

FARMER/HERDERS CONFLICT AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The menace of Fulani herders has dire implications for political and socio-economic development in Nigeria. This study argues that, unfortunately, the Nigerian State, which should be leading the search for solutions, is now totally distrusted by most of those involved in the conflicts. This study examined the politics of herders attacks and their socio-economic implications for the Nigerian State. The study adopted secondary data sources anchored on the structural functionalism theory. It found that the militant activities of herders are politically motivated by the actions and inactions of desperate political leaders for group interests. The study concluded that the solution to the farmers/herders conflict is not beyond the power of government and advised that collaboration among levels of government can help find solutions to the problem. Based on the observations, the study recommended that the government at all levels adopt appropriate crisis management approaches devoid of personal aggrandisement. It was also recommended that the government should pass through appropriate agencies to probe and block the sources of sophisticated weapons at the disposal of herders; the cattle business should not be treated as a national asset, and there should be legislation on cattle business to reflect its private nature; cattle farmers should adhere to routes provided them by the government.

Keywords: *Farmers/Herders, Conflict, Security, Southern, Nigeria*

Introduction

The ongoing herders-farmers conflict, especially in Nigeria, has a long and complex historical background. The land disputes among nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers are nothing new. However, it has transformed over time and turned into a destructive and violent conflict, especially since the beginning of the 21st century (Abbass, 2012). Nigeria is a vast country with different climates in different regions. It has arid, semi-arid, sub-humid and humid zones, allowing different lifestyles and means of living. Climate and land are significant factors in the lives of Nigerians, accounting for about 70% of the workforce's activities, which are concentrated on agriculture (International Crisis Group, 2017).

It also had different administrative systems in several regions under British colonial rule, which started in the twentieth century. British colonial administration divided the land into three administrative parts: North, East and West. The coastal regions and the whole Eastern and Western protectorates were under the direct rule of the British. In contrast, the British ruled the Northern region indirectly through Nigerian traditional institutions. Thus, the Northern region had rules and regulations that differed from other regions. This privilege provided the North with greater access to political power. After the independence in 1960, to douse the influence of the North, the country's administrative regions were divided into smaller units, culminating in the 36 states of the federation (Patience, 2019).

The attainment of independence caused many changes in Nigeria. Attempts to create a modern state structure did not give the results as planned. The country's political atmosphere was beclouded by military coups, preventing the foundation of sustainable state institutions. However, one of the most important

events in the history of modern Nigeria has been the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region of the country. The oil was found in 1956, which changed the country's socio-economic trajectory for a long time (Folami, 2010).

Although the oil created a substantial economic boost in the country, it did not flourish its people. The oil industry became the centre of the government's attention and projects. Until then, agriculture was the most significant income source, providing 63% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 1988, this contribution of agriculture to GDP was only 34% (Ejembi, 2018). The farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria also has ethnic and religious dimensions. The pastoralist herders who mostly live in the North are called "Fulani" people and are considered settlers by other ethnic groups in Nigeria, as they started to move to this region from other parts of Western Africa around the fifteenth century.

Fulani people founded an Islamic Caliphate in today's northern Nigeria, and after that, they became politically more effective in the region. Some Fulanis migrated southwards and got mixed up with the traditional Hausas. Today, pastoralists and nomadic Fulanis mainly live in the North, and the urbanised Fulanis (Hausa-Fulani) live more in the South. Both groups speak the Fulfude language and are Muslims. Although they have many things in common, urban Fulanis are considered more politically wise and pre-eminent than nomadic Fulanis (Mikailu, 2016).

Christianity and Islam almost have the same number of believers in Nigeria. Mostly, the people in the northern region are Muslims, and in the South are Christians. This brings more complexity to the farmers-herders conflict because it is happening mainly in the middle belt between the North and South regions of the country, respectively—the middle region transitions between religions, flora and nomadic-sedentary lifestyles (Ajayi & Allagenyi, 2001).

