

# Changing Perspectives of Killer Herdsmen Mayhem: Redefinition of the Nation State in the New Development Paradigm

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**Abstract:** Pastoralists who are mostly from northern part of Nigeria and mainly of Fulani ethnic extraction move the length and breadth of the country in search of pasture and water for their herds. This open grazing is attributed to harsh and weather changes in the northern region of the country. In a bid to ensure the survival of their herds, they vagrant to different states of the country especially the central and southern states. They settle within communities and fend for their herds. However, their activities in these host communities have led to conflicts between them and their host communities. This paper investigated the primary cause of these incessant conflicts that have caused numerous deaths, dislocation of homes and ethnic tensions. The paper also examined the correlation between the conflicts and economic development of the country. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The paper is purely qualitative in nature and as such content analysis was adopted as tool of analysis. The result therefore revealed that destruction of arable lands and farms by the pastoralists or killer herdsmen as they are popularly referred to in Nigeria is the main cause of the conflict and that the conflict is affecting the economic fortunes of the Country through dwindling production of food and protein. The paper recommended as a way of curbing the conflicts, the establishment of ranches for a fee by states and the introduction of profiling and tracking of the vagrant herdsmen by the Federal Government.

**Keywords:** Pastoralists, conflict, aggression, frustration, ranches.

## 1. Introduction

Agriculture is second to oil in revenue generation in Nigeria. In terms of employment, it is the first. Agriculture according to Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development report (2016) employs about 70 percent of Nigeria's Labour Force. Agriculture in Nigeria consists of both arable farming and livestock farming. Livestock farming is controlled by pastoralists who are mainly from Northern part of the country. It is estimated that over "90 percent of pastoralists are Fulani, a large ethnic group straddling several West and Central African countries" (ICG, 2007, p.1). Pastoralists own approximately 90 percent of the national herd, estimated at 19.5 million cattles, about 975,000 donkeys, 28,000 camels, 72.5 million goats and 41.3 million sheep (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2011). Livestock represents between 20 and 30 percent of total agricultural production and about 6 to 8 percent of overall Gross Domestic Production (GDP) (Ogbe, 2016).

Pastoralism includes nomadic pastoralists or what is referred in Nigeria as herdsmen. They move their livestock from one place to another between wet and dry seasons in search of green pastures. In doing so, they settle in different host communities between one period and another.

Their existence is very necessary. It is estimated that demand for livestock in Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to rise. Thorton (2010) confirmed this when he noted that food demand for livestock products will nearly double in Sub-Saharan Africa from some 200kcal per person per day in 2000 to around 400kcal per person per day in 2050. Unfortunately, United Nations (2014) reports in

Dimelu *et al* (2017) show that the trend of increased demand is currently not matched by a similar growth in local production within Africa. In Sub-Saharan, productivity remains low and average yields per animal are lower than those in other developing regions (Otte and Knips, 2005).

The question is why? Livestock production is facing challenges of constant conflicts between herders and their host communities. Dimelu *et al* (2017) state that more recently herdsmen-farmers conflicts are formidable challenges facing livestock production in Nigeria. The conflicts are not new. Nyong and Fiki (2005) recalled that as far back as 1965, there were conflicts between herders and their host communities. However, the dimension and proportion since 2005 has become deadly and worrisome. A report by International Crisis Group (ICG) (2017) noted that violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years with an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016 alone. These clashes they opined are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East threatening in the process our national security and development.

Governments of some states adversely affected by this malaise have come up with some solutions like enacting of anti-grazing laws. But the herders, not being comfortable with these 'solutions' have simply become more deadly and more atrocious. Benue State for example came up with Benue Anti-Open Grazing Law as a way of preventing the herders from destroying farmers' crops and polluting communal rivers. The result was fatal resistance from

herders as they invaded many local government areas in Benue State killing more than 100 people since early January 2018, with over 100,000 fleeing their homes to safety (Ekpei, 2018). In April, around 30 suspected herdsmen attacked Mbalom community in same Benue State killing 18 people in a dawn attack on a church including two priests and two school principals (Ekpei, 2018). The same scenario enveloped and is still enveloping in Nasarawa, Kogi, Plateau, Enugu, Ekiti, etc, states.

