

The Fallouts of Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract: *There is an on-going conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in almost every nook and cranny of the Nigerian state. The conflict is of recent development. But despite its recency, the conflict has done great harm in Nigeria and to Nigerians. Sincere Nigerians within Nigeria, most especially, can attest to the blunt fact that the conflict has caused deluge of problems in virtually all ambits of life in the country. And to this effect, this paper employs primary and secondary data in bringing out of obscurity the economic, political, security and socio-cultural effects of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria as well as the possible remedies to it.*

Keywords: Fallouts, herdsmen, Farmers, conflict

Introduction

Man can deny everything but he cannot deny the open truth that conflict is as old as he is. Every human society, no matter its level of civilization, digitalization and advancement, has witnessed either intra-personal conflict, or inter-personal conflict, or intra-group conflict, or inter-group conflict, or all combined at one time or the other, and Nigeria is not an exception. The herdsmen-farmers conflict (an inter-group conflict) is one that broke out between two different agriculturist groups in Nigeria. The principal or major cause of the conflict is the struggle over who occupies and utilizes the land since one of the group (the herdsmen) needs land where their cattle would graze on, and the other (the farmers) also need land to till and cultivate their crops. And it is widely accepted, just like Rashid (2012) opined, that land is the most important resource needed by man for his day-today existence. Builders, manufacturers, fishermen, miners, hunters and farmers need land to carry out their respective activities. However because land is a limited and scarce resource, competition (which leads to conflict, as Conflict Theorists would say) becomes inevitable.

According to Ajibefun (2018), the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers came into existence as a result of encroachment of farmlands by the herders. And, “attempts by farmers to prevent them (Fulani herdsmen) from causing havoc”, as Adetula (2016) notes “met with stiff and violent resistance”. But from the angle of the herdsmen, the causes of the conflict are: attack on “innocent” cattle, cattle rustling, and “unpalatable” government policies. According to the National Vice President of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Husaini Yusuf Bosso, as recorded by BBC News Pidgin, it is the anti-grazing law in many Nigerian states that is responsible for the conflict, and until they are abolished the conflict may not stop. He said:

We no wan dis crisis to continue. Na di anti-open grazing law na im cause am but we no want am to continue. Government suppose comot di law or provide us with land to our cows

Be that as it may, the conflict and its consequences are soaring every day. In Ajala (2018), a 2017 Global Terrorism index report revealed that there were 67 clashes between the two groups in Nigeria between 2007 and 2011, and 716 clashes between 2012 and 2018. Gift Sunday (2017) on the other hand notes that the conflict led to the death of 80 people in total between 2010 and 2013, while in 2014 it led to the death of 1,229 people. At this juncture therefore, we will be looking at the consequences of the conflict in detail.

Economic Fallouts

The conflict between these two groups (herdsmen and farmers) is a great obstacle and threat to Nigeria’s economic development. Although both groups have contributed positively to the economic development of the country, the current crisis between them is greatly marring the nation’s economy. In a report released by Mercy Corps (a global humanitarian organization), it was revealed that the on-going crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers across the North-Central geopolitical zone alone costs Nigeria at least 14 billion US dollars in potential revenues annually (see Premium Times, 2018). In the same vein, Njoku (2018) noted that the same conflict between these two groups which claimed the lives of six thousand and five hundred (6,500) Nigerians between 2010 and 2015 also caused the displacement of sixty-two thousand (62,000) citizens from their homes and ultimately caused the destruction of properties and investments worth 14.7 billion dollars within the same period of time.

In Bauchi State in North-East geopolitical zone, the economy of the state witnessed great devastation as a result of herdsmen-farmers conflict. The state which occupies a total land area of 492,359 km² and houses or shelters about 4,696, 465 people is

one of the states in the federation where insurgency is very high. Amid the clashes going on in the state, several losses have been recorded. For example, the monetary value of farm and farm produce lost to the conflict was ₦72,117,006.00. Livestock that were also lost to the conflict include 34 cattle and 11 sheep/goats valued about 1.8 million Naira. A total of about ₦3,193,100.00 was incurred from both totally damaged and partially destroyed tube well/washbore equipment, with water pumps recording ₦176,415.00. Motorcycles and bicycles accounted for ₦565,254.00 in terms of losses experienced. Comparatively, the arable farmers in the state incurred higher ₦80,075,172.00 losses in monetary term than the pastoralists who recorded ₦7,047,013.00. Also, six houses were noted destroyed beyond repairs, and the monetary value of this stood at ₦5,920,410.00 (see Sulaiman and Jaafar-Furo, 2010).

