the already fragile relationship between herdsman and other groups in the country.

Again, Okoli and Akpaloke (2014) as well as Shehu, Victor and Binta (2017) have maintained that aside from ethnic questions, the case of cattle theft is another serious compelling factor to conflict. A number of northern states such as Katsina, Zamfara and elsewhere depend largely on agricultural economy, and mostly cattle rearing for subsistence. In Okoli and Akpaleke's (2014) reports, over 322 cattle breeders have been killed and over 60,000 cattles were stole during the period under review; with the most affected states being Zamfara, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Niger, to mention but a few.

On their part Okoli and Atelhe (2014), Amusan, Abegunde and Akinyemi (2017) have blamed the widespread conflicts between herders and farmers in some parts of Nigeria on environmental scarcity and population explosion. On environmental scarcity, Okoli and Atelhe have queried the nature of marginalization of what they call "disadvantaged groups" within the Nigerian geo-politics. The level of unfair economic distribution such as this could cause flare-ups. Conversely, there have been consistent changes in population of the country. This finds expression in demographic changes as well as urbanization. To be sure, the nation's population has quadrupled from as low as 50 million in the 1950s to a whopping 200 million persons in 2021 (NBS, 2020). The continuous upsurge in population has had untold pressure on few available land and water resources. The competition for space and opportunities by the various forces breeds conflicts.

Research studies carried out by UNOWAS (2018) cited in CDD (n.d) has revealed that the increase in crop farming in wetland areas, especially along animal watering points have been the well-known causes of conflict. In addition to this, there has been an extensive grazing activity spanning over 21,913.75 square kilometers around the north central region, for example. It goes to explain the fact that the movement of herders in search of fodder and water sources would have changed dramatically. This change in movement by pastoralists down south from the arid areas of the north via grazing routes and reserves has been at the heart of the problem for conflict. Muhammad (2015) has however argued that what is important about the herdsman versus farmer's conflict is to ensure that there is good governance. The latter could be a veritable tool for peace rather than the hues and cries about grazing routes.

Added to the challenge of transhumance as driver of conflict is the issue of inordinate possession and bearing of arms by under-aged and young herds boys, drug abuse, arms proliferation; the role of traditional rulers and security agencies in the escalation of conflicts, etcetera. This is expressly captured as depicted in table 1 below:

Table 1 showing major actors in Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

Actors in Conflict	Justification for participation in conflict
Herdsman	Carrying out transhumant activities to secure feeds for livestock
Farmers	Acting in defense of crops and farm land from possible encroachment by herders.
Bandits	Engaging in cattle theft/rusting, raiding of villages, kidnapping of persons for ransom.

Ethnic militia groups, mercenaries and vigilantes	Act as community guards, could trigger violence to steal from villages or steel cattle. They also act as mercenaries to attack on vengeful mission in villages.
Traditional rulers	Ceding of grazing routes to farmers; heavy fines imposed on herders, unfair treatment in the event of damage of crops by herders, inciting violence for pecuniary gains.
Live stock and forest guards	Creating room for extortion of herders, causing tension and inter-communal conflicts that could lead to violence among hitherto peaceful communities.
Security agencies	Carry out extortion in conflict zones, influence of getting rich quick due to poor salary structures; absconding from official duty while in conflict zones, molesting vulnerable group, aping of helpless women.
State Governments	Promotion of open grazing prohibition hams leading to the eviction and migration of herders outside affected states, revenge mission by herders and mercenaries against obnoxious grazing laws, provocative comments by governors of affected stats, extortion of herders, killing of herder and retaliation/attacks.

Source: Culled from Centre for Democracy & Development (CDD) (n.d) p.22.

Stakeholders Intervention Strategies to mitigate Herders-Farmers Conflicts

The need to ensure peace, tranquility and mutual understanding between and amongst persons or groups in Nigeria is the responsibility of the Nigerian government and principally, the federal government. The Constitution has ascribed such responsibilities to either the federal or state government as documented in the Concurrent Legislative list of the Constitution 1999 (as amended). What has happened in the case of herders-farmers tension in Nigeria is the conspiracy of silence by the power elites over the conflict. However, it can be said that government over time has been responding passively by drafting anti-riot police squads as well as military men/women to troubled spots where there are conflicts between herders and farmers. It is also a fact that some of the security officers assigned to check security breaches have themselves become victim of circumstance or that their efforts to stem the tides of frequent herdsmen attacks on farmers have hardly yielded meaningful results. Again, there has been consistent push for legislative enactments so as to mitigate the conflicts in Nigeria. Kwaghga (2018) again, has argued that the land Grazing Bill which was sponsored by a Nigerian law maker, Zainab Kure, initially meant to create designated grazing routes for the herders. The Bill, as a matter of fact, has faced a lot of challenge and controversies. As a result of the controversies and stiff opposition, it is difficult to state exactly what has happened to the Bill to date!