This human carnage affects Nigeria’s economic development in a very negative and great measure. The human lives wasted some of which are professionals and farmers that contribute to economic growth of the country affect the nation’s growth and development. The greatest asset of a nation is its human resources. That a country is successful or otherwise depends on its human resources. Every nation with genuine development intentions builds its human resources. But when these militia herders kill and deplete our human resources, they deplete our economic and development aspirations.

We intend in this paper therefore to carry out an in-depth study on the nefarious activities of killer herdsmen and recommend various options that will provoke Federal and state governments to formulate policies with a view to curbing the menace of Fulani herdsmen and falling back on track on our economic and overall national development.

**2. Aims of the Study**

Historically, relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. By and large, they lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship: herders’ cattles would fertilize the farmers’ land in exchange for grazing rights (ICG, 2017). However, a report by International Crisis Group (ICG) (2017) show that tensions have grown over the past decade, with increasingly violent flare-ups spreading throughout central and southern states; incidents they stated have occurred in at least 22 of the 36 states of Nigeria with over 2,000 people killed and tens of thousands displaced in Benue and Kaduna states alone.

This paper therefore investigates the immediate and remote causes of the disputes between herders and host communities bringing out its implications on Nigeria’s economic development. It is also the aim of this paper to diagnose various measures initiated and implemented by some affected states, evaluate the proposals put forward by the Federal Government and suggest some policy options that can mitigate the crises.

**3. Methodology**

This research is qualitative, documentary and evaluative in nature. Secondary sources especially review of

books, journals, internet resources, etc were employed. It involves therefore the use of documentary analysis as a method of data analysis where these secondary sources were critically assessed and corroborated to attain authenticity and make informed judgments. In this regard, the researchers employed the content analysis techniques in the analysis of the qualitative data used: Observe impression-which is the interpretation of what was observed and Recursive technique-which is summarizing and re-summarizing of our data three times or more until a compact summary emerges reflecting the researchers’ perceptions on the subject matter. This ensured validity and reliability of our study and it is based on such analysis that findings of the study were arrived at, and recommendations and conclusions were subsequently drawn from.

**4. Review of Literature and Theoretical Issues**

Pastoralists in Nigeria still migrate from one community to the other in search of pastures for their livestock. Amusan *et al* (2017) argue that given the traditional nature of pastoral farming techniques in contrast to modern ranch system of livestock production that has become popular elsewhere, nomadic pastoral farmers faced with the direct impacts of climate change indulge in migration. Amusan & Jegede (2014) add that migration and increasing competition for grass and water as heightened by drought and sahelization poses a threat to existing resources, forcing more reliance on migration into new terrains, thus making conflicts inevitable. Adekunle & Adisa (2010) also noted that conflicts arising from herders’ search for resources such as water, forage and land in host communities have remained a major problem faced by the herdsmen in the course of tending their herd. Amusan *et al* (2017) believe that this has bought enmity between the herders and the host communities especially with the arable crop farmers.

Manu *et al* (2014) are of the opinion that conflict emanates from the insatiable nature of human wants; and competitions for scarce resources are the foremost causes of community or inter-group conflicts. Adekunle & Adisa (2010) added that these conflicts are becoming fiercer and increasingly widespread in Nigeria. A report by International Crisis Group (2017) reported that tensions have grown over the past decade, with increasingly violent flare-ups spreading throughout central and southern states; incidents they noted have occurred in at least 22 of the country’s 36 states. Studies on many communities and cases in central Nigeria states where this violence is rampant revealed that these clashes originally emanate from crop farmers in the host communities and herders and have led to many deaths (Nyong & Fiki, 2005; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

**Table 1: Some documented farmlands destruction by herdsmen**

S/N	Data	Location	Incident
1	June 13, 2001	Benue State	A Fulani herdsman trespassed into the farm of a Tiv farmer. His herds destroying crops in the farmland.
2	April, 2006	Ubulu-Uku, Aniocha Local Council, Delta State	Herdsmen destroyed farmlands in 63 communities.
3	April 19, 2016	Lagun village, Lagelu Local Council,	18 herdsmen invaded farms of the communities.

		Oyo State	
4	April 27, 2016	Obiaruku, Ukwani Local Council, Enugu State	Herdsmen held 8 farmers hostage for hours.
5	May 20, 2016	Oke-Ako Ekiti, Ikole Local Council, Ekiti State	Fulani herdsmens' attacks killed 2 people and injured 11 others over disagreements on cattle grazing on natives' farmlands.
6	December 25, 2016	Four Local Government Councils in Southern Kaduna	808 Christians killed in Southern Kaduna and farm produce worth millions of naira destroyed and many towns forcefully taken over by suspected Fulani cattle herdsmen.

Source: Culled from Olatunji, O.E. (2017) *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4(5):72-89.

There are presentations of other farms destroyed by herdsmen in Nigerian communities:

- Crops worth millions of naira were destroyed in two communities in Obokun local government area of Osun State (Makinde, 2018).
- Herdsmen destroy ₦15m crops in Ondo community (Ojo, 2018).
- Nigeria loses \$14 billion annually to herdsmen farmers clashes (Ogundipe & Oluwole, 2016).
- More than fifty clashes in 2017 alone between farmers and herdsmen with 1,000 deaths (<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/why-clashes-are-rise-betweenfarmers-and-herdsmen-in-the-Sahel>).
- 67 clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria between 2007-2011; 716 clashes between 2012-2018 (Ajala, 2018).
- Major causes of herdsmen/farmers clashes are access to land and water (Ajala, 2018).
- Deadly attacks often happen when cattle stray into farmlands and destroy farm products (Ajala, 2018).

There are uncountable numbers of farmlands destroyed by the marauding herdsmen in different communities across the country and these have not gone down well with the communities-the owners of the farms. In a bid to either protect their farms or dispel the intruders, and the herdsmen on the other hand protecting their herds and ensuring that they are fed, clashes have always occurred.

The majority of pastoralists or herders are Fulani, accounting for about 90 percent of cattle herd ownership (Koster and de Wolff, 2012). Fabusoro (2004) collaborated that they are the major cattle breeders, providing the main source of meat, the most available and inexpensive source of protein. The Fulani's according to Fabusoro (2007) were not originally domiciled in Northern Nigeria. They migrated into Hausa Land from the Senegalese valley in the Western Sudan. The author continued that they first settled in the Sudan/Sahel Savanna in Northern Nigeria and were forced out by the deteriorating environmental condition, land degradation and recurrent drought in the Sudan/Sahel Savanna during 1960 to 1970. This accounted for the exodus of pastoralists from their home base to the Guinea savanna

and even beyond to the forest fringes in the southern part of Nigeria (Fabusoro, 2007).

In this light, Adisa and Adekunle (2010) concluded that the migration of nomadic pastoralists follows a systematic pattern, dictated by variations in rainfall, grazing stock, pasture and water. Gbaka (2014) suggested therefore that in the course of moving toward pastorage, water sources, salt licks, etc they tend to protect their livestock against vagaries of nature, tribal enemies, hostile social environments, etc. From the above analysis, Dimelu *et al* (2017) suggest that the migratory nature of the pastoralists is a reason for the conflicts between them and communities as there is intense competition between pastoralists and farming communities. Again, the period from May to September, during the rainy season, has been noted as the intense period of clashes between pastoralists and farmers. This is because of arable land destruction by the herders. When the herders return northwards with their cattle as the vegetation begin to appear in those rainy season months, they invade the arable lands of communities in the south with their cattles destroying crops (Abbass, 2012; Adisa & Adekunle, 2010).

Pastoralists-communities conflict in Nigeria has persisted and intensified and is impacting on economic and indeed all facets of our national development. ACAPS (2017) noted that these conflicts have taken heavy toll on Nigeria's human resources. They estimated that in Benue and Kaduna states alone, at least 2,069 people died in 2016-a toll higher than that caused by Boko Haram insurgency over the same period. ACAPS (2017) in ICG (2017, p.7) noted also that "tens of thousands also have been displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62, 000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states; in the absence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, most seek shelter in other poor, rural communities, straining their already scarce resources".

Furthermore, there are evidences of economic losses because of the conflict between pastoralists and communities. Result of a research by Dimelu *et al* (2017) assert that there are loss of animals, insufficient beef supply, wanton destruction of properties, human and animal lives which impacts on availability and access to sufficient beef, income and wellbeing of herdsmen.

On governmental level, the Mercy Corps (2015) reports that the Federal government of Nigeria lost about \$13.7 billion in annual revenues because of the herders-

farmers conflicts in Central Nigerian states of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states. Mercy Corps (2015) also reported that the four states lost about 47 percent of their internally-generated revenues. Benue state specifically asserts that the conflict had cost the state ₦95 billion

between 2012 and 2014 (The Nation, 2017). The economic impact of the crisis on Borno State is amplified by its poor agricultural harvest during the height of the crisis (2004-2013) in the state. The table below explains aptly.

**Table 2: Farmer-reported typical harvests before and during conflict in Borno State**

Production (metric tons)					
Identification Number of Farmer	Crop	Typical harvest before (2004-2008)	Typical harvest during conflict (2009-2013)	Typical harvest during conflict	Percent Change
1	Cowpea	1.0	0.3		-70
2		2.0	0.5		-75
1	Maize	2.8	0.4		-86
2		4.8	1.0		-80
3		15.0	2.2		-85
1	Sorghum	0.8	0		-100
4		20.0	6.4		-68
3	Rice	3.0	1.5		-50
4	Millet	5.0	1.1		-78

**Source: Africa Growth Initiative Working Paper 17 July, 2014**

Contributing, Ahmed-Gamgum (2018) postulates that at the end of violent confrontations lots of lives, properties and settlements are destroyed. The population of farmers he maintains is reduced, population of widows, widowers and orphans increase and more money is expended on arms and security provision services which affects our economic well being and national development.

On the other hand, the products of pastoralists which are the main source of protein in the country cannot be done without. Higazi and Yousuf (2016, p.3) opine that “pastoralist livelihoods supports millions of Nigerians and form an important part of the rural economy and society”. From the literature reviewed, it can be observed that both the communities and herders and the agricultural business they engage in have enormous impact on our economic development and constant conflicts between them cannot help the nation’s path to development.

**Frustration- aggression theory**

This paper hinges its theoretical foundation on frustration-aggression theory. This theory attempts to explain but not justify the cause of violence. Dollard et al propounded the theory in 1939. It states that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. They stated that “the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression”. In that regard, the cause or reason for violence is frustration. Dollard *et al* (1939) posit in Mba (2014) that frustration causes aggression and when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target. Amusan *et al* (2017, p.37) explained further that the exhibition of aggressive behaviour always follows from a frustration-evoking impulse”.

Mba (2014) defined aggression as an action with the intent to harm, and can be physical while frustration is

the condition which exists when a goal-response suffers interference. In otherwords, difficulty in achieving a purpose or a goal. The failure to achieve the goal leads to aggressive behaviour.

The pastoralists in Nigeria due to harsh realities of weather in their native northern Nigeria move with their herds southward for greener pastures. The long trek from one part of the country to the other and sometimes encountering great difficulty in finding pastures that are not farms leads to frustration. The communities they come in contact most times do not allow them to graze in their communities for fear of farm destruction and river pollution. Faced with hunger for their herds and fear of losing them, they resort to violence.

**5. Discussion of Findings**

Herders-farmers or communities conflicts have intensified over the last decade. It has become more dangerous and deadly threatening not just the economic well being of the country but its national security, unity and cohesion. Deaths by farmers in their communities by the Fulani herdsmen are reported every now and then across the country especially the central and southern part of the country. The worrisome aspect of the situation is the lack of serious intervention by the federal government. They have failed to enact any law against the crisis or seriously put measures underway to curb it or secure the armless farmers in their communities.

Some citizens are beginning to wonder if the lack of response is based on the fact that the president of the country is a Fulani or the grand patron of the Fulani herdsmen association- The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders’ Association (MACBA). The rhetorical question is, if the Fulanis are the ones being slaughtered that is, the ones at the receiving end, wouldn’t the federal government have acted? Another disturbing aspect is that the federal government through the

police force asked citizens of the country with illegal firearms to submit them. Citizens in this aspect include the Fulani herdsmen. Law abiding citizens responded but the herdsmen never surrendered their firearms. The implication of this is that ordinary citizens are exposed to the mercy of the Fulanis and other miscreants. And they have used their illegally acquired firearms to unleash more mayhem and deaths in communities that innocently accommodated them or allowed them to trespass their route. Our federal government has not responded to the herdsmen's refusal to submit their firearms in any way.

Two states-Benue and Ekiti have however responded with anti-grazing laws promulgated by their various Houses of Assemblies. The law prohibited open rearing and grazing of livestock and provision of ranches. In the case of Ekiti state, the law bans grazing after 6pm in the evening and before 7am in the morning. No herdsman should carry firearm in the course of rearing his animals or be charged with terrorism. If the federal government and other states will come up with such laws, then there will be end in sight to the crisis between herders and communities in the country.

#### **6. Recommendations**

It is the opinion of this paper that free animal grazing with the accruing incidences of farm destruction and other multiplier effects must be discontinued. It is recommended that every state of the federation should provide ranches for herdsmen and for a fee. This is their private business and levies, taxes and dues should be paid by them to their host government as other businesses in Nigeria do. If this becomes the case, some state governments that are in disagreement over the establishment of grazing reserves will change their stance as this policy will bring economic development.

Federal government that has the exclusive authority over security apparatus of the country should use this apparatus to stop the incessant killings and attacks from herdsmen. If they do not act decisively and fast, citizens might resort to self help. No particular group of citizens has monopoly of violence. And if there are counter attacks and revenge killings by host communities, it will only exacerbate the situation and create more social and economic upheavals. In that regard, federal government should strengthen the security arrangement with specific instructions to stop the attacks and deal with criminal elements.

Profiling and tracking are options that the federal government should consider. This involves getting personal details of all herdsmen in the country in a census-like manner. In that line, a census of herdsmen should be taken and stored. They will then be tracked technologically to know the location they are at every point in time. If any conflict ensues along the line, the government will know who are responsible and arrests, investigations and prosecutions can follow. Developed countries like the United Kingdom and United States profile and track their dangerous criminals with a view to controlling them. It is working

marvelously well for them and can work for Nigeria too in our bid to finding a lasting solution to the menace of herdsmen.

There is mistrust between the herders and communities as an aftermath of incessant crisis between the duos. Government (especially state governments) should establish resolution, reconciliation and mediation panels to assuage this mistrust. It should be a form of commission that any aggrieved party can report its grievances to and solutions sought. This civil mechanism can go a long way in solving the herders/communities altercations.

#### **7. Conclusion**

The spate of conflicts resulting in wanton killings and destructions between herders and their host communities is simply alarming. Human lives are taken on a daily basis and properties worth millions are wasted in the process. Federal government has not shown enough commitment or come out with enabling policies to curb the situation. The crisis has brought about low production of food and meat with increased prices for the little available. This is affecting the economic prospects of not just the affected states but the country as a whole. Nigeria exited recession because of high production in agriculture and if the government does not act fast to stop this crisis that is affecting agricultural production, we cannot rule out getting back into recession.

The volume of deaths in the country is simply too high. No country survives with this volume of death meted out to citizens by fellow citizens. Revenge attacks will simply lead to civil war that will break up the polity. Federal government's suspicious silence and inaction is simply not an option.

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