Nigeria's ongoing violent conflict between herders and farmers has several parties and actors. Until the last twenty years, the disagreements between herder and farming communities used to be solved by negotiations. Usually, the heads of villages and herder communities agreed on simple solutions such as a 'herder must compensate for the damage in a farm if he could not control his animals from damaging growing crops. The dialogue between the two communities did not happen only after a nasty incident. Instead, during the dry season, if herders would like to use some laid fallow farms as grazing land, they would ask permission from the land owner before using it (Akevi, 2014). More than 90% of nomadic herders in northern Nigeria are ethnic Fulanis, and the majority of the Fulanis are Muslims (International Crisis Group, 2017). This ethnic group originally migrated from the Arabic peninsula, and today, they are living not just in Nigeria but in several countries in West and Central Africa (Blench, 2010). They are the central conflict party in disagreements with farmers because of their high numbers in animal husbandry business (Akevi, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The Fulani herders' attack on Nigerian citizens has assumed an alarming dimension. Hardly a week passes without one rumour of attack or another in one part of the country, especially in Benue, Plateau, and Delta. In each of these attacks, there is usually a large-scale destruction of lives and properties, the vast human loss being the most worrisome in these attacks. Therefore, this study examines the causes and socio-economic, political and religious implications of these attacks on sustainable development in Southern States in Nigeria.

Fulani herders are popular for being cattle rearers, which makes it essential for them to navigate their

highly valued cows from one location to another in search of food and water. Such regular search often leads to the herders' invasion of other peoples' farms, causing damage to crops and other valuables belonging to the host communities. The herdsman crisis remains a significant issue in Nigeria. So far, thousands have been killed, and many more have been expelled from their homes, and the Nigerian government does not appear willing to initiate any forceful action against such acts. Instead, they request land from states to provide the rampaging herders with permanent feeding grounds. They are largely nomads who go through towns with their cattle. However, when moving from one location to another, the herders reportedly encountered cattle rustlers. They complained to relevant authorities, who failed to investigate the issue, hence their purported reason for carrying arms.

Thus, attempts by farmers to prevent them from causing havoc are met with stiff and violent resistance. Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured and killed, while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herders are accused of taking these opportunities to steal, rape, raze houses and kill innocent members of the communities they pass through (Muhammed & Odogun, 2017). Before now, the herders have been known to wreak havoc in specific communities in Nigeria, but now, the rate at which they commit these crimes has increased exponentially. According to statistics provided by the Institute for Economics and Peace, 1,229 people were killed in 2014, up from 63 in 2013, and Benue State seems to be the hardest hit in recent times. Barely five days to the end of Governor Gabriel Suswam's administration in May 2015, over 100 farmers and their family members were reportedly massacred in villages and refugee camps located in the Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa local government areas of the State.

According to reports, in July 2015, suspected herders attacked Adeke, a community on the outskirts of the state capital, Makurdi. Last December, six persons were killed at Idele village in the Oju local government area. A reprisal attack by youths in the community saw three Fulani herdsmen killed and beheaded. In February 2018, as a result of a clash between herders and farmers in Benue State, 40 more people were killed, about 2,000 displaced, and not less than 100 were seriously injured. Most recently, more than 92 Nigerians were massacred by suspected Fulani Herdsmen in Benue and Niger states. Also, before this time, there have been reported attacks by the Fulani Herdsmen in southern states of the country, including Enugu, Ekiti and Ondo states (Mohammed, Umar, & Hamisu, 2017).