Nonetheless, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) has reported that in spite of these seeming loopholes created by lack of political will to end herders-farmers imbroglio, a number of interventions towards forestalling the menace of conflicts between the two sects are discernible. For example, a number of peace committees are said to have been enunciated by most state governments in Nigeria. The peace committee initiatives are most seen in states with high risks and volatility in terms of herdsmen attacks. A case in point is the peace committee signed by the government and endorsed by stakeholders, a practice believed to have had positive after-effects on a number of attacks recently. Again, this committee initiative has given rise to a cross-border agreement between Katsina state government and those of localities around Moradi, a suburb in nearly Niger Republic. Essentially, the cross-border engagement has become necessary to curtail the influx of migration into Nigeria by alien herders through the Katsina land border areas. This is aside from several Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by affected North Western states, the promulgation of Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Established Laws of states, namely, Benue, Ekiti, Taraba and so on. Although, some of these

moves can be said to have assisted in conflict resolution, the attendant hues and cries of marginalization and discrimination by herdsmen and the countless reprisal attacks which followed afterwards remain a matter for further debates.

Herders-Farmers Conflicts: Implications for Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria

Recent scholarly writings have pointed out that democracy can hardly be sustained in the midst of rancor, acrimony and sporadic conflicts, either between herders and farmers or any other group in Nigeria. This standpoint brings to the fore the fact that the nation's quest for national integration, nationhood and development is already threatened, and hence, at risks. Here, we can say that national integration only makes sense when other social cleavages making up the nation's geo-political theatrics are effectively managed, and where the mechanisms for peaceful co-existence forcefully guarantees loyalty, peace and stability. This is why Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwade (2018) have insisted that integration should be seen as attainment of a sense of community and of institution viable enough to assure dependable expectations of a sustained community. In this paper, the author maintained that the issue of integration is sacrosanct. This is because democracy is workable only when there is peace. In most states of the federation today as it were, there might be no elections if violence continues to foster. The current influx of militia herders into places like Plateau, Taraba, Southern Kaduna, Ondo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Nasarawa and many other places, will likely affect holding credible elections in those places. It is not out of place to say that elections are the bedrock of democratic product. Therefore, the threat to electoral officers, the electorates and electoral institutions across some of these states has made it relatively impossible to contemplate any form of democratic exercise in the affected flash points of conflicts. A certain online video that surfaced showed gun-touting young IPOB militia (supposedly) somewhere around Imo state. From the video clip, several electorates who had gathered in a local community to exercise their franchise were all asked to lie on the ground, with their faces down! What was heard of those boys was that "we don't want election in this place..." No government must come here and conduct elections...". In the process, the electoral officers seen in the said videos were practically shot by the militia boys and killed! It will be unthinkable for anyone, including government to think of holding elections in those communities whatsoever. While it can be argued that the IPOB is merely a separatist agitation, and so, has no correlation with herders-farmers conflicts. It should also be recalled that some of the states such as Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, etc, have witnessed flare-ups in the number of conflicts. What can be said of the affected communities is that virtually all the residents in the affected places have been forcefully evicted and, in most cases, warned by the herders not to ever think of coming back to inhabit those places. This, yet again, is a minus to democratic sustenance.

Aside from the challenge of national integration as an off-shoot of herders-farmers crisis, Odoh and Chigozie (2012) and Okoli and Atelhe (2014) have raised another dimension to the problem of herders-farmers conflict. What these scholars have claimed is that the issue of minority question as critical component of herdsmen attacks is paramount. To be sure, and based on the foregoing arguments by Odoh, Chigozie, Okoli and Atelhe, minority crisis appears to have been escalated. To the herdsmen, who literally claimed to be from ethnic minority divide, their constitutional rights and privileges have been undermined. The herders, as a matter of fact, argue that their right to access to land resources as transhumant has been denied them. What this means is that the struggle for natural resources must be actively sustained, and that anything short of equality to access is more or less considered as an affront, which in itself is the more reason for continuous agitation, antagonism and conflicts. Aside from all of these effects, there is also the problem of ethnicity, political unrests, mutual suspicion, poverty (especially around affected communities), food crisis, low agricultural shortfall in the nation's overall national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and national economic outputs, among others. The implications of conflict, no doubt, is all encompassing, and therefore, can be detrimental to not only the political sphere of the nation, but also on the economic, social and cultural landscape.

