FARMERS -HERDERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examined the frequent violent conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria, which have caused the loss of thousands of lives and widespread displacement. Though farmers - herders conflict is not new, the country has been devastated by violent farmer- herder conflict since the early 2000. The paper adopted the descriptive and survey research method. It is theoretical in nature, and drew its arguments from secondary sources. Findings of the study showed that, although the main reason of the conflict is the scarcity of land resources, several other factors such as population pressure, inefficient state mechanisms, climate change, increasing proliferation of arms etc have fueled the conflict in recent years. However, the most immediate trigger to the surge in farmer-herder violence in the country, is the activities of the violent militant groups. Due to easy access to arms, the group who have better weapons try to get what they want by every available means. Consequently, the cycles of farmer-herder violence and reprisal have become increasingly frequent and lethal leading to massive destruction of lives and property and subsequent massive internal displacement. The study also revealed that effort at addressing the conflict have not been effective. The paper concludes that the frequent farmer-herder conflict deserves effective government's response, given the potential how often land disputes rapidly escalate into broader inter-communal conflict and the accompanying destruction of lives and widespread internal displacement.

Keywords: Conflict, Farmers, herders, internal displacement, Nigeria.

Introduction

In Nigeria, violent conflicts and internal displacement as a result of farmer conflict has become a serious problem in recent years. Farmer -herder conflict which revolves mainly around disputes over land between herders and farmers, dates back to pre-colonial period. Competition between herders and farmers over land resources has caused conflicts in the north-central, culminating in significant levels of violence and population displacement. Similarly, long-standing ethnic conflict between Fulani pastoralists and Hausa farmers in northwest states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara has also triggered thousands of deaths widespread displacement.

. In recent times however, the conflicts have become more frequent due to climate change, population pressure amongst other factors. Although the underlying cause of the conflict is environmental and economic factors, it has acquired ethnic and religious dimensions, simply because the conflict occurs between the Muslim Fulani pastoralists and the mostly Christian farmers across the country, particularly in the north central zone. In the last two decades, especially since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the conflict has become more frequent and has deteroriated into violent attacks between the two groups. It is estimated that

the conflicts now kill more people than the Boko Haram insurgency, and has displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Between 2010 and 2015 there were 850 clashes resulting in more than 62,000 displaced persons in Benue and other north central states (Ameh, 2018).

Similarly, a survey conducted by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), revealed that about 60, 000 people were killed and more than 300,000 displaced across the four states of Plateau, Taraba and Benue and Nasarawa in 2018(Gürsoy, 2020). Nigeria's displaced population are vulnerable, without means of livelihood, thus, the burden of provision falls on the government.While, the government has been responding to the needs of the needs of the displaced population, the root causes of the conflicts that give rise to internal displacement have not been given adequate attention. The government must to put in place targeted mechanisms that seek to prevent violent conflicts that lead to displacement. Without tackling security issues, the problem of displacement cannot be sustainably addressed.

Literature Review

The struggle over access to and control over important resources such as water, oil, gold, land

amongst others, has become an important source of conflict in recent years. Although it is a great concernthat natural resources could became a source of conflict, of greater concern is the role that resources have played in specific conflicts. For instance, inequalities in the distribution, use and consequences of resources management have been sources of tension and violent conflicts.

According to some resource conflict scholars,four important conditions can influence the likelihood that resources will be the object or source of conflict. Such conditions include: the degree of scarcity; the extent to which the supply is shared by two or more groups/ states; the relative power of those groups; and the ease of access to alternative sources. The most present approach in the resource conflict literature is a "resource scarcity" as a main cause of conflict. This approach links resources considers as resource scarce to supply induced, demand induced or absolute scarcity, as well as environmental degradation as a key source of conflict. (Schwarz, 2006). According to Homer-Dixon & Percival (1997), in some developing countries, the scarcity of renewable resources such as cropland, forests and water generate social effects such as poverty, migration, and weak institutions, which in turn produce tensions and conflicts.

In Nigeria, the farmer-herder conflict is a typical case of a resource conflict that has constituted a serious security threat. There is a vast body of scholarly works on the farmer- herder conflicts in Nigeria. Many of the existing literature have focused on the history of the farmer-herder conflict, while others attempt to explain the cause of the farmer-herder conflict. Still some literature focus on its manifest consequences and government's responses to the conflict. Writing on the history of farmer- herder conflict Azarya (1996), trace the origin of the conflict to Uthman Dan Fodio, an Islamic scholar of the 19th century who established the Islamic caliphate of Sokoto, which is today known as the ancestral home of the Fulani. He argues that, the conflict in the middle belt region of Nigeria, is compounded by this history and the religious differences that exist between the peoples of Northern and Southern Nigeria; thereby making the middle belt a religious hotbed of the crisis.

Other scholars of this school of thought examine the colonial and precolonial history of the Fulani. Eke (2018), argues that during the colonial period, the Fulani people attained privileged status in governance. However, things took a downward turn after Nigeria's independence in 1960. The situation was made worse with the indigenization policies of the

1970s. Since the Funani are nomads, it was difficult for them to claim indigeneity of many of the places they had temporarily settled due to resistance from their 'host' communities. This situation left the Fulani herders on the borders of the Nigerian society, and has served to exacerbate the farmer-herder conflict.

Still on the history of the farmer-herder conflict, scholars like Egbuta, (2018) focus on Fulani migration. They trace the Fulani origin to Senegambia, and their subsequent migration to Northern Nigeria in the 19th century. According to them, desertification, population explosion, war and climate change are the major triggers of movement for the Fulani herders. Bolarinwa et al. (2013) equally notes that most of the farmer-herder conflicts are the result of migration of Fulani herders from the Sahel and Sudan savannah to the Guinea savannah and more recently the rainforest regions. According to them, it is the transhumance movements that has resulted to land pressures and the eventual conflict between the two groups who depend on land for their survival.

On the other hand, there are scholarly works that focus on the causes of the farmer-herder conflict. Egbuta,(2018) divides the causes of the farmer herder conflict in Nigeria into the immediate and the remote causes. They note that the destruction

of crops by cattle, contamination of drinking water source, sexual harassment of women by herders, harassment of herders by host community, cattle rustling amongst others are the immediate causes, while the remote causes include ethnic and religious inclination, poverty, effects of climate change, and rapid population growth. However, there is a consensus among scholars that the major cause of conflict between farmers and herders is the destruction of farmers crops by the herders in the course of feeding their cattle. A study conducted by Ofuoku (2009) on the role of community development committees in farmer-herder conflicts in Delta State, showed that destruction of crops ranked highest as the major source of farmer- herder conflict. A similar study by Usman et al. (2017) showed that 100 per cent of famers in the study stated grazing of crops as the main cause of conflict with herders.

There is also scholarly literature on the consequences of the conflict. Scholars have equally noted that it is the responses of government to mitigate the conflict between the farmers and herders that is responsible for the ongoing conflict. Although there is existing literature on the consequences of the farmer-herder conflict, most of them seem to focus on loss of lives and property and mass displacement of farmers and herders. None

sufficiently addressed the effect of the farmer-herder conflict on internal displacement in Nigeria. The study therefore focuses on farmer-herder conflict and how the conflict has led to massive internal displacement in Nigeria.

Overview of the conflict

The ongoing farmers- herder in Nigeria conflict has a long and complex historical background. Disputeover land resources between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers is not new.However, it transformed into a destructive and violent conflict since the beginning of twenty first century, particularly since Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 (Egbuta, 2018). The main cause of the clashes is the competition over land resources, especially grazing land.Nigeria is a vast country with different climates in different regions. It has arid, semi-aridand humid zones, which allow people to practice different types of occupation. The climate and the land are significant factors in people's lives, since around 70 percent of the peoplepractice agriculture (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Although farmers and herders have held competitive relations for centuries, the current conflict between the two groups is unprecedented in recent years This stems from the fact that the government had abandoned the grazing reserve system. The

Northern regional government had created over 417 grazing reserves in the north in 1965(Shehu, 2018) Under the grazing reserve system, government provided space, water and vaccinations for the livestock while the herdsmen in return paid taxes to the government. However, the situation changed with the discovery of crude oil, whichmade Nigeria an oil economy. The oil created an economic boom in the country, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, and the oil industry became the center of government's attention and projects (Ofuoku, and Isife, 2010). Before the discovery of oil, agriculture was the biggest source of income, contributing 63percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP),but in 1988 this contribution of agriculture to GDP was only 34 percent (Egbuta, 2018) Consequently, the grazing reserve system was abandoned due to the neglect of the agricultural sector as the mainstay of the country's economy.The grazing reserves couldnot be sustained, as it received little or no attention from succeeding administrations. The situation made the herdsmen to return to their traditional and seasonal grazing routes which had been interfered with by industrialisation, urbanization andpopulation pressure. This then led to conflict with farmers and host communities.