Concerns about the true identity of those behind the attacks have been raised. Many with dissenting views believe they may be members of the Boko Haram sect, masquerading as Fulani Herdsmen. A few others, including the Nigerian military, have said they are herdsmen from other parts of West Africa and not Fulani. While the latter may be admissible due to porous Nigerian borders and poor immigration surveillance, especially in northern parts of the country, it is challenging to correlate the activities of Boko Haram terrorists to those of the Fulani herders. Boko Haram has utilised explosives carried by suicide bombers or hidden in a target. However, accounts by victims of the herders crisis have shown that the Fulani herdsmen are mainly concerned with gaining greater access to grazing lands for livestock. In fact, following the February attacks in Benue, the leadership of the Fulani group openly admitted that the attacks were carried out by its members (Mohammed, Umar, & Hamisu, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The structural functionalism approach provides a valuable framework for categorising and comparing data. It was not very useful for analysing or predicting change, the issue of why, how, when, and in what direction political development occurs. This issue of development, or change, is, of course, crucial for the Third World. Structural functionalism is a tradition of social analysis that sees society as a mosaic of

functions and structures that perform them. For example, to survive, a society needs to educate its children, produce goods, govern its affairs and provide security for its members. These functions necessitate several structures, such as schools, industries, parliaments, courts, and armed forces, to perform their roles.

Understandably, when these structures perform their roles or functions properly, there is order in society, and in fact, society inherently moves in the direction of order and stability. Consequently, from a structural-functionalist perspective, peace is achieved where existing social structures perform their functions adequately, supported by the requisite culture, norms and values. In broadening the definition of peace, Galtung (1990) had earlier outlined two dimensions of peace. The first is negative peace, which is the absence of direct violence, war and fear of the individual, nation, region and indeed, at the international levels; the second dimension is positive peace, which is the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace of the individual. In sum, we can conceive peace as the absence of fear, conflict, anxiety, exclusion, deprivation, suffering and violence. It primarily concerns creating and maintaining a just order in society (Galtung, 1991; Fayeye, 2011).

To justify this theory, we know that violent social, political, or environmental conflicts have seriously contributed to human and material capital loss. This theory, however, has been found suitable for this study as the structure of government has failed in its responsibility of maintaining peace (Army, Police, and other security agencies).

Literature Review

Conflict is a reality. It does not exist in a vacuum or the blues but among humans. It is unavoidable in human interactions. However, violent or armed conflict can be avoided. Conflict is simply a disagreement. However, when the disagreement is not managed correctly, it degenerates into violent or armed conflict, a physical war involving guns, spears, daggers, bows and arrows, and other sophisticated weapons. The desire to undo or cheat a person, individual, group, State or nation leads to conflict or violent conflict, as the case may be. 'Conflict' has been defined by scholars according to different ideological, historical, and cultural influences. However, Hanne and Nina (2012) defines conflict as the "pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups".

The concept of conflict is fundamental in social science discourse. The debate is based on the notion that conflict is the engine room of progress. However, several scholars have expressed their opinions on the conceptual discourse of conflict in many world countries' socio-political and economic development. According to (Hanne, Magnus and Janpeter 2018), defining conflict also depends on the concept one has of the nature of conflict as something that takes place in society and between people. For example, conflict is commonly understood as a form of opposition between parties, an absence of agreement between parties, a way to solve social contradictions and a natural process in human social interaction.

However, the recent general trend has considered conflict as something normal, an everyday social phenomenon, and a simple and natural characteristic of human social systems. Society, by its very nature, as human beings themselves, is not perfect, so disharmony and contradictions are inevitable parts of social development. The distinction must be made between conflict itself and the negative consequences of some ways of dealing with conflicts, such as war. From this perspective, war is not a conflict but rather a negative result of how the conflict is dealt with (Mikailu, 2016).

Methodology

The methodology adopted here is a descriptive survey based on content analysis. This method was applied in analysing, describing, and interpreting data since it is predominantly desk research, which means data was sourced basically from secondary sources. Through the content analysis, the paper arrived at the following findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Results and Discussion