Conclusion

This paper has examined herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. The work has particularly unraveled the attendant implications for democratic sustainability with a view to addressing the ever-increasing menace of rampant attacks in recent times. What has been found in the case of this study is that the said conflict may not only affect the immediate farming communities alone. Rather, the conflict could have boomerang after-effects on the nation. This is seen in form of the degeneration or otherwise, of the nation's quest for national cohesion and integration, minority question and likes. The work has also discovered that in the entire crisis situation, government seems to bear the brunt. This is so because the business of conducting efficient management of government business in relation to provisioning for the people's welfare as part of the social contract would have been overtaken by violence and carnage orchestrated by the unending tension and acrimony arising from conflicts. The paper has also discovered that not much has been done to curtail the conflicts. In its logical sense, it does appear that the power elites could have had some kind of personalization of interest to the crisis. This largely accounts, in the view of this study, why the crisis has continued to linger unabated! To forestall this herders-farmer's imbroglio, the study seeks to proffer the following suggestions as recommendations.

Recommendations

Having examined the issues at stake in relation to the unending violent attacks between herders and peasant farmers in Nigeria and having looked at the attendant consequences on the nation's socio-economic and political landscape, the following suggestions and/or recommendations will suffice as panacea to effective reconciliation of the belligerent factions in the conflict.

First, government, and indeed, all stakeholders in the country must be seen and hence, made to be committed in the peace project. Beginning with the Chief Executive and President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr. President should openly condemn and also act in accordance with statutory regulations to stamp out the incessant killings in the country. A situation where the Chief Executive goes about his business as if nothing has happened, and in a situation where hundreds of thousands of farmers and villagers are mowed down and killed without commensurate action by the Head of Government is not only indicting, but also a smear on the nation's image abroad.

Besides, there should be consistency in national legislative debates and extend laws on the grazing rights of herders and the right to ownership of lands by the peasants. Cross-carpeting by either of the parties to scout for trouble should be checked forthwith.

Again, it has been discovered that most herders have become exceptionally arrogant due to the fact that the powers in government are largely of one ethnic background. This is tantamount to ethnic profiling and hate speech. To deal with this ugly trend, all defaulters should be brought to book, and hence, made to face the wrath of the law.

The farmers should also have limits to how they operate and cultivate their farm lands. They should be assisted by the government to erect protective covers and demarcations for farm lands. This way, unnecessary trespass will be curtailed.

Moreover, there should be dialogue, rather than confrontations. What have been seen in most states is the provocative and unguarded utterances of state Governors and Chief Executives of states. Some of the Governors appear to have been acting under stress. Therefore, some of the comments they have supposedly made in the past are more or less inflammatory. To avoid this, there is need for diplomacy and dialogue.

The most important of all, aside from dialogue, is the infiltration of herders from neighboring countries into the country. To most avid critics, the herdsmen are known (at least in the past) to be accommodating and friendly in their disposition. The reason why there is antagonism today, leading to incessant killings by herdsmen is due to the infiltration of alien mercenaries and herders from neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, etc. This calls for the attention of the federal government of Nigeria to urgently create a budgetary provision for all-round barricade across these border areas. It

therefore follows that there should be men of the armed forces drafted into these borders to man security checks to forestall any form of intrusion.

Lastly, government should take stock of existing herdsmen within the Nigerian nation state. What this means is that efficient demographic survey will assist to identify aliens and trouble makers, evict same groups, and hence, rid the nation of criminal gangs who possibly might be hibernating among genuine herders domiciled within the nation.

it is hoped that the consideration and implementation of all of these suggestions will go a long way in assisting in the amelioration and reduction of the incidences of conflicts arising from herders and farmers, and hence put the nation's democratic structure in a more viable and workable pedestal in the 21st century and beyond.

References

- Adibe, J. (2020) Farmers'-Farmers' violent conflict and the politicization of transhumant pastoralism in Nigeria. *African Renaissance*, 17(1), 121-141.
- Akindele, B. (2020) Fulani herdsmen killed 2,539 Nigerians in 654 attacks. *This Day Newspaper*. June 7. Available at: <https://www.thisdaylive.com>
- Aliyu, M.K., Ikedinma, H.A. & Akinwande, A.E. (2018). Assessment of the Effect of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts on National Integration in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8 (10), 118—128. DOI: 10.30845/ijhss.v8n10p13.
- Amusan, L., Abegunde, O. & Akinyemi T.E. (2017), "Climate change, pastoral migration, resource governance and security: the Grazing Bill solution to farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria", *Environmental Economics*, 8(3), 35-45.
- Bagu, C. & Smith, K. (2017), Past is Prologue: Criminality and Reprisal Attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt. A Commissioned Study by Search for Common Ground.
- Bello, B., Abdullahi, M.M. (2021) Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict, Cattle rustling, and banditry: The dialectics of insecurity in Anka and Maradun local government area of Zamfara state, Nigeria. Sage Open. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/215824402110117>
- Brimah, A.N., & Olawale, S.M. (2020) Effects of farmers and herders conflict on entrepreneurial practiced in South Western Nigeria. *International Journal on Economics, Finance and Sustainable Development*. Available at: www.research-parks.org
- Centre for Democracy and Development (n.d) Farmer-Herder conflict in Northern Nigeria: Trends, dynamics and gender perspectives.
- Doyin, T. (2017). An Empirical Investigation to Incessant Killings in Nigeria. *Journal of Philosophy*, 5, 67—82.
- Duru, P. (2016) 7,000 persons displaced in Fulani herdsmen, Agatu farmers' clash in Benue. *The Vanguard*. February 29. Available at <https://www.vanguardngr.com>.
- Dwan, R. & Holmquist, C. (n.d) Patterns of major armed conflicts. Stockholm's. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org>
- International Crisis Group (2018) Stop Nigeria's spiraling farmers-herder violence. July 26.
- Kingelmen, M. (2012) The global farm raced: Land grabs, agricultural investment and the scramble for food security. Island press. Available at: <https://google-scholar.com>
- Kwaghga, B. (2018) Herdsmen/farmers crisis: A threat to democratic governance in Nigeria. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(11), 100-108.
- Muhammed, I., Ismaila A.B & Bibi, U.M. (2015). "An Assessment of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria using GIS", *International Journal of Engineering Science Invention*, Volume 4(7), July, 23-33.
- Nzeh, E. (2015). The Effects of Migration by Nomadic Farmers in the Livelihoods of Rural Crop Farmers in Enugu State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Science Frontier Research*, 15 (3), 45—56.
- Odoh, S.I. & Chigozie, C.F. (2012). Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Worsening Incidence of Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Northern Nigeria. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 2 (1), 110—124.
- Oghuvbu, E.A., & Oghuvbu, O.B. (2020) Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in Africa: The case of Nigeria. Vestnik RUDN. *International Relations*. Available at: <https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations>.
- Okoli, A. C. & Atelhe, G. A. (2014), Nomads against Natives: A Political Ecology of Herder/Farmer Conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(2), 76-88.

- Okoli, A.C. & Atelhe, G.A. (2014). Nomads against Natives: A Political Ecology of Herder / Farmer Conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4 (2), 76—88.
- Okoli, A. C. & Okpaleke, F. N. (2014) “Cattle Rustling and Dialectics of Security in Northern Nigeria”, *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science* 2(3), 109-117.
- Okoro, J.P. (2018) Herdsmen/Farmers Conflict and its effect on socio-economic development in Nigeria. Researchgate.
- Okoro, J.P. (2018). Herdsmen / Farmers Conflict and Its Effects on Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria. *Journal of Peace, Security, and Development*, 4 (1), 143—158.
- Schwartz, O., Axt, H.J., & Milososki, A. (2006) Conflict: A literature review: Researchgate. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net>.
- Singer, D.J., & Small, M. (1972) *The wages of war 1816-1865*. New York: A statistical Handbook.
- Stanojoska, A., & Petrevski, B. (2012) Theory of push and pull factors: A new way of explaining the old. Researchgate. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net>.
- Sunday, O. (2021) Herdsmen attacks: Over 600,000 persons displaced in Benue. Daily post April 24. Available at: <https://www.dailypost.ng-de>.
- The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2020).
- Udeh, C. (2018) How climate change is provoking clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. *Ecologist: Journal for the Post-Industrial Age*. retrieved on December 5, 2018. Available at: <https://theologist.org/2018/feb/22>