Moreover, the former Nigerian head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar addressed Nigerians, in a one-day forum organized by a group identified as the Eye-Opening Statistics, about the killings and losses the Farmers-herdsmen conflict had caused in Plateau, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Benue state in just one year. He gave the statistics as follow: for 2016 only, 2,500 people were killed; 62,000 people displaced from their homes; 13.7 billion dollars lost to the clashes and 47 per cent of the internally-generated revenue in the affected states lost (see The Guardian, 03 November 2017). Going by the statistics above, if 47 is subtracted from 100, the result becomes 53. So it then means that these four states Abubakar mentioned (Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Kaduna) had only 53 per cent each out of 100 per cent of their respective internally-generated revenues. In other words, the conflict between farmers and herdsmen deprived these states almost half of their total earnings.

Another economic adversity of the conflict is the pressure put on the government by the conflict to shift some of the national spending to the purchase of military hardware. Instead of investing more on education, agriculture, aviation and tourism which help in building a nation's economy, the government now had no other option than to spend huge sum of money on acquiring different types of arms and weapons. Hence, Ajibefun (2018) notes that a substantial part of the country's budget has been spent on the compensation of families who lost their relations to the conflict, and huge amount of money spent on weapons and ammunition acquisition so as to equip the military to handle the situation on ground.

Socio-Cultural Fallout

Apart from having economic consequences, the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers has huge social effects on Nigerians and the Nigerian nation. In a country as heterogeneous as Nigeria, when things happen, they easily attract ethno-religious sentiments. Herdsmen-Farmers conflict has greatly threatened national unity in Nigeria. Many people in the country are presently viewing the issue through the telescope of religion and ethnicity. Based on the fact that Fulani herdsmen are mostly Muslims and some farming communities predominately Christian, the conflict between the groups has become, to some people, an ethno-religious conflict. This has also worsened Nigeria's fault-lines because those who share the same faith as farming communities view these clashes as attempts at ethnic cleansing and even a modern-day reincarnation of Usman Dan Fodio's Fulani Jihad of 1804. Meanwhile those who are of the same tribe and religion with the herdsmen are reluctant to condemn the actions of their militias (Amaza, 2018).

In mass media, internet and social media, Nigerians constantly pour out their grievances and point accusing fingers at this ethnic group and that as the ones responsible for the conflict, which is never a good omen for the country's unity. Majority of Igbo, for example, accuse President Muhammadu Buhari (who happens to be of Fulani descent) of knowing and supporting the killings perpetrated by his kinsmen. Some Igbo increased criticisms on the conflict against the Fulani president when Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was arrested, and the activities of the non-violent movement proscribed by the government of Buhari. What later broke the camel's back was when IPOB was pronounced a terrorist group by the same government. Many Igbo people took to Social Media to 'crucify' the president, saying that the president has not tagged or pronounced Fulani herdsmen, who have perpetrated many killings in the country, terrorists but has declared a non-violent movement a terrorist group. This was also confirmed by Campbell in his Perception of Tribalism and the Farmer-Herdsmen conflict in Nigeria.

In Berom farming community in Plateau State, something dramatic occurred. After the killing of a group of five herdsmen by Berom farmers on June 21, 2018, there was reprisal attacks which led to the death of eighty-six (86) persons and destruction of fifty (50) houses. When this happened, the people of Berom, mostly youths, erected roadblocks on all their roads, attacking travelers who looked "Fulani and Muslim" (CNA, 2018). Also, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of Christians in Nigeria, blasted President Buhari over his 'reluctance' in taking effective action against his fellow Fulani brothers (the herdsmen). CAN's General Secretary, Musa Asake noted that the Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked Christian community in Bwari, Abuja on 2017 Christmas Day and killed several people. He also noted that on New Year's Day in 2018, Christians observing "watch-night" service in Ilorin were attacked and three churches burnt. In spite of this, the Nigerian Air Force bombed a Christian IDP Camp and killed over two hundred (200) Christian refugees in Rann, Kala-Balge Local Government Area in Borno State on 17th January 2017, he noted. At this juncture, Asake said: "It is unfortunate that a president that was sworn into office to uphold and defend the constitution has flagrantly violated the constitution and adopted Sharia ideology as operational standard..... Unfortunately, within few weeks of his (Buhari) election, he started creating the