Farmers/Herders Conflict in Nigeria

In Nigeria, most herders do not own land but graze their livestock in host communities (Nouhoun, Luc and Eva, 2014). While a few have adopted the more sedentary type of animal husbandry, the increasing crises between farmers and nomadic herders presuppose that grazing is a significant means of animal rearing in Nigeria. The sedentary type of animal husbandry also proves to be more expensive, difficult to manage and inefficient for the rapidly growing market of an ever-increasing Nigerian population. Over the years, the presence of the nomads and their cattle has provoked violent clashes in several communities across the country. Apart from the language and cultural barriers that usually spot the nomads as strangers, the audacity with which they shepherd their flocks to graze on available vegetation on their route has often attracted protests from the host communities. This scenario has given rise to an unhealthy rivalry between farmers and herders, leading to violence and loss of lives and property. In some cases, many community residents, primarily farmers, are wiped out, and those fortunate to escape have become refugees in other places (Ibenwa & Uroko, 2017).

From 2000 till date, there have been reported cases of conflicts and confrontations between the nomads and the indigenes of the areas they migrated. The media is also awash with reported cases of clashes between nomads from the North and the inhabitants of Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kastina, Kaduna, Kwara, Edo, Delta, Enugu, Abia, Taraba, Ebonyi, Ondo, Oyo, Osun and many other states. Whenever these clashes occur, the nomadic herders attack and kill scores of villagers in a contest for grazing fields and water; there are usually reprisal attacks. This scenario has thrown up tribal, ethnic, regional, religious and political sentiments that threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria (Okoli, 2017).

Some farmers practising mixed farming revealed that their animals had affected other farmers in one way or another. Likewise, sedentary pastoralists were, in one way or another, affected by farmers (Ifidon & Ahiauzu, 2005). This shows that the issue of farmer-nomadic herders conflict is more or less a shared problem. Therefore, this may not warrant the isolation of farmers or pastoralists into ethnic or regional groupings for the sake of levying blame on any, as the case may be. Nigeria is experiencing a historic demographic expansion and a spectacular change in food habits. With a population growth nearing 2.8% per year, according to NPC 2006, the country's domestic production is far from meeting demand. Nigeria is, however, expected to have a population of over 398 million, more than the population of Pakistan and Brazil in 2050 (Ofem, & Inyang, 2023).

Farmers/herders crisis in Nigeria

The clashes are driven by a range of environmental and political factors, but at their core is the problem of land scarcity, especially in Southern Nigeria. Climate change and the desertification of Nigeria's Northern region have forced the nomadic cattle herders farther south to feed and sell their cattle, encroaching on the

territory of sedentary farmers. Nigeria has over 220 million people today and is set to become the third largest in the world by 2050. This numeric figure has worsened the competition for land, so herders and farmers lived in peace for decades (Daniels, 2016). However, as Nigeria grew, it became clear that something had to be done for herders and farmers to co-exist peacefully. In the 1960s, the government attempted to introduce legislation to guarantee migratory routes for the herders and ensure farmland was respected. However, the laws were never enforced, leaving communities with disputes. In recent years, the violence has increased, with some herdsman carrying heavy arms and the farmers assembling militias. Both sides are engaged in a devastating cycle of reprisal attacks, particularly in the central region.

According to Amnesty International, each time there is an outbreak of violence, the Nigerian government has promised to crack down on the perpetrators. However, the reality has seen herders and farmers take matters into their own hands to settle scores. There is no accountability; previous perpetrators have never been punished. Impunity is the most dangerous thing. Individual states are trying to introduce new laws with mixed results. In Benue State, hundreds have been killed since the start of the year, and a ban on open grazing angered herders who said it threatens their way of life.

Nigeria is a country split almost evenly between a mainly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south, and religious tensions bubble constantly below the surface. Many Nigerians, and especially lawmakers playing identity politics, have seized on the fact that the herders are predominantly Muslim while the farmers are mainly Christian. President Buhari warned against a simplistic reductionism but was accused of not acting decisively because he is an ethnic Fulani. This latest round of attacks has cemented the perception that the federal government, particularly the Buhari administration, is biased in favour of the herders. Many, especially inhabitants of Southern Nigeria, feel Buhari did not address the herder's conflict as decisively as he did with Boko Haram jihadists and Niger Delta militants. Whether this arises from incapacity, complacency, or complicity is open to question (Francis, 2020).

The violence could be contained if the government focused on boosting security and enforcing legislation (Abbas, 2009). A first step would be to arrest perpetrators, he added. "If the people had been apprehended earlier on and dealt with, we would have been talking about another thing entirely". At the same time, legislation guaranteeing herders and farmers access to land has to be enforced. Unchecked, the conflict risks mutating into a more significant security threat where ethnic groups are pitched against each other; if it is not dealt with as a criminal justice issue, it escalates, and you have a cycle of blood feuds. Then it becomes more catastrophic (Fiki & Lee, 2005; Fayinka, 2004; Fabusoro, 2007).

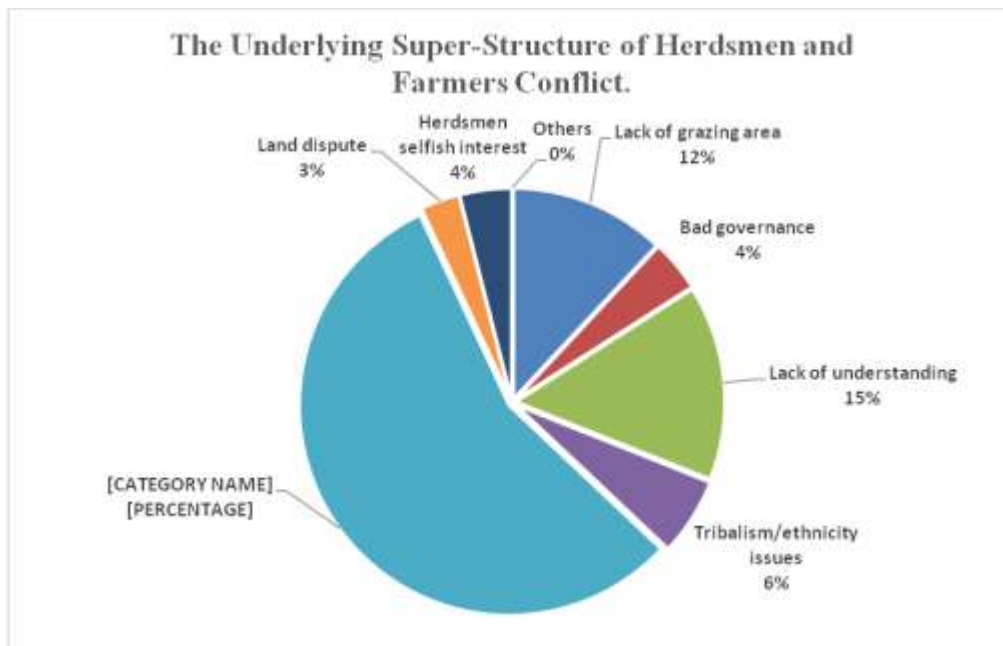
Causes of the Incessant Fulani Herdsmen Attack in Nigeria

Many reasons have been adduced for the Fulani herder's attacks, some of which are:

1. Destruction of crops by cattle and other property by the herders.
2. Burning of rangelands and blockage of stock routes and water points
3. The increasing rate of cattle theft, which is often accompanied by violence.
4. Antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herders compound conflict, mainly due to failing institutions and fierce resource competition.
5. There is a decline in internal discipline and social cohesion, as adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods and the authority of the traditional rulers is breaking down. This is

exacerbated by increased rent-seeking by the formal and traditional authorities in managing resource access.

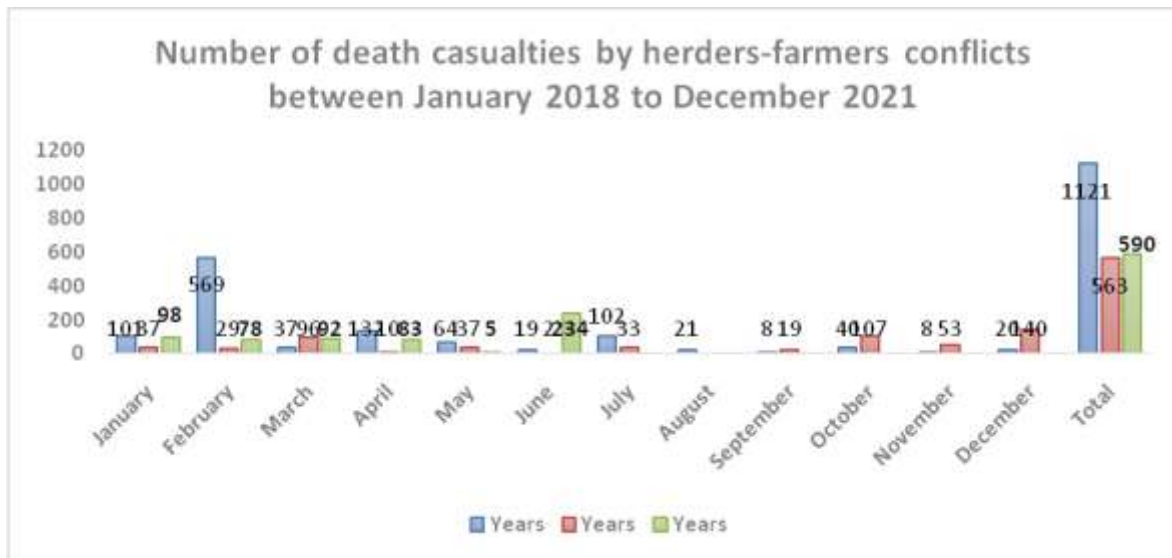
6. Particularly severe on the traditional trek routes, which become favourite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas. Within the Fadama areas, this is exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the crop plots, which makes the preventing animals straying in the crop plots difficult.
7. Inadequacy of grazing resources, such as increasing crop cultivation (and increasing commercialisation of the crop residues) and poor management of the existing grazing reserves have resulted in a significant reduction in available livestock feed resources, in particular in the Northern States.
8. Moreover, the high-value crops introduced by NFDP (tomatoes and onions) produce almost no crop residues for livestock feed.
9. The regulation that 20% of the Fadama would need to be set aside for grazing (Tade, 2020) identifies climate change and its effects as precipitators of the conflicts.



Source: Adapted from Tade, (2020).

The major alternative is to migrate to other countries and face the consequences. The case of Fulani herders is a perfect illustration of such migrations. Because of persistent droughts and desertification in northern Nigeria, most Fulani herders migrated Southwards in search of green pastures for their cattle. “In terms of migration, the influx of migrants into new areas has been a significant factor in many “environmental conflicts ...large migrations have at times lead to violent conflict, and large migrations may be a consequence of climate change” (Fiki & Lee, 2005). This is also the case with Fulani herders, whose migration has been causing a lot of violent conflicts for the host communities.

Fig 2: Intensity and spread of attacks by herders



Source: Tade (2020).

Factors escalating farmer/herder conflict in Nigeria

A number of factors combine to escalate the conflict among the identified actors. Some of these include climate change and environmental degradation, depleting arable land for farming, and a lack of political will to tackle the challenges.

Climate Change: Climate is a critical factor in the activities of herders and farmers. The changing climatic condition, generally called global warming, is undoubtedly taking a toll on the survival of herders'-farmers' businesses. Desert encroachment from the Sahara towards the Sahel region and other associated climatic conditions have continued to affect the livelihood of herders as they push further south in search of available green areas, pitching them against farmers and host communities. This global phenomenon currently affects many parts of the world with attendant consequences – including the herdsman-farmer conflict.

Depleting Space for Farming: Constant urbanisation and global demographic shifts have increased the tendency and likelihood of farmers to move further afield for farming activities. At independence in 1960, the Nigerian population stood at about 35 million. However, 64 years later, it has leapt to over 180 million people, and the growth is expected to persist shortly. An increase in population of this magnitude also means a geometric increase in the demand for food products as a basic human need. This also implies an increase in the quest for farming space for food production. Conversely, industrialisation and urbanisation have continued to claim the most available land, leaving little or nothing for farming activities. The continued movement of herders southwards in search of pasture for their animals has pitched them against farmers, eventually leading to conflict and destruction. For example, farming along the Benue River accounts for over 20,000 tons of grain annually. This same area is also fertile ground for herders to feed their cattle. Thus, farmlands within the river bank areas are the most affected by the herders's movement—resulting in many clashes.

Lack of political will to fight the menace: The government at all levels has demonstrated a near absence of needed political will to proffer lasting solutions to the conflicting claims of different actors in the ongoing conflict between the herders and farmers. Political leaders have failed to invoke appropriate legislation to be backed by actions that define rules and limits for parties involved in the conflict. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a Protocol on Trans-human Movement. However, the framework is yet to be fully implemented nationally. Thus, lack of political will remains a hindering factor among member states. The political will to implement this protocol and other frameworks remains an enabler of the conflict. The Federal government has tried to regulate and control pastoral activities, but adequate political will is needed to enforce laws. For instance, the government is perceived from some quarters, especially by opposition parties, as being sympathetic to the activities of the herders. This perception is likely because the President is of Fulani extraction, the same ethnic group that dominates the cattle business. Citizens, especially from the most affected states, expected the federal government to deal with the herdsman-farmer conflicts in all the states with the same vigour and determination it showed in similar internal security issues in other parts of the country.

Conclusion

The activities of the Fulani herders in Southern Nigeria have assumed an alarming proportion, with unquantifiable loss of lives and properties. The ethno-religious dimension of the conflict between the herders and the farmers is more worrisome, challenging the basic fabric of Nigerian society. Various reasons have been adduced for the clashes, including the destruction of farmlands and climate change. Whatever the causes, the conflicts' attendant psycho-socio-political and economic implications are enormous, threatening the country's unity.

The study explored the herdsman-farmers conflict in Nigeria. It is curiously observed that such a crisis is majorly caused by the herders' cattle destruction of crops on farmland. The study also explained in detail the socio-economic consequences of the Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict on the nation's development. The nomadic system was appropriate when human and animal populations were tiny and the land was huge, just as the shifting cultivation system was appropriate. However, over the last couple of decades, there has been an increase in population, causing drastic reductions in fallow periods in addition to changing weather patterns. The study, concludes, that herder-farmer conflict is not beyond the capacity of the government to handle. It only requires adopting measures appropriate to the situation to begin addressing the problem from its remote course.

Recommendations

For continuous harmonious herder/farmer coexistence and security, the following suggestions have been provided:

1. The government should focus on policies designed to enhance Fulani herdsman's rights to land to reduce insecurity and mitigate the spate of conflicts. This will bring about peaceful coexistence, improve security for Fulani herdsman and host communities, and also provide grazing areas for cattle without pouncing on farmers' crops.
2. Legislation on the grazing reserve should be amended and improved upon to reflect the private nature of cattle rearing.
3. There should be a deliberate effort to enlighten and mobilize the parties in conflict to understand the ecology and the resources available in the localities. This opens a window for interdependence and complementary among groups in the optimal use of the resources for collective benefit and equitable access.
4. The government should expand its surveillance to trace and block the source of the sophisticated arms in the possession of the herdsman.
5. The State Government should make herders keep to the agreed routes, and farmers avoid farming across them with stern government policy and strict compliance.
6. Cattle-rearing is a private business; profit from the cattle business goes into the owner's purse, not the national treasury. It should not be treated as a national wealth. If the government provides grazing areas for private cattle, it should also provide grazing areas for goat or poultry farmers living in southern Nigeria for balanced attention. Otherwise, a cattle farmer should acquire private land for his animal grazing.
7. All levels of government, especially the most vulnerable states, should work in synergy to resist this evil.

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