

# CONFLICTS AND THE RETROGRESSION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HERDERS-FARMERS' CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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Article History: Received on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2019, Revised on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2019, Published on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The study draws attention to the negative impacts that the conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers have had on Nigeria's national development, especially on its quest to achieve food security while repositioning agriculture as a major player in the economy. It further draws attention to the serious danger these conflicts pose to the country's socio-economic and political sustainability. The study attempts to illuminate the disconnect between these conflicts and the actualization of the twin goals of "no poverty" and "zero hunger" as encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2.

**Methodology:** This study generated both primary and secondary data to evaluate the socio-economic and political implications of the herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. While the primary data were generated through the instrumentality of key informant interviews (KIIs), the secondary data were obtained from archival materials and other published works.

**Main findings:** The study found that herders-farmers conflicts have inflicted serious costs on the Nigerian economy in terms of loss of resources and human lives. It also found that these conflicts have jeopardized the prospects of meeting the global goals of poverty eradication and zero hunger. The study equally found that the government has no specific set of strategies to contain the conflicts and that its equivocation and unwillingness to prosecute the architects and perpetrators of the conflicts has emboldened them.

**Social Implications:** The herders-farmers conflicts have had serious impacts on the people. These impacts include human fatalities, social dislocations, especially displacement and disruption of people's livelihood patterns and the exacerbation of poverty.

**Originality/Novelty:** The originality of the study derives from its successful establishment of wider links between the Fulani herders-farmers conflicts and the prospects of the country derailing in repositioning the agricultural sector and meeting the global goals of poverty reduction and food security.

**Keywords:** Political Economy, Herders-farmers Conflicts, Food Security, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed an array of conflicts threatening its territorial integrity and its overall survival as a state. The recent one is the upsurge in the Fulani herders-farmers conflicts, which has become a blistering issue of concern in Nigeria because of its ubiquitous nature and level of savagery. Despite the occupational affinity between the nomadic herdsman and sedentary crop farmers, the two groups have taken their disagreement to a terrifying and dramatic status of widespread killings, maiming and plundering with the farmers displaced from their ancestral lands. From an economic perspective, the fractured relationship between the herders and farmers has posed a serious danger to Nigeria's political and socio-economic development as well as the human development index.

The consequences have been alarming. It is estimated that over 10,000 people have been killed over the past decade with more than 6,000 of them being casualties in the past two years ([Kwaja& Ademola-Adelehin, 2018](#); [Ilo, Jonathan-Chaver, & Adamolekun, 2019](#)). To underscore the lethality of the Fulani herders, it is reported that the death toll resulting from conflicts between herders and farmers in 2016 alone was about 2,500 persons and that between 2011 and 2016, fatalities averaged more than 2,000 deaths ([International Crisis Group, 2017](#)). This average exceeded the death toll from the Boko Haram terrorist activities in some years within the period. Updated data from the Nigeria Security Tracker documented that fatalities from herders-farmers conflicts in 2017 and 2018 were 1,041 and 2,037 deaths respectively ([Campbell, 2018](#)). The record of fatalities on Boko Haram conflicts in 2018 showed a death toll of 2,016 persons, an indication that herders-farmers conflicts were deadlier than the Boko Haram terrorist carnage ([Campbell, 2018](#); [Ilo et al., 2019](#)). Notwithstanding the deadliness of the Fulani herders, the government's response has been poor and uninspiring ([International Crisis Group, 2017](#)).

Apart from deaths resulting from such conflicts, there is a humanitarian crisis related to internal displacement. It is estimated that over 620,000 people have been displaced in Nigeria's Middle Belt states of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau where the conflicts are more heated ([Kwaja& Ademola-Adelehin, 2018](#)). The overall impact of these conflicts,

beyond the loss of lives in the affected states, is the enduring dislocation and the attendant humanitarian and economic crises of enormous proportions. For instance, in Benue state alone, herdsman-farmers conflicts have led to economic costs of over ₦400 billion resulting from the destruction of properties over the years (Ortom, 2019). The state has also suffered social dislocations in the form of internal displacement. Statistics show that over 180,000 persons registered in eight officially designated Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps in most part of 2018 while over 500,000 displaced people have turned into “refugees” in their various localities as they squat in uncompleted buildings in the most deplorable conditions (Ortom, 2019). The Fulani herders achieved notoriety in 2014 when they were classified as a terrorist group and considered the fourth deadliest group as a result of having killed 1, 229 people (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). The Fulani herders are still very deadly considering the deluge of reports of attacks, ransom kidnapping, and deaths linked to them. Despite the international classification of Fulani herders as terrorists, the Nigerian government does not share the same view.

Nigeria’s security situation is worsened by the inaction of the government and its security agencies amidst the belligerence and carnage orchestrated by the Fulani herdsman and the solidarity and support offered by the pro-Fulani groups like Miyetti Allah KautalHore, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) and Fulani Nationality Movement (FNM). It would appear that the catalyzer for the upsurge in the violence that has enveloped the Nigerian political space for years now through the Fulani herdsman is the penchant of the federal government to be aloof to their atrocious acts and its disinclination to prosecute them. Despite the national and global outrage on the activities of the Fulani herdsman, none of them has been successfully prosecuted. Many of our respondents indicated that the government’s inaction is suggestive of either connivance or outright lack of political and moral will to uphold the constitutional expectations of an impartial dispensation of justice. Our respondents further felt that it is a travesty of justice and betrayal of oath of office for Nigerian government officials who swore to ensure the security and welfare of the citizens to do the exact opposite in the face of violence unleashed by Fulani herders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Contending Perspectives on Herders-Farmers’ Conflicts in Nigeria

This paper interrogates the herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria from various perspectives. Its core task consists of evaluating the socio-economic and political implications and backlashes of the conflicts on Nigeria’s multi-ethnic set-up and overall implications in meeting the global and continental expectations with regard to the twin challenges of poverty and food insecurity in the country. In addressing these concerns, the paper draws insights from the Marxist political ecology approach to link socio-environmental causal factors to elite actions and inactions in illuminating the contending forces that conduce to the seeming ubiquity and intractability of the conflicts.

Broadly speaking, macro-scale analyses of the conflicts between the herders and farmers often attribute ethnic and religious dimensions or coloration to them (Adamu & Ben, 2017; Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018). The nature of the relationship between the herders and the farmers is occupational exclusivity. The herders are exclusively Fulani, who are largely nomadic. They move from place to place in search of pastures and water for their livestock. The farmers, on the other hand, are the natives whose source of livelihood is based on the cultivation of the soil for different crops. Unlike the nomadic Fulani, the farmers are sedentary in their respective localities. Contending scenarios of sophism and denial have been painted to deflate tension, to wit:

- i) That not all Fulani are nomadic cattlemen: that indeed a good number of them had settled in towns, and cities all over the country, especially in many Northern Nigerian cities. Hence, the claim that Fulani is responsible for the gruesome murders across the north-central states of Nigeria cannot be justified.
- ii) That not only Fulani keep cattle. The contention is that cattle rearing have become a universal (global) transnational business involving every ethnic group. The premise of this argument is that most of these herders engaging in horrific murders might not be Fulani.

The build-up to the above is the fear being expressed that the herdsman attacks could be an extension of the Boko Haram terrorist carnage (Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018) which has adversely affected the north-eastern part of Nigeria. The nature of the herdsman attacks reinforced this fear; the targets are the main areas of Christian settlements. The Fulani herdsman and attackers are predominantly Muslims, thus giving the whole saga a religious configuration. This fear has been severally expressed by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to the Federal Government under the leadership of Muhammadu Buhari. The view that is held by a cross-section of analysts is that the attacks represent a surreptitious strategy of advancing jihad to the non-Muslims areas of the country through the well-known jihadist tools of intimidation, destruction and carnage (International Crisis Group, 2017; Adamu & Ben, 2017; McGregor, 2017).

The panacea to the conflicts often advanced is ranching (International Crisis Group, 2017; Egbuta, 2018). But the Fulani herders who are nomadic tend not to be favorably disposed to the idea. The counter-argument to ranching is spearheaded by the Fulani socio-cultural association, Miyetti Allah KautalHore and is principally anchored on its impracticability based on its disconnect and incongruence with the nomadic lifestyle of the Fulani people. The justification provided for the unworkability of ranching was its failure when experimented in former Gongola (now Adamawa and Taraba), Kaduna and Plateau states (Ducrotoy et al, 2018). Apart from the nomadic inclination of the herders, the failure has

further attributed to the unsustainability of the breed of cattle reared by the Fulani in Nigeria's geographical setting. The unsustainability argument is based on the voraciousness of the breed and the likelihood of their grazing habits to eventually lead to ecological disaster ([Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018](#)). A related basis for the opposition of ranching in northern Nigeria is the low volume of annual rainfall. The argument is that northern Nigeria is not like other parts of the world where ranching is successfully practiced because of the narrow window of rainfall. In such places where ranching is thriving, the volume of rain per annum is at least four to seven months, which provides enough grasses to feed the cattle ([Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018](#)). However, [Egbuta \(2018\)](#) has argued that what led to the failure of the ranching initiative, or more appropriately, the grazing reserve model in the north, was policy summersault arising from the abandonment of agriculture as the country's economic mainstay due to the discovery of oil and its subsequent boom in the early 1970s. Therefore, as oil replaced agriculture, the grazing reserve initiative suffered the neglect that was meted to the agricultural sector as a whole.

Many states in Nigeria have risen up to the challenges of herder-farmers conflicts by enacting laws to regulate grazing and by extension the associated conflicts. For instance, the Benue State House of Assembly passed the anti-open grazing law. However, there is opposition from the supporters of the herders, especially their socio-cultural organizations and Fulani elites in government. Their opposition revolves around three key issues: firstly, that the law is oppressive, sectional, negative and, to say the least, repugnant to the socio-economic wellbeing of the pastoralists. Secondly, the movement of cattle by the pastoralist's interstate commerce, which cannot be regulated by any state other than the federal government. Lastly, those anti-grazing laws do not take into cognizance Fulani herders' economy and patterns of relationship with means of production.

Although the nature of transhumance coincides with the dry season when farmers are supposedly less busy compared to the rainy season, the operational modalities of farming do not necessarily follow such strict compartmentalization of seasons. This is so because some crops are always ripe for harvesting during the dry season and some are not strictly annual which means that they would still need to be tended during the dry season. As such, farms may still be active during the dry season.

The intractability of the conflicts between the herders and farmers is rooted in resource war, which is driven, sustained and justified by the logic of culture and way of life. And, this resource war is also linked to their economic wellbeing. What exacerbates the intractability of the conflicts is the traditionalism associated with the manner in which both the herders and farmers operate their different sources of livelihood, which is non-adoption of global best practices in farming and raising livestock. Thus, the two groups (herdsmen and farmers) are at the crossroads of socio-cultural and economic survival. For the Fulani herdsmen, pastoralism goes beyond their economy, as it is a way of life. The entire life of the Fulbe (Fulani) is dependent on their herds. For the Fulani, the cattle surpass everything as their mindset places the cattle at the epicenter of their existence such that the death of their cattle equates their own extermination ([Adebayo, 1991](#)).

The same goes for the farmers. Farming is their culture, their socio-economic well-being, their lives, and the proceeds from farming are the determinants of their essence. Hence, a proximate relationship could be drawn between the cattle and the farm products. In other words, as herds are to the pastoralists so are farm produce to the farmers. The primacy of these two products to these two groups has made for the inevitability of violent conflicts, which has resulted in the death of scores of people on both sides.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed both primary and secondary data in evaluating the socio-economic and political implications of herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The primary data were obtained from twelve respondents comprising of eight security experts and four other respondents with knowledge of Nigeria's political system and issues relating to herders-farmers conflicts. The data gathering tool employed was a key informant interview (KII) method. The choice of the respondents was made through the combination of snowball and convenience sampling techniques. The study used a semi-structured question format to elicit responses from the respondents as it provided them the opportunities to elaborate on their answers where necessary. As part of the pre-interview agreement for personal and occupational safety, the identities of the respondents have been made confidential. The secondary data, on the other hand, were generated from archival materials that range from documents from relevant intergovernmental organizations, journal articles, textbooks, and relevant web-based materials. The analytical tool used was a logical induction method.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### The Geopolitical Dimensions of Herders-Farmers' Conflicts in Nigeria

The recent devastating cases of attacks on crop farmers by nomadic herdsmen in Nigeria, especially in the middle belt states date back to 2002 when clashes erupted in Yelwa-Shendam area of Plateau state, but the conflict assumed a notorious dimension of widespread killings in 2011 ([Mikailu, 2016](#); [Ortom, 2019](#)). There is hardly any part of Nigeria, which has not experienced the negative impacts of Fulani pastoralists on their communities, in one form or the other. However, it appears that north-western Nigeria has the least recorded casualties of pastoralist violence. This is understandable given the fact that the north-west geopolitical zone is regarded as their home base. Secondly, it is from

the north-west that they usually move Southward in search of grazing facilities and water for their cattle. The third, reason, is the ethnoreligious factor, which has facilitated cordiality between Fulani with their kith and kin in the zone as well as other areas where Hausa-Fulani settlements have been dominant.

The north-central states of Plateau, Taraba, Benue, Kogi are usually the most vulnerable areas in the North. For instance, in Plateau state, there are incessant conflicts, which have rendered many people homeless. According to [Bonkat \(2008\)](#), many natives have had to abandon their homeland, which the Fulani invaders occupied until date. This issue needs to be viewed against indigenes (natives) versus settlers' dichotomy that underpins conflicts, particularly in Plateau state. The indigene/settler dichotomy is often used to justify exclusion and marginalization. It is resistant to this classification that often engenders conflicts. The common narrative holds that the indigenes or natives are the original settlers on the land, while the settlers are the migrants, whose history of migration can easily be recalled by the natives. The natives are dominant in the political appointment, representations, and elective offices, however not without the resistance of the migrants. The migrants whose history of migration had spanned more than a century are normally excluded from the ownership of land and traditional chieftaincy entitlements.

In Taraba state, many communities like Takum, Ussa, Gembu, Wukari, and so on, have been completely overrun by the herdsmen. Benue state, which appears to have spearheaded the anti-open grazing bill, is perhaps, the most hit by the crises. The herdsmen-farmers conflicts have claimed scores of lives; even the Christian clerics were not spared. This issue was a major consideration during the 2019 General Elections in Benue state if not the whole of the north-central states.

There are tales of woes arising from herder-orchestrated violence across Nigeria with the new trends ranging from terrorist-like executions to hit-and-run kidnaps-for-ransom. These activities have deepened the security challenges in the country. It would appear that the intention of these series of violence in far-flung parts of Nigeria is to cow their target localities. Thus, from Kogi to Niger states in the north-central zone to Edo and Delta states in the south-south region to Ondo and Oyo states in the south-west to Enugu and Imo states in the south-east geopolitical area, many people have been reportedly murdered in the course of herder-farmer conflicts.

A curious trend in these series of violence is the manifestation of linkages of conspiracy. There appears to be a matrix of conspiracy comprising the government and security agencies. This conspiracy is motorized by government connivance through string-pulling from the presidency, and subsequent inaction by security agencies and, in some situations, the display of overt partisanship against communities that elected to defend themselves against their assailant-herders. Two scenarios in the south-east geopolitical zone exemplify this thinking of conspiracy. The first was in March 2016. The youth of Ugwuneshi Autonomous community in Awgu local government Area of Enugu state had earlier protested the destruction of their farms by Fulani herdsmen and later accosted them when information filtered to the community that their women had been abducted by the herdsmen. The mission of the youth was to rescue these abducted women from captivity. Rather than facilitating peace between the herders and the community, military men swooped on the village and arrested 76 youths of the community ([Akinkuotu, 2016](#); [Okoli, 2016](#)).

The second scenario was an attack on the Okapi Nimbo community. On the midnight of 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016, a band of Fulani herders numbering about 500 persons invaded and massacred over 46 people and destroyed over 11 houses in Okapi Nimbo community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government of Enugu state ([Igata, 2016](#)). The only action reportedly taken by the Nigeria Police was the release of a terse media statement claiming that five persons had been arrested in connection with the massacre. However, there was evidence that the community had reported the impending attack to the police high command but no preventive security measure was taken to forestall the attack and resultant carnage ([Akinkuotu, 2016](#)). Our respondents viewed the actions of the police in the post-massacre period as a mere effort at fence-mending and image-laundering to mask its inaction arising from seemingly unofficial directives from high government quarters sympathetic to the Fulani herdsmen. Furthermore, our respondents interpreted police media statement as a ploy to assuage public tempers and create the impression that something was being done. To underscore this view, none of those purported to have been arrested in connection with the massacre in Okapi Nimbo community was ever arraigned before any court.

Another scenario that manifested and which indicated government complicity was differential responses to security threats between herders and farming communities. The security agencies tended to respond and intervene promptly when the herdsmen were at the receiving end and displayed nonchalance when the herders had an upper hand. For instance, when there was an outbreak of violence between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Mambila Plateau in Taraba state leading to heavy casualties on both sides but with the farmers having an upper hand, the government intervened within 48 hours by dispatching contingents of police, army battalions and a military surveillance helicopter. No such quick response was coordinated when Fulani herdsmen unleashed killings of genocidal proportions in Agatu in Benue state or southern Kaduna or other scenes of herder violence in Kogi, Ekiti and Delta states ([Vanguard, 2017](#)).

There is a deluge of reported incidents of conflicts between the herdsmen and farmers in far-flung places around the country. In fact, wherever there are farming communities with Fulani herdsmen having access to such communities, there are bound to be conflicts. Our respondents opined that where there is no incident of the herdsmen-farmers clash, then the people must be bearing the brunt stoically.



## The Aetiology of Herders-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country that has failed to weld these attributes into forces of strength for national development. Thus, for the past 58 years, Nigeria has not only failed to transform itself into a united entity but has allowed the various divisive primordial forces in the system to entrench deepening centrifugalism. The forces undermining Nigeria's potentials for national development are multidimensional and range from bad leadership characterized by kleptomania to citizen loyalty based on primordial consideration like ethnic and religious affiliation. Thus, there is no internalized culture of national patriotism among the citizenry. The last point on the inadequacy of citizen-socialization-process, which has created in-ward looking ethno-nationalists rather than true nationalists, is part of the enablers of insecurity in Nigeria. Thus, rather than the elites tackling national challenges disinterestedly, ethnoreligious permutations often dictate responses to seemingly national challenges. This politics accounts for the difficulty in forging elite consensus to deal with seemingly national challenges. The result is that the polity is characterized by late interventions in crises some times and non-intervention at other times leaving problems to pile up and reach crisis proportions. The major catalyst for the efflorescence of herders-farmers' conflicts is the partisanship of the elites, which is built around ethnoreligious affiliations.

Apart from the failure of the elites to live up to the expectations of non-partisanship in dealing with national challenges, ecological, developmental and security factors constitute critical escalation factors to the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. The ecological factors are linked to climate change. One of the key environmental changes due to climate change, which has triggered conflicts is water shortage. Water shortage is directly linked to climate change-induced erratic rainfall patterns and extreme aridity, both of which conduce to drought and desertification. These twin challenges of drought and desertification have had the effect of drying up natural water sources and degrading pastures, thus forcing herders to migrate in search of alternative sources of water and grazing for their herds ([International Crisis Group, 2017](#)). Although violence is almost inevitable in situations of competition in the face of diminishing vital resources, a major trigger of violence is the disdain with which the Fulani herders often treated farmlands, thus portraying that farmers had no economic rights. In other words, the migration of Fulani herders southward to flee from a shortage of water and pasture had often been characterized by impatience and aggression resulting in the wholesale destruction of farmlands and in situ crops.

Closely related to the issue of Water Island. The Fulani herdsmen are nomadic. As nomads, they are landless. The most affected group of the Fulbe are the Bororo, who are landless and unrepresented in the political scene. The explanation of the aggression unleashed by Fulani herdsmen in recent times often centers around their quest for land grabbing; that is, the Fulani herders annihilate some natives with the view of taking over their ancestral land. It is instructive that Plateau state government and indigenes have remarked that the herdsmen have taken over some villages in recent times without any form of prohibitive action from the federal government or security agencies.

Developmental pressures have also dictated new trajectories in land requirements. The quest for national development has resulted in rapid urbanization. It is estimated that 49.52 percent of Nigeria's total population resides in urban centers with the country's urbanization rate put at 4.3 percent ([Bloch, Fox, Monroy, & Ojo, 2015](#); [Aliyu & Amadu, 2017](#); [Adekola & Lamond, 2018](#)). What this means is that more and more parcels of land are required for expansion to meet the needs of urbanization. Therefore, as these lands are developed, they cease to be available for both farming and grazing. The implication is that there is the contraction in the total available land to serve the needs of herders and farmers, thus pitching them against each other for access and ascendancy, especially in the face of weak government mechanisms for moderation and mediation.

Another variant of developmental pressure is the impact of rapid population growth. Nigeria's population has always been on the increase with its rate of growth estimated at 3.1 percent. In 1960 when Nigeria secured its national independence, its population was 35 million ([Egbuta, 2018](#)). This figure has been growing in leaps and bounds that as of 2017, the country's population was put at 198.1 million with projections for persistent growth due to high fertility rate and improved child and maternal mortality ([NBS, 2018](#); [CBN, 2018](#)). Population pressures have manifested in several ways, as every ethnic group in the country experiences population growth.

The quest by Fulani herdsmen to become landed is not only connected to satisfying their grazing needs but also to accommodate their increasing population as nomadism may no longer be a viable option. The Nigerian population has been on the increase and it is projected to hit 200 million by the end of 2020. The implication of the population growth trend is that more and more land would be required for infrastructural development. As [Akinyetun \(2016\)](#) has observed, population explosion has made people claim more land and build more houses. The more "idle" pieces of land are used up for various developmental purposes, the less land would be available for farming and grazing. In addition to the requirement of land for developmental purposes in deference to population growth and urbanization, there is another contending force for land, which is the increasing number of livestock owned by Fulani herdsmen. By extension, the number of livestock to cater to has increased astronomically thereby putting too much pressure on the land. A recent estimate put the number of cows at 19.5 million ([Akinnaso, 2018](#)). This figure is an appreciation of 13.9 million cows estimated in 2012, made up of 11.5 million cows in pastoral systems and 2.4 million cows kept in villages ([Lawal-Adebawale, 2012](#)). [Musa \(2016\)](#) has also pointed out that the quest for food security through irrigation farming has led to the conversion of vast areas of land in the savannah belt to this purpose. This conversion meant that such vast areas,

especially along riverbanks of the savannah belts, which were hitherto used by Fulani herdsmen, became unavailable thus intensifying competition for land.

The elites (especially the political elite) have been blamed for the escalation of the crisis between the herdsmen and farmers. In the elite circle, there are two major elites, namely the commercial elite and the political elite. The commercial elite engages in the selling of sophisticated weapons, which have found their ways to the country as a result of the porosity of Nigerian borders. There is a complex business arrangement with regard to the cattle business. This arrangement is much more like the relationship that existed under the feudal system. Thus, most of these herds that are moved around the country are owned by the urban elite of Fulani extraction. In other words, these herdsmen stand proxy for this urban Fulani elites and that is what accounts for their access to sophisticated weapons as well as government protection from all their atrocious killings. Our respondents asserted that most of these nomadic herdsmen are hirelings. To underscore their views, they contended that given the high cost of AK 47 guns, it is highly unthinkable that a large population of herdsmen would be in a position to procure them. It is estimated that an AK 47 gun goes for US\$ 1,292 (about ₦465,120) in Nigeria's black market (McCarthy, 2017). Another thing that is worthy of note, is that more often than not, the difference or line of demarcation between the commercial and political elites is indeterminate. Both are capable of acquiring herds of cattle and can afford to arm their hirelings for the purpose of protecting their vested commercial interest. There has been the allegation that the herders-farmers conflicts have some political undertone. Our respondents argued that the political elite provides protection to the Fulani herders to preserve their nuisance value for political negotiations and horse-trading. In other words, the violence regularly unleashed by Fulani herdsmen has its political value, especially to intimidate and unsettle politically hostile areas.

The seeming intractability of Fulani herder-farmers conflicts is artificial. The artificiality is traceable to the executive-legislative institutional weakness. The executive as represented by the presidency is not pro-active enough to nip the problem in the bud. The National Assembly has been weakened over time, and could not make the executive accountable to guarantee good governance. Indeed, Nigeria is nose-diving towards a failed state. The social indicators of a failed state includes (i) demographic pressures resulting from drought, crop failure, etc (ii) incidence of massive movement of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP), (iii) civil disorders caused by ethnic, racial and religious conflicts and (iv) chronic and sustained human flights (Nwabueze, 2010; Nwozor, 2018). All the afore-mentioned indicators are present in Nigeria's political landscape currently. The inability of the political leadership to stem the tide of violence hassled minority ethnic groups in the north-central geopolitical zone to accuse the Muhamadu Buhari administration of complicity with Fulani herdsmen to usurp their ancestral land. The accusation assumes more weight given that Buhari is of Fulani ethnic group and the patron of MACBAN.

State inaction appears to have emboldened the herders to continue with their violent campaigns against farming communities with impunity. The failure of the state as demonstrated by the reluctance of security agencies to apprehend and prosecute those involved in these conflicts, often possessing genocidal dimensions, has served as a big-time enabler to the continued reproduction of violence by Fulani herders. This has also put the government on the defensive all the time. The executive and the legislature also trade blames over the incessant occurrence of the violence. The governor of Benue state, Samuel Ortom defected from the ruling All Progressives Congress to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in protest to the inability of the Presidency to arrest the ugly situation of Fulani herders-farmers clashes in Benue State.

The inability of the state to engage the youths gainfully has made them vulnerable to violence. There is widespread unemployment among graduates of Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Universities in Nigeria. Moreover, there is no comprehensive arrangement by the state to rehabilitate school dropouts. All these people constitute a threat to the socio-economic and political stability of the Nigerian state. It is common knowledge that the nomadic education which would have liberated the Fulani from the primitive method of cattle rearing has for long been abandoned. Large percentages of Fulani nomads are not educated in the western sense. The farmers' children are either unemployed or school dropouts. The two groups have been known to always mobilize their youths for offensive and defensive actions.

The security factors that have served as triggers and enablers to the conflicts are varied. The nomadic nature of Fulani herders puts them at risk. The insecurity in the north-east as a result of the Boko Haram activities forced the herders to emigrate from that geopolitical zone. Similarly, rural banditry and cattle rustling in the north-west and north-central geopolitical zones made the herders initiate self-help strategies for survival (International Crisis Group, 2017). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the West African sub-region provided them the much-needed weapons for self-protection, which were later deployed for aggression and criminality.

The proliferation of arms and ammunition in the country has greatly aggravated the violence between the herdsmen and farmers. It is important to note that other similar manifestations of violence such as armed robbery, ransom kidnapping, militancy in the Niger-Delta and Boko Haram terrorist activities are sustained by the same illegal arms and ammunitions. The inability of the Nigerian state to curb or block this importation through smuggling has made many Nigerians resign to fate.

The twin cases of rustling and poisoning of foliage for livestock have been known to trigger conflicts between herders and farmers. The high incidence of cattle rustling in the already identified areas of crises has really frustrated the Fulani pastoralists. The aggression, which herders often unleashed on farming communities could be linked to the theft of their

livestock. A mechanism must be put in place to protect the interest of herders by shielding them from cattle rustlers. It, therefore, calls for unmasking the people behind this crime otherwise the lasting peace, which the government envisages may turn illusory. The Fulani herdsman have also alleged that their neighbours usually poison the vegetation around leading to the mass death of their cattle.

### **The Impact of Herders-Farmers Conflicts on the Socio-Economic and Political Development of the Nigerian State**

The Fulani herdsman and farmers' conflicts have negatively impacted on Nigeria's body politic. The first thing to note is that both groups are very crucial to the survival and stability of the polity as well as in meeting the SDGs, especially goals 1 and 2. The two groups are involved in agriculture, which Nigeria is currently promoting as a major strategy to diversify its monocultural economy. The conflicts have had negative consequences on the agricultural sector and the human development index of Nigeria. When agricultural production is in short supply, it provides fodder for inflationary pressures, which in turn heightens tension in the country, and in most cases can lead to political instability and, in extreme cases, an abrupt change of government.

A major cost resulting from Fulani herders-farmers conflicts is drop-in national agricultural productivity and its attendant implication on national wealth formation and the earnings of farmers. The attraction of agriculture is sustained productivity, which helps to offset operational costs and ensures profitability. The driver of the agricultural sector is not livestock production but crop production (CBN, 2018). Thus, the reduction in crop production has implications on the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The major effect of herders-farmers conflicts is disruption and reduction in the productivity of agricultural activities, especially crop production. For instance, one of the theatres of herders-farmers conflicts is the River Benue axis. According to statistical records, the River Benue axis accounts for the production of 20,000 tonnes of grains annually. The conflicts in that axis have had a negative effect on the sustenance of this productive capacity (Egbuta, 2018). In a study conducted by Mercy Corps, it found that Nigeria is more or less losing about US\$13.7 billion to herders-farmers conflicts. In other words, Nigeria stands to gain US\$13.7 billion in total macroeconomic progress if herders-farmers' conflicts were non-existent (Mercy Corps, 2015a).

A necessary fallout of low agricultural output as a result of the herders-farmers' incessant crisis deepening poverty in these theatres of conflicts as well as adjoining or neighbouring communities. The atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty created by the conflicts generally reduces the capacity of both groups to produce optimally. According to Mercy Corps (2015b), an average household in these conflict-prone communities would experience at least a 64 percent or potentially 210 percent decrease in income due to conflicts. This is so because most of them would be afraid to pursue their livelihoods over long stretches of time for security reasons. The impact is the deepening of food insecurity leading to famine, which will inevitably engender malnutrition, an outbreak of preventable diseases, stunting in children and a rise in child and maternal mortality. It is, therefore, not only the earnings of farmers and herders that suffer but their overall wellbeing. The various state governments in these areas where conflicts are prevalent also suffer the loss of income as a result of the non-payment of taxes. It is estimated that states affected by herders-farmers' conflicts lose an average of 47 percent of taxes (Mercy Corps, 2015a).

Another socio-economic implication of the crises is the rising number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The herders-farmers conflicts have resulted in the displacement of many persons from their ancestral homes thus turning them into "exiles" and "refugees" in their own country. The implication of internal displacement is evident at the micro and macro levels. At the micro-level, individuals and their families have suffered in diverse ways, namely, the indignity of relying on state hand-outs and charity for survival, traumatization arising from forceful dislocation from their ancestral environment, the destruction of their means of livelihood and consequent descent into poverty, and the depreciation in their overall quality of life. The combined effect has been the pauperization of these communities and their descent into the poverty trap. At the macro level, government policies enunciated to meet certain international benchmarks have been truncated, thus making their actualization impossible. Another distortion arising from internal displacement has been the diversion of resources that otherwise would have been channeled to developmental projects to cushioning the effects of humanitarian crises caused by internal displacement.

There is a sense in which these conflicts manifest cyclic retaliation. For instance, rustling could be a means of recouping losses for the destruction of farms. And punitive campaigns could also be a means of avenging stolen livestock. In other words, herder-instigated destruction of farms leads to cattle rustling and cattle rustling leads to punitive reprisal attacks. All of these have cost implications. Rural banditry and cattle rustling have had economic implications. In recent decades, cattle rustling with associated losses have increased significantly (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Not only has it aggravated internal tension and insecurity, but it has also had a negative impact on livelihood expectations of the herders and their overall wellbeing. According to the International Crisis Group (2017), estimates put the number of cows stolen by rustlers in 2013 at more than 64,750 with at least 2,991 herders killed in the process. Between 2011 and 2015, bandits, cattle rustlers, and other criminals killed 1,135 people (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The Nigerian economy, especially its agricultural sector, is suffering a setback as a result of the incessant herders-farmers conflicts. This is essentially so given the government's policy thrust towards revamping and repositioning the agricultural sector to contribute more than the current 40 percent to the country's GDP (Adesina, 2012; Vanguard, 2017). Not only is the Nigerian government aiming to achieve a drastic reduction in its food dependence profile, but it

also envisages to use the agricultural sector to reduce the unemployment challenge in the country. As the [CBN \(2018\)](#) has emphasized, the main objectives, which the government wants to achieve through agriculture include: diversifying the economy, ensuring food security and restoring robust economic growth. Therefore, there is a need for stability to ensure the achievement of the agricultural goals of the country.

The herders-farmers conflicts have had a de-marketing effect on the agricultural sector of the country. Since the introduction of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) in 2011, the emphasis of the government has been on private sector-led growth in the agricultural sector within the context of the commodity value-chain approach ([FMARD, 2011](#)). The insecurity created by herders and farmers could make the sector unattractive because investors are only motivated by the logic of profit and the security of their investments, which are often guaranteed by the stability of the political system. Thus, the incessant conflicts are a recipe for driving away prospective investors and foregoing the beneficial prospects of the agricultural sector.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pertinent question at this stage is how Nigeria should respond to the herders-farmers' conflicts to ensure their resolution in a sustainable manner. Many scholars have offered plausible suggestions that could facilitate the resolution of the imbroglio. The key policy-relevant suggestions include the setting up of administrative machinery for peace and conflict resolution as well as the encouragement of constant dialogue between farmers and herders ([Egbuta, 2018](#); [International Crisis Group, 2017](#)); strengthening security arrangements to isolate the criminal elements and make both farmers and herders feel safe and the improvement of the justice system ([Mercy Corps, 2015a](#); [Mikailu, 2016](#); [Egbuta, 2018](#)); the introduction of climate-smart agriculture that sustains both crop farming and animal breeding in view of the pressures of climate change ([Egbuta, 2018](#)); and the resuscitation of grazing reserves as well as the encouragement of ranching ([MercyCorps, 2015b](#); [Asogwa& Okafor, 2016](#); [Mikailu, 2016](#); [International Crisis Group, 2017](#); [Ajibefun, 2018](#)).

However, beyond these interventionist recommendations, there are a number of other strategies that could be deployed to facilitate the enthronement of sustainable peace. Our respondents pointed out that the Nigerian borders are too porous as a result of the failure of the appropriate agencies of government to manage them effectively. They recommended that Nigerian borders should be well-manned in order to check the influx of foreign herdsmen. Additionally, our respondents generally agreed on the urgent need to resuscitate and massively fund the various river basin authorities, especially in the north to enable the growth of grass for animal grazing to minimize nomadic mobility across the country. Considering the importance of national security, there is a need for the creation of appropriate and adequate security architecture. This would help to keep track and checkmate the influx of illegal small arms and light weapons into the country. Furthermore, the creation of common platforms like neighbourhood watch as well as the resuscitation of communal arbitration mechanisms is indispensable in enthroning peace ([Dimelu, Salifu & Igbokwe, 2016](#); [Ajibefun, 2018](#)). The state must take its laws seriously by ensuring that nobody is "above the law". Thus, justice must be vigorously pursued such that architects of violence are made to pay for their crimes.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The practical application of this study is in the domain of conflict resolution and peace building among farming communities and Fulani herdsmen as well as in evolving policies to deal with the threats of the food crisis, which the conflicts could engender in Nigeria.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors acknowledge the support of Landmark University Centre for Research, Innovation, and Development (LUCRID).

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