

## HERDSMEN-FARMERS CRISIS IN NIGERIA AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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### Abstract

*Agriculture is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy as it employs over 70% of the Nation's workforce and provides food security and foreign exchange earnings for the country. However, agriculture in Nigeria is currently faced with many challenges. Among the challenges faced by agriculture is Herdsmen and Farmers crisis which is a common feature in most parts of the country today. This menace has posed a serious threat to the food security as well as socio-economic development of the country. The conflict between the herdsmen and farmers spreading across the country stems from a long history of feuding, herding and farming on limited available farmlands. Unfortunately, the problems are still lingering for a good number of years due to leadership challenges. This paper therefore examines the causes of conflicts between the herdsmen and farmers as well as leadership challenges militating against conflict resolution. It also highlights some of the teething and unresolved problems such as obstruction of cattle routes, unavailability of cattle ranches and poor government policy on cattle rearing. Adoption of dialogue between the herdsmen and farmers, provision of security and other inclusive mechanisms are suggested as way forward in resolving these conflicts and to avoid the looming food insecurity in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Nigeria's economy, Herdsmen and farmers crisis, Conflict resolution

### Introduction

Apart from crude oil and other mineral resources, agriculture has been identified as the major bedrock of food security in Nigeria. It also serves as one of the major sources of revenue for the nation. In addition, it provides employment, raw materials for industries, shelter and clothing, rural-urban socio-economic development, recreation and tourism. However, in view of the numerous benefits of agriculture to mankind, farming activities cannot take place in a chaotic atmosphere and environment such as the one that is common in areas where herders and farmers crisis is prevalent in Nigeria today. In many parts of the country, clashes between herdsmen and arable farmers are very common especially in the northern region where pastoralists and arable farmers will have to contend with one another for the available land and water in the dry season (Emoche, 2018).

Herdsmen are pastoralists or nomadic and semi-nomadic Fulani herders whose major occupation is raising and rearing of livestock (Iro, 1994). The Fulani herdsmen engage in random movement of their cattle while the semi-nomadic pastoralists make transhumance migration and return to their camps or homes. The arable farmers are small holder peasant or subsistence farmers whose primary occupation is cultivating of food crops for human consumption. In Nigeria, the livestock reared by the herdsmen provide a bulk of the beef consumption while food crops produced by farmers are the bulk of staple food for the people as well as food security for the country. The unhealthy competition between the herders and arable farmers over the available land and water resources in many parts of Nigeria is the major cause of herdsmen and farmers crisis (Musa, Shabu & Igbawua, 2014).

Moore (2005) described conflict in resource use as not uncommon and perhaps not unnatural in human environment. Moore further noted that human conflict *per se* is not bad; it is perhaps a necessity in the evolution and development of human organizations. But when conflicts degenerate to violence, destructive clashes, they become not only unhealthy but also counter-productive and threat to progress and development. Nyong and Fiki (2005) stated that resource-related conflicts are responsible for over 12 percent declines in *per capita* food production in sub-saharan Africa.

Currently, competition-driven conflicts between cattle herdsman and arable crop farmers have become common occurrences in many parts of Nigeria. Fasona and Omojola (2005) in a newspaper report on crisis in Nigeria between 1991 and February, 2005 stated that conflicts over agricultural land use between Fulani herdsman and farmers accounted for 35 percent of all reported crises. The study of 27 communities in the North-Central Nigeria conducted by Nyong and Fiki (2005) showed that over 40% of the households surveyed had experienced agricultural land related conflicts as far back as 1965. De Haan (2002) observed that not less than 20 villages were involved in herds-farmers conflicts annually in the states covered by his study. Nyong and Fiki (2005) found a spatial differentiation in crisis occurrence as more violent clashes take place more frequently in resource-rich areas like the Fadamas (flood plains) and river valleys than resource-poor areas.

The cattle herdsman have identified conflicts arising from land use as the "major problem" they face in their occupation (Van't Hooft, Millar & Django, 2005). Describing the annual herding cycle of the Fulani cattle herdsman, Fasona, Faburo, Sodiya, Adebayo, Olorunfemi, Elias, Oyedepo & Oloukoi (2016) stated that the herding season begins with Southward movement of the herds and along river and stream valleys from October to December, marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season. January to February is harmattan season that is characterized by longer grazing hours, herd splitting and more frequent visits to stable water sources. The increasing demand for grasses and water which are relatively scarce in the extreme northern region of the country in the dry season encourages Southward movement of the herds. The months of March and April are usually the toughest for the herdsman and their cattle, as it is the hottest period in the grazing calendar (Riesman, 2007).

The months of May and June signify the end of dry season and vegetation begins to appear. This also marks the beginning of Northward movement of cattle herds. From this period up till September, which is the peak of rainy season, although characterized by cattle-breeding, more milk production and shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production. Herdsman-farmers crisis therefore becomes prevalent during this period. This results to increase in competition for arable land which has often times led to serious manifestation of hostilities and social friction between herders and farmers in many parts of Nigeria. The conflicts have not only heightened the level of insecurity of lives and properties but have also demonstrated high potential to exacerbate food crisis in Nigeria due to loss of lives, animals, crops and valuable properties (Cotula, Toulmin & Hesse, 2004). The threat to human and food security occasioned by these crises is quite real.

Human restiveness and communal clashes have become more prevalent in the savannahs where intensive and extensive crop production activities are particularly predominant around the flood plains. According to Oyesola (2000) and Ajuwon (2004), the cattle herdsman are now being found in the Southern part of the country along the Guinea savannah and forest-belt in search of pasture for their herds. Fiki and Lee (2004) reported that there have been wanton destruction of farms with standing crops, crop barns, residences, losses of livestock and human lives in many rural communities as a result of the crisis between the herdsman

and farmers. All these are potential threats to food security and socio-economic development in the country. With hundreds of farmers killed, kidnapped, farms destroyed and many others deserting their farmlands for the fear of insecurity. The recent high frequency of crisis shows that Nigeria is on the verge of food insecurity (Akinloye, 2017).

### Leadership

According to Kearns (2005), leadership is described as a purposeful relationship, which occurs episodically among participants, who use their individual skills in influence, to advocate transforming change. It is also the ability of developing and communicating a vision to a group of people that will make a vision true (Valenzuela, 2007). The basic attributes of leadership are the confidence, focus, honesty, positivity, decisiveness and inspiration. Leadership is therefore a part of human. Leadership type can be democratic or authoritative and either of these is a common leadership style among the herders and farmers in the rural communities in Nigeria Musa *et al.*, 2014).

### Leadership Challenges Contributing to Herdsmen and Farmers crisis

The various leadership challenges contributing to herders and farmers crisis in many parts of Nigeria as identified by Isah (2009) and Akhaine (2018) include the following:

- (i). Most of the Fulani herdsmen leaders and farming community leaders are not educated. Therefore, lack of requisite level of literacy is affecting the leadership role of the rural community leaders and herders' leaders.
- (ii). Lack of dialogue among the leaders of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers across the country.
- (iii). Use of hate speech in communication between herdsmen leaders and farmers' community leaders in the rural areas.
- (iv). Lack of or inadequate provision of pro-active measures at the three tiers of government to nib the menace of herdsmen-farmers crisis in the bud before it becomes a full-blown conflict.
- (v). Lack of adequate dissemination of information on the modern innovations of cattle rearing and crop husbandry to curb incessant crisis between the herdsmen and farmers over the limited available land and water resources.
- (vi). Lack of provision of security personnel by the government in areas prone to herdsmen and farmers clashes.
- (vii). Nigeria's porous borders with other neighbouring countries.

**Table 1: Examples of crises between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria in recent times**

S/N	Nature of Crisis	Date	Location
1	About 30 people were killed in conflicts between farmers and herders over grazing land in Barkin-Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State.	January 2002	Plateau State
2	About 100 people were killed in clashes between Fulani herdsmen and Yungar ethnic groups in Adamawa State.	February 2003	Adamawa State
3	Herdsmen attacked and burnt 34 farming villages in Adamawa and Gombe States which resulted in 63 dead and over 500 people were injured	May 2003	Adamawa State and Gombe State

4	49 farmers were killed as they flee nomad attacks by Nomads in the farming town of Yelwa, Plateau State	February 2004	Plateau State
5	Dozens of people were killed in Adamawa State when Fulani herdsmen alleged to come from Chad and Niger Republic attacked farming communities in a dispute over grazing land	February 2005	Adamawa State
6	32 people were killed, scores of houses burnt and several farms destroyed following clashes between pastoralists and farmers in Nasarawa State. About 700 pastoralists were sent away from Borno State	December 2009	Nasarawa State and Borno State
7	Fulani herdsmen invaded three villages of Dogo Na Hauwa, Ratsat and Jeji in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State killing many people including mostly children and women in barbaric manner.	March 2010	Plateau State
8	Fulani herdsmen- farmers clash in Kirikasamma Local Government Area of Borno State left one person killed and over 17 people from the farmers' side seriously injured. The crisis was triggered when farmers in the area took measures to protect the perennial destruction of their yet-to-be-harvested farm produce and frequent attacks on them by the Fulani pastoralists. Conflicts between farmers and Fulani pastoralists in Benue State, left two soldiers, some 50 men, women, and children dead.	November 2011	Borno State and Benue State
9	The conflict between Fulani pastoralists and sedentary farmers in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State left over 30 people dead.	March 2012	Benue State
10	16 people were killed in a clash between Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Kadarko community, Giza Local Council of Nasarawa State. About 5,000 residents were displaced and fled to safer areas in nearby towns.	March 2012	Nasarawa State
11	April 2012 one person was killed and several others were injured in a Fulani herdsmen-Hausa farmers clash in Sokoto.	April 2012	Sokoto State
12	A clash between farmers and herders in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State left five people dead, and many others displaced.	May 2012	Benue State
13	At least 6 people were killed, houses burnt and several farmlands were destroyed in Ngandum village, Adamawa State as pastoralists and	June 2012	Adamawa State Adamawa State and Gombe State

	farmers engaged in a fierce battle. These occurred after Herdsmen led their cattle into rice fields resulting in the death of a farmer.		
14	About 200 people, including a serving federal senator, Gyang Dantong, were killed in Matse and Kakuru villages by Fulani herdsmen during a funeral for some people killed earlier by suspected Fulani herdsmen.	July 2012	Plateau State
15	Clashes between Gbagyi farmers and Fulani nomads near Abuja left two people dead, five injured, and over 1,500 people displaced from about 27 settlements that were destroyed.	December 2012	Plateau State
16	Farmer's hand was cut off; his sibling was raped and farmland destroyed by Fulani herdsmen in Oyo State.	March 2015	Oyo State
17	5 days to the end of Governor Suswam's administration in May 2015 over 100 farmers and their family members were killed in villages and refugee camps located in Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa LGAs of the State.	May 24 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Benue State
18	15 people were killed as the Fulani herdsmen attacked two villages in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba State.	April 12 <sup>th</sup> 2016	Taraba State
19	Twenty –five Local Government Areas in Delta State protested on the Benin-Asaba Expressway over the alleged killing of about 23 persons by herdsmen.	April 19 <sup>th</sup> 2016	Delta State
20	Fulani herdsmen attacked Ukpabi Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State and about 40 people were killed.	April 25 <sup>th</sup> 2016	Enugu State
21	Fulani herdsmen attacked and killed 25 people in parts of Taraba State and many villages destroyed.	January 15 <sup>th</sup> 2018	Taraba State
22	Fulani herdsmen attack on rural communities in parts of Nasarawa State, killing several people	December 25 <sup>th</sup> 2017 to January 15 <sup>th</sup> 2018	Nasarawa State
23	Fulani herdsmen attack on farmers, killing over 70 people and houses burnt in many parts of Benue State.	January 1 <sup>st</sup> 2018	Benue State

**Source:** Ukwayi and Anam (2017); Muhammad, Isah & Oladipo (2018)

### **Causes of Crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers**

Isah (2009) and Emoche (2018) have summarized some of the causes of crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers as follows:

- (i) Climatic change, which over the years there has been a change in global and regional climate patterns attributed to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by fossil fuels. This has led to rise in temperature, warming oceans, sea level rise, among others.

- (ii) Use of under-aged children as cattle rearers by herdsmen to control grazing animals in the field.
- (iii) Scaring of cattle by arable farmers and their children thereby arousing the anger of herdsmen which causes conflict.
- (iv) Most livestock routes have been taken over by farmers with little or limited land left for the herders to graze their animals.
- (v) Lack of respect for each other's culture and traditions also causes conflict between the herders and farmers.
- (vi) Moving about with dangerous weapons like guns as it is common with Fulani herdsmen gives the herders the confidence to instigate conflict with farmers and their families.
- (vii) Rumor peddling between the two warring groups (herders and farmers) and their members sometimes can trigger crisis.
- (viii) Farming close to pastoralist settlements often results in conflict as animals may go into such farms and eat up the crops of farmers.
- (ix) Disparity in educational background of the two warring groups (herdsmen and farmers) is a source of suspicion in their interactions with each other which sometimes can cause conflict.
- (x) The compelling need to feed their cattle on crop residues especially during adverse period of dry season when grazing vegetation is scarce. This also leads to conflict as farmers consider such practice as an act of intrusion on their farmlands.
- (xi) Lack of information and inadequate dissemination of useful information to the herdsmen and farmers on new innovations, farm practices, developmental policies or programmes from government can also cause crisis between the two groups.
- (xii) Population pressure on available arable land reduces grazing area for herders' animals and increases competition between the herdsmen and farmers. This sometimes can cause encroachment into farmlands leading to unhealthy conflict between the herders and farmers (Rasheed, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

This paper explores a literature overview of conflicts between the herdsmen and farmers in the country. It was observed that the major cause of crisis between the herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria is climate change which is the primary cause of environmental scarcity, population explosion, unregulated transhumance, ethno-religious intolerance, security threat induced by herders-farmers clashes and lack of effective conflict mediating mechanism, among others. It was also observed that dialogue, negotiation, government intervention, mediation, expulsion and exploration of opportunities presented by climate change are the best and most widely used strategies for resolving conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers.

In view of the above, it is concluded that clashes between herdsmen and farmers in many parts of the country should not be allowed to degenerate further by incitement, intemperate, unguided statements among the citizenry. There should be peaceful co-existence between the Fulani herdsmen and arable farmers in order to enhance agricultural production and sustain food security in Nigeria. Moreover, peaceful resolution of herders and farmers crisis will boost socio-economic development, eradicate poverty in the grass-root and reduce fear of insecurity in the rural areas where the bulk of staple food is produced.

### **Recommendations**

- (i). Federal, State and Local Governments as well as community leaders should explore dialogue among the warring Fulani herdsmen and local farmers across the country to resolve the lingering crisis.



- (ii) The attention of the leadership of herdsmen and farmers such as Miyyeti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and Farmers Association of Nigeria (FAMAN) should be drawn to the importance of embracing cordial working relationship among their leaders and their members.
- (iii) Government should create a forum where farm community leaders and herdsmen leaders with deficiency in education can have access to formal or literacy education especially as it affects changes from traditional to modern animal rearing husbandry and crop production practices.
- (iv) The leaders of the warring parties (Fulani herdsmen and local farmers) should avoid the use of hate speech capable of inciting their members to cause mayhem.
- (v) Government should be proactive in its approach to resolve herdsmen-farmers crisis particularly when the conflict is still in the bud. Any delay in action will always lead to loss of lives and valuable properties and this can cause food insecurity and hunger.
- (vi) Dissemination of any useful information on government policies such as land-use reforms relating to the herders and farmers activities is crucial and must be given utmost priority.
- (vii) The best way to tackle climate change problems is to approach them with the aim of exploring the opportunities they present to empower people. For instance, investing the power sector to cut down gas emission and exploring opportunities in wastewater recycling for irrigation especially in the northern part of the country will not only improve the standard of living of Nigerians, but also create jobs and stop a naturally-induced crisis from becoming politically explosive.
- (viii) Another solution to the problem of crisis between the herders and farmers is to ensure that peace is maintained between herdsmen and local farmers.
- (ix) Other modern ways of feeding cattle have to be devised. There should be ranches because statistics have shown that in Nigeria, only 141 grazing reserves were gazetted with less than 20 equipped with resources for pastoralists.
- (x) Agriculture experts believe that if the proposed National Grazing Route and Reserve Commission (NGRRC) proposed by the Federal Government is established to engender acquisition and management of lands across Nigeria's 36 states to provide pastures for cattle, farmers will be able to produce what the country can eat and export.
- (xi) Herdsmen and farmers should be adequately sensitized on the benefit of anti-open law being enacted in some states in Nigeria before it is fully enforced and implemented to avoid further clashes between the Fulani herders and arable farmers.
- (xii) The use of under-aged children as herders to control herds in the field should be discouraged by the Fulani herdsmen unless such under-aged children are accompanied by matured and experienced herders to ensure proper control of grazing animals.
- (xiii) Local traditional rulers, Fulani herdsmen leaders and farmers' community leaders should be trained in the "modern systems of conflict management and peace

education” to enable them apply such conflict resolution management strategies in their communities whenever there is crisis.

- (xiv) The herders and farmers should show respect and appreciate each other’s cultures and traditions to maintain a peaceful co-existence between the two groups.
- (xv) No herder or farmer should go about with dangerous weapons like guns to avoid the suspicion of attack and reaction.
- (xvi) Farmers should be educated on the need to allow the cattle of Fulani herdsmen graze their crop residues on their farmlands after harvesting. This will help to enrich the soil through defecation, urination and burying some residue into the soil. However, under no circumstances should any herder allow his cattle to graze on standing crops and on the farm produce stored on the farms by farmers.
- (xvii) Most importantly, government should provide adequate security to protect lives and properties in the rural farming communities and along the nation’s porous borders to prevent influx of violent herdsmen from neighbouring countries.

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