impression that he was in power to serve the interest of his Fulani ethnic group only.... Under President Buhari, the murderous Fulani herdsmen enjoyed unprecedented protection and favouritism to the extent that the herdsmen treat Nigeria as a conquered territory....” (Daily Post, 16 January 2018). Based on the above ethno-religious sentiments by individuals, communities and groups, Ajibefun (2018) concluded that the clashes between herdsmen and farmers have done nothing but pitched Christians and Muslims against each other. In the same vein, Kupoluyi (2017), cited in Njoku (2018), stated that the same on-going clashes between these two groups if not curbed, can set the nation on fire in ethno-religious terms.

Another significant social effect of the conflict is the displacement of Nigerian citizens from their homes. Many people have deserted their homes for IDP –Internally Displaced Persons camps because of the bloody conflict between farmers and herdsmen. According to figures released by the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), about eighty thousand, four hundred and fifty (80,450) children dwell in eight IDP camps in Benue State alone as at March 1, 2018. Out of the figure presented above, SEMA made it clear that Forty-seven thousand, three hundred and fifty-three (47,353) were male while thirty-nine thousand, nine hundred and nine (39,909) were female children (Vanguard (A), 24 March 2018). So while other children in other parts of the world are living comfortably in their homes and studying in schools for a better tomorrow, these ones here languish in IDP camps, without even the warmth of their homes. Also, in the future when these children’s mates and contemporaries would be progressing and contributing meaningfully to their society, these ones in IDP camps would be retrogressing because they were deprived of the virtues of sound education and warmth of their homes as a result of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in their communities.

The conflict has also disconnected many children from their parents and vice versa. It has hindered effective communication between families, relations and loved ones. Apart from this, social rights and right to life of many have been extremely violated in the ongoing clashes. Many have been killed, raped, kidnapped and valuables stolen and looted. For example, a witness in an attack in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State told Vanguard News, “Right now, coordinated war is raging simultaneously in most villages in Omala, Dekina and Bassa Local Government Areas. Our people are being killed and houses burnt down, even as our women are being raped while many children who ran from the theatre of war were still missing” (Vanguard (B), 19 March 2018). From the same report, a traditional ruler of Onu Okenwu of Agbenema Community, Musa Edibo and his wife were reportedly killed in the same attack. So, if a traditional ruler could be murdered in the conflict, it then shows that the herdsmen-farmers conflict is also a huge enemy or threat to culture and tradition.

According to one of the researcher’s respondent in Asaba, Delta State who answered his questionnaire on a condition of anonymity, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers has constituted a big hindrance to effective communication between people and even between and among blood relations. He noted that for about seven months he had not spoken with a cousin of his that lives in Taraba State with her family. He noted that they used to communicate and pay each other visits once in two or three months but since the escalation of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in the state such had been a history for them for over seven consecutive months. He went further to express that he blames not his cousin nor himself for that but the conflict, because one whose house is on fire does not go about chasing rat.

Political and Security Fallouts

The herdsmen-farmers conflict undoubtedly has become the most potent threat to national security in Nigeria. The conflict has become very alarming recently due to its sheer brutality, frequency and level of destruction. Many communities and states in the federation have witnessed deterioration in terms of security and rise in casualty rate. In states such as Benue, Niger, Plateau, Taraba and Kaduna where the conflict is fierce and at its peak, people feel highly insecure, hence, they at times abandon their homes, farms and business for IDP camps in search of safety and security for their precious lives. The conflict has brought many security challenges such as economic downturn and harsh conditions of living as well as unemployment. As at date, there have been wanton killings, loss of lives and mass displacement of people in the above listed states (see Gadzama, 2018). In fact, many objective watchers have declared that the now regular raids by the militant Fulani herdsmen are the biggest security threat facing Nigeria after Boko Haram. Actually, the number of people dead in 2016 due to the herdsmen-farmers conflict surpass that of Boko Haram attacks (see Oluabunwa, 2018).

The conflict has currently given birth to a number of reprisal attacks in the country which have also claimed lives. Although many figures and personalities in the country have supported reprisal attacks as the only way communities should and/or can guard themselves against herdsmen attacks. For example, Bishop Dogo, after an attack on ECWA Church in Zaria in June 2012, said in an interview, “It’s high time for our people to revenge because most of the attack is purposely targeted on us, so I see no reason for us not to retaliate”. Another personality in the person of Zakka, expressed his support for retaliation by saying, “Retaliation is the only solution for now because the government fails to address the insurgency caused by the terrorists” (see Akinyetun, 2016). However, more people have died in many communities all in the name of retaliation. Many who have also tried to defend or protect their abodes and avenge for themselves the attacks by ‘herdsmen’ have met their death in those vengeance and reprisals.