The conflict has been on the increase in recent times and now constitute one of the major threats to Nigeria's national security. It has displaced hundreds of thousands and sharpened ethnic, and religious division. What started as a competition between farmers and herders over land across has now assumed a dangerous religious and ethnic character.

The conflict has led to widespread displacement in Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states. Since the violence escalated in January 2018, an estimated 300,000 people have been displaced (International Crisis group, 2018). The conflict has also metamorphosed from spontaneous reactions to provocations to deadly premeditated attacks, particularly in the Middle belt states of the country. It is estimated that the conflict has claimed about six times more civilian lives than the Boko Haram insurgency, and poses a grave threat to the country's stability and unity (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Causes of the conflict

Nigeria has experienced the highest number of farmer-herder conflicts over the past two decades. This trend has increased both in terms of frequency and intensity, with over 2,000 deaths recorded in 2018 (International Crisis Group, 2018). Several reasons have been given as factors behind the ongoing farmer-

herder conflict in Nigeria, ranging from the remote causes to immediate causes.While some of the conflicts may take on an ethno- religious character as a conflict between Christians and Moslems, the more fundamental cause has always been the long-standing struggle over the control of land between the Fulani herders and farmers (Adesote and Peters, 2015).

Climate Change

One of the root causes of the farmer -herder conflict in Nigeria is the issue of climate change. The northern region of the country has over the years been devastated bythe problem of desertification due to the annual decrease in rainfall. It is estimated that Nigeria has lost and average of 350.000 square kilometer of the its land area to desert encroachment in the past sixty years (Okeke, 2014). According to Shehu (2018), the desertification has continued towards the southern parts of the country with an annual speed of 600 meters. These environmental changes havenegatively affected the livelihoods of many people, especially farmers and herders who depend on land for their survival.

As drought and desertification have dried up water sources across the far north of the country, large numbers of herders have to search for alternative pastures and sources of water for their

cattle, thereby causing the migration of herderssouthwards to the farming communities of the middle belt and southern part of the country (Genyi, 2017). Similarly, the farmers who lost some of their land because of climate change are forced to look for new lands to cultivate. This led to the expansion of their farmlands into the areas that used to be suitable for grazing, which means less space for herders' animals.

Growing Land Pressure

As a result of the dramatic increase in Nigeria's population, particularly the rural population, many herders have seen their grazing lands turned into cultivation, thus making their livelihoods very difficult. Over the past four decades, agricultural land in the northern part has doubled reaching nearly 25 percent of the total land surface, a trend that accelerate alongside population growth (Ofuoku, & Isife, 2010). Thus, the expansion of farms and settlements that swallow up grazing reserves and block traditional migration routes is seen as one of the main triggers of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria.

Dispossession

The encroachment of cultivated land into grazing areas has deepened pastoralists' grievance that their rights to resources such as land, water etc compared to those of farmers have often been

ignored. This has brought about the feeling of disenchantment and has increased their frustration and aggression. It should be noted that the Grazing Reserves Act of 1964, was enacted by thefederal government to demarcate certain areas as grazing reserves for the herders. This law was the first official step to regulate the activities ofcattle herders. The government designated 415 specific areas for grazing purposes (Shehu, 2018). However, contrary to the provision of the Act, only 114 of the reserved areas were given the grazing land status officially. Even those which were given the status were not properly protected as grazing areas, while the ones without an official status mostly ended up as new construction areas, either for business or housing (International Crisis Group, 2017). Moreover, the Land Use Act of 1978 transferred all land to the government, and gave it the decision-making power about land leasing and renting (Okello, 2014). This law also made it easier for the farmers to obtain "certificate of Occupancy" for the use of land. Therefore, herders were gradually dispossessed and excluded from the land use.

Cattle Theft

Livestock is the most valuable resource across many rural communities in northern Nigeria, and is a common target of theft. Increased frequency and magnitude of livestock theft is one of the

major causes of violent conflict. The increased incidence of cattle rustling is attributed to activities of armed groups who use stolen cattle to fund their activities. For instance, the Boko Haram terrorist group in the northeast considers cattle theft an important source of money fund for their activities. In the northwest, violent bandit groups alsoengage in massive cattle theft which threatens the herders' source of livelihood (Shehu, 2018). The risk of theft causes herders to arm themselves to protect their animals. On the other hand, aggrieved groups may perceive stealing livestock from communities with which they have been in conflict as a form of revenge. This has raised the stake in the conflict situation, and has led to a rapid expansion in the number of community-based armed groups to ostensibly guard against livestock theft. Sometimes, such groups can also engage in reprisal violence as a form of social justice.

Incessant cases of cattle rustling in the north has also driven herders southward.As the herders migrate to the central and southern states, they meet resistance from the farming communities where high population growth has increased pressure on land. Consequently, clashes over destruction of crops and water pollution have become more frequent. With the decline

of traditional mediation mechanisms and in the absence of mutually accepted, such quarrels increasingly turn violent.

Armed Groups

One of the reasons for the escalation of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is the activities of armed groups in the communities. Most militias complain of inadequate government protection and insist on a right to protect their communities. Often, militias are backed by ethnic and communal leaders, including politicians, who justify their actions and shield them from arrest and prosecution(Shehu, 2018). Militias and vigilantes are not new phenomena in the Middle Belt. Over the last decade, most communities in the middle belt states of Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba, all predominantly farming communities formed militias and vigilante groups to keep off Fulani herders from their farms. These groups sometimes attacked herders in retaliation for alleged damage to farms or to force the "strangers" out of their territory. Similarly, as disputes over grazing resources have increased, some herders who initially acquired arms to drive away cattle rustlers have organised or engaged fighters to avenge real or perceived wrongs by farmers or to gain access to fresh pasture.

In recent times, militias both herder and farmer, have been operating in larger numbers than in the past, and their operations are no longer spontaneous but increasingly premeditated. The nature of attacks has also changed, now increasingly taking the form of scorched-earth campaigns that kill dozens, raze villages and burn down farms. Consequently, the activities of the armed groups have compounded the conflict and impede efforts to curb the farmer-herder conflict.

Impunity and Poor Government Response

There is a constant complain by both the farmers and herders that their demands for justice for past criminal acts and warnings of imminent attacks get little or no response from the government. The Funani accuse the Federal government of inaction and poor response to the farmer-herder conflict. For instance, the government arrested no one in the murder of about 1,000 Fulani herders, including women and children, and the slaughter or theft cattle between June 2017 and January 2018(International Crisis Group, 2018). The Fulani herders were equally dissatisfied with an investigative panel the Adamawa state government set up after the November 2017 killings of over 55 Fulani in attacks by Bachama youth militias in Adamawa state. In retaliation, the

aggrieved Fulani later attacked Bachama villages(International Crisis Group, 2018).

Similarly, Benue Governor Samuel Ortom reported that in 2017 he sent several letters to President Buhari and security chiefs, alerting them of the danger of herder militia attacks on farmers in his state(International Crisis Group, 2018). According to the Governor, he did not receive any positive response from the Federal government.Until the violence escalated in January 2018, no measure was put in place to prevent the violence. On the contrary, the government's response to most incidents had been condemnations, condolences and vows to stop further killings, rather than effective preventive action.Government's failure to either punish perpetrators of previous violence for their atrocities or early respond to distress calls has therefore, emboldened the armed groups involved in herder-farmer conflict.

Effect of Conflict on Internal Displacement in Nigeria

The cost of farmer-herder conflicts on human population is the massive internal displacement being witnessed in the country. Farmer- herder conflict have lasted for years, and have claimed thousands of lives and caused widespread internal displacement. Conflicts between rural farming communities, cattle rustlers, and

nomadic herdsmen in the north central and northwest have been retaliatory, creating a cycle of violence and displacement of thousands of people (Mohammed, 2017). Majority of these clashes that led to displacement had taken place in Taraba, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Benue states between 2000 and 2002. The number of internally displaced persons since 2001 increased in 2004, leading to the displacement of an estimated 220,000 people (IRIN, 2005).In 2004, violence in Plateau state left more than 1,000 people dead, while an estimated 400,000 people were displaced in the state (Kalin, 2010).

A similar conflict in 2008 led to population displacement. The 2008 violence led to the displacement of more than 10,000, while violence in 2010 resulted in about 18,000 internal displacements (Krause, 2011). The National Commission for Refugees estimated that about 3.2 million people were displaced due to farmer-herder clashes that escalated to ethnic and religious conflict, from various states in the country between 2003 and 2008(Akume, 2015).By January 2011, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that about 5000 people were displaced in the 2010. (Mohammed, 2017). New clashes also broke out in 2011, killing 20 persons and displacing 4000 (Akpoghome, 2015). Renewed conflict over land between ethnic

Tiv and Fulani herdsmen in Benue states also led to the displacement of an estimated 15,000 people in 2012 (Mohammed, 2017). Between October, 2016 and January, 2017, over 2,000 people were displaced from Kafanchan in Kaduna State. Continuous clashes between farmers and herders in Benue state also led to widespread population displacement between 2016to 2018.

In the northwest, a new population displacement crisis has also emerged due to the pastoralists and farmers conflict, which have been on the rise in recent years. Fierce, and often violent competition between Fulani herders and Hausa farming communities over land and water has sharpened over the past decade. However, what began as competition between herders and farmers over land has recently metamorphosed into rural banditry with heavy human cost and widespread displacement. In 2011, the northwest witnessed a surge inarmed attacks as the farmer – herder conflict spurred the formation of ethnic militias and vigilante groups (Brenner, 2021). Attacks have led to burning of entire villages, and the numbers of fatalities and displaced people have continued to rise. The northwest has consequently been turned into a theater of war involving many armed non state actors, including herder-allied groups and vigilantes in a violence

that has displaced over 200,000 people and killed over 8000 since 2011 (Mohammed, 2017).

While the Boko Haram insurgency remains Nigeria's biggest security threat, farmer-herder violence, has been rated more deadly than the Boko Haram insurgency (Campell, 2020).According to a 2019 report by UNHCR, over 200,000 persons were internally displaced in several communities of Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto States between January-August 2019. In November 2019, an estimated 4,000 people were also internally displaced in Shiroro LGA of Niger State (UNHCR, 2020). According to Campbell (2020), more than 210,000 people were internally displaced, as at March 2020. Incidences of displacements as a result of farmer -herder attacks have left thousands homeless, a phenomenon that has impacted negatively on millions of displaced people.

The conflicts which have escalated in recent years due to intensification of attacks by criminal groups have resulted in widespread internal displacement across the country. According to International organization of Migration (IOM), armed clashes between herdsmen and farmers, bandits and local communities led to new population displacement in June 2021(IOM, 2021). Similarly, armed conflict between herdsmen and farmers led to

new waves of population displacement between 20 and 26 December 2021 (IOM, 2021). Indeed, the perennial conflict between farmers herders in the northwest and north central has led to the growing population of internally displaced persons.

Government's Response

The federal government has adopted measures in response to the escalating conflict. These measures include deployment of additional police and military forces, prosecution of those responsible for violence, schemes for "cattle colonies", or clusters of ranches with services for herders and, most recently, a National Livestock Transformation Plan.

Similarly, in response to the growing violence, several state governments have adopted anti-open grazing laws to reduce violent conflicts with farmers.Initially enacted in the two Middle Belt states of Benue in 2017 and Taraba in January 2018, the law permits livestock to graze only on ranches; requires people who rear livestock to buy land and establish ranches; prohibits movement of animals within the state except by rail or road; and spells out punishments, including five years' jail term or a 1 million naira (about $3,000) fine, for anyone whose cattle are grazing outside a ranch (International Crisis Group, 2017) In other words, it outlaws the pastoralism practiced by many Fulani. The

Taraba state law, the provisions of which are almost the same, officially took effect on 24 January 2018. However, the laws are seen as outlawing nomadism, representing a threat to the lifestyle of the herders.

The number of conflict and fatalities escalated after the passage of the anti-open grazing laws.The Fulani herders protested against the law, which they see as inimical to their centuries-old pastoralist culture. Between September 2017 to June 2018, farmer-herder violence left at least 1,500 people dead, many more wounded and about 300,000 displaced – an estimated 176,000 in Benue, about 100,000 in Nasarawa, over 100,000 in Plateau, about 19,000 in Taraba and an unknown number in Adamawa (International Crisis Group, 2018).In 2018, Benue was among the states that experienced the worst violent clashes between herder and farmer communities, and the total number of deaths and displacement was more than 2016 and 2017 (Amnesty International, 2018). Following the spread of farmer-herder clashes to the south, the governors of 17 Southern States equally issued a joint resolution in May 2021 to ban open grazing in their states and curtail the violence.

Unfortunately, these laws which are embedded within a hostile political discourse about Fulani herders, makes long-term

conflict de-escalation more difficult. For example, the Nigerian government and many other political actors strongly support the implementation of the 2019 National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), which aims to improve security and reduce farmer-herder conflict by settling herders into ranches.Ranching is viewed suspiciously by many herders as it requires dramatic changes in their lifestyle. Since the law favors local indigenous populations, it often supports farmers who wish to raise cattle. This result is a framework that offers little help to seminomadic pastoralists and instead creates further barriers to land use and access. It does not therefore, address the underlying drivers of division between farmer and herder communities.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan could however, mitigate some pastoralist related conflict if it is be more inclusive of pastoralists' interests. However, flaws in implementation will likely reduce its effectiveness. For instance, Benue State's Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law requires individuals who do not qualify as indigenes, which includes many herders, to follow complexprocedures that include authorization from landowners (Brottem, 2021).In such a case, the law is unlikely to facilitate livelihood transitions or reduce the need for pastoral mobility.

Rather, such laws will further exacerbate intercommunal resentments. Moreover, policies that effectively reduce the grazing land available to herders may also inadvertently fuel cycles of farmer-herder violence. In search of land, herders are increasingly forced into forest reserves, which also serve as hideouts for criminal gangs and extremist groups. This exposes herders to cattle theft and other forms of insecurity to which many herders have responded by arming themselves as a form of protection. Unfortunately, the local communities see them as threats and this makes herders increasingly indistinguishable from extremist groups, andthis contributes to increased intercommunal tensions.

Recommendations

Farmer- herder conflict is a complex and multidimensional conflict that requires a multisectoral approach to resolve it. To this end, there must be a comprehensive plan by government which should include many stakeholders. Most importantly, to end the farmer-herder killings, the federal government should demonstrate more commitment, notably by improving security, tackling impunity by arresting and prosecuting the perpetrators of the atrocities in the ongoing farmer-herder conflict amongst others.

Improve Security

To improve security, the government should increase the number of security personnel, particularly in the most vulnerable states of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states. Moreover, the large number of police personnel still guarding politicians and other privileged elites should be reassigned to trouble spots. Additionally, the federal government should provide the army and police units deployed to these states with additional logistics support, including more patrol vehicles and especially those working in difficult terrain and remote communities.

Technological equipment like drone should be deployed for surveillance. Security services must also improve their professionalism in intelligence gathering and attach great importance to early warning signals to repel attacks(Crisis Group, 2018). Moreover, the police should utilise information gleaned from interrogations of arrested armed group members to apprehend and disarm militias. Preventive measures are needed to deal with the militias effectively. Furthermore, tackling the issue of proliferation of illicit weapons to prevent the inflow of the arms would be one of the most important steps to end the conflict.

End Impunity

There is a general consensus that impunity is one of the major drivers of farmer herder conflict.

To end impunity, the government should hold perpetrators of violence accountable. The government should ensure that both herders and farmers responsible for violence are held to account. The government should also set up an independent high-level commission of enquiry to investigate all major cases of farmer-herder violence. Powerful individuals and sponsors of the armed groups responsible for the violence should be held accountable for the atrocities and should be punished accordingly. Allegations of military complacency and connivance should also be investigated, and adequatemilitary law applied for officers or soldiers found to have acted unprofessionally. For persons already arrested and others who may be indicted, the government should make special arrangements to expedite trials, and those found guilty should be convicted,to send a strong signal against impunity. Delay in the dispensation of justice without special steps to speed up trials gives room for deepening grievances and the risk of further violence. Disarmament of militias and vigilantes should also be taken seriously.

Encourage Herder-Farmer Dialogue

Dialogue between herders and farmers, particularly at the local level, is crucial in ending the violence. In some states, governments have established structures that could facilitate such dialogue. These include the Committee on Reconciliation and Development of Gazetted Grazing Reserves in Adamawa state, the Peace Agency in Plateau state and the multi-level conflict resolution committees in Nasarawa state, whose establishment was formalised on 27 June 2018 (International Crisis group, 2018). State governments should strengthen these structures to ensure sustained engagement with, and effective mediation between the conflict parties. Other new initiatives include the AFAN and MACBAN agreement to collaborateand to ensure peaceful coexistence among their members countrywide. In furtherance of the agreement, they formed a fourteen-person joint committee to recommend strategies for ending violence and building peace between the two groups (Gursoy, 2021). These laudable initiatives should be supported by federal, state and local governmentsas well as non-governmental organisations with expertise in grassroots conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Implement of the National Livestock Transformation Plan

The implementation of the National Livestock Transformation Plan is a step in the right direction, as a way of resolving the perennial farmer-herder conflict. The government should ensure that the proposed transformation addresses all the components of the livestock sector. In addressing these challenges, the federal government shouldensure the acceptance of cattle owners and herders throughout the country. While the leaders of herders' associations acknowledge the need for a phased transition from open grazing to ranching, many cattle owners consider the investments enormous and herders are unsureof their livelihoodif open grazing is abolished. The federal and state governments should formulate realistic options for both cattle owners and the large number of herders who will be rendered redundant by the transition. Such options should include easy access to soft loans for establishing ranches, as well as training for alternative employment in the livestock production and management value chain, including in areas like growing grass and marketing it to ranchers or packaging waste from rice mills and selling it as cattle feed.

The Niger state government's recent initiative to fund skill acquisition programs for Fulani youth, as part of efforts to reduce

farmer-herder clashes and juvenile crime should be emulated by all state government, particularly in the northern region. The government also should show more commitment to the nomadic education program, now over three decades old, which was, among other goals, to give pastoralist youth the basic education necessary for alternative employment(Crisis Group, 2018).

Climate Change

Desertification,threatens the livelihood of everyone, particularly herders and farmer. The federal government should step up efforts to address the root causes of problems in the livestock industry. The first important step is to combat desertification and environmental degradation in the arid and semi-arid northern region.The government should also intensify efforts on re-forestation programmes ,and prevent the pollution of environment. If the government can restore the land and water resourceslost to desertification for agricultural purposes, it will help both farmers and the herders (Gursy, 2020). The Economic Committee of West African States (ECOWAS) and Nigerian government should work together, including neighboring countries in the fight against climate change and desertification (International Crisis Group, 2017). Also, the government should

regulate transhumance migration in line with the international protocols to which Nigeria is a signatory.

Conclusion

The farmer-herder conflict has arguably become the greatest threat to Nigeria's security. It has led to thousands of deaths and widespread internal displacement. Without adequate measures to address the problems ranging from immediate dialogue between affected groups to long-term livestock sector reforms, the conflict risks escalating. Government must take concrete steps to curb the conflict and tackle the drift of many young men to ethnic militancy, the proliferation of arms and the entrenchment of culture of impunity. States enacting anti-open grazing should see herders not as unwanted intruders, but as a crucial link in the food security chain. Similarly, herders' organisations must accept that the old frameworks of farmer-herder relations and conflict resolution are no longer workable and that a transition to ranching is inevitable. The government must as a matter of urgency, implement the national livestock plans, such as creating ranches and improving grazing reserves in order to get to address the root cause of the problem. Most importantly, negotiations between the groups and major stakeholders to work together towards Joint

Problem Solving (JPS) is imperative to address the agelong farmer-herder conflict.

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