Indeed, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers has led to today’s call to arms by some politicians and statesmen/stateswomen. Some politicians and statesmen (like T. Y. Danjuma, Ayodele Fayose, Senator Shehu Sani, etc.) have clamoured for the need for the public to pick up arms and defend themselves instead of waiting on the government and the security personnel. Some of them have also advised the masses on media to mobilize ethnic militia for the protection of their lives and property. These politicians even looked for constitutional backups in order to convince the public to arm themselves. But this has been lambasted by some other persons of influence on the ground that such call for arms has political undertone and can only reinstate the Hobbesian State of Nature. Hence, this particular call which stemmed from the conflict between herdsmen and farmers is on its own a threat to the nation’s security and unity, if properly examined.

Further, the activities of herdsmen who have been classified by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) as “the fifth deadliest terror group in the world”, and the lingering clashes between them and farmers have resulted in Nigeria sliding to an unenviable and irritating ranking of 13th position on the world peace index. Meaning that Nigeria ranks 13th least stable country in the world, based on Fragile State Index (FSI) (see Njoku, 2018). In other words, the herdsmen-farmers conflict is seriously soiling the image of Nigeria abroad.

Another significant security threat the conflict has posed in the country is the issue of food shortage. It is no news anymore that many have abstained from farming in most communities due to the fear of losing their lives on the process. Due-for-harvest crops and plants in many farmlands now serve as foods to animals and birds of the air. Also, there lie in many farmlands crops calling for pesticides but in the midst of the conflict, some farmers are afraid of going to their farms to administer pesticides on their farm crops. In respect to this, Njoku (2018) stressed that with the ban on importation of certain food items coupled with the loss of large quantity of locally produced food crops, the large percentage of the Nigerian population might be vulnerable to severe food shortage.

Besides, the ‘said’ conflict has also contributed greatly to the soaring of banditry in the country. In different parts of Nigeria, while some opportunists are busy rustling the herdsmen’s cattle, others are in different farms reaping what they did not sow. According to Njoku (2018:13), incidences of cattle rustling is also a great threat to national security because it extends to different states of the federation like a wildfire. In addition, Njoku observed that cattle, which constitute the valuable economic asset of the cattle owners, are presently being rustled by bandits (p15). In April 2016, soldiers of I Division of Nigeria Army under the auspice of Operation Sharan Daji invaded bandits’ camps in Zamfara and Katsina states. After a brief exchange of gunshots between the soldiers and the bandits, the soldiers overpowered them and recovered five (5) AK-47 rifles, eleven (11) AK-47 rifle magazines, 205 rounds of 7.62mm (special) ammunition and 25 rounds of 7.62mm. Aside from this, while the soldiers moved from Zamfara State to Faskari Local Government Area of Katsina State, they arrested seventeen (17) cattle rustlers and recovered nine hundred and thirty (930) cattle, two hundred and ten (210) sheep and twenty (20) machetes (Vanguard(C), 14 May 2016). These bandits were no other people but individuals who saw the herdsmen-farmers conflict as an opportunity to create an empire of livestock and farm produce for themselves, by reaping where neither their cutlasses nor hoes worked on.

Table 1: Level of deaths and destructions the herdsmen-farmers conflict has caused in different states of Nigeria

Date	Location	Attack	Body Count
April, 2016	Enugu	Heavily armed Fulani herdsmen attacked Nimbo (Nimbo Ngwoko, Ugwuji, Ekwuru, Ebor, Enugu Nimbo, Umuome and Ugwuachara) villages in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area. Ten residential houses and a church were also burnt in addition to vehicles, motorcycle and domestic animals.	Forty (40)
April, 2016	Taraba	An attack on residents and razing of houses in Dori and Mesuma villages, Gashaka Local Government.	Fifteen (15)
February, 2016	Agatu	A village in Agatu, Benue State.	Fifty (50)
December, 2015	Jos	An attack on Kwata community, Jos South Local Government, following a prior warning leading to deaths and six houses burnt.	Twenty-two (22)

(see Akinyetun, 2016:39)

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is and remains one of the cores in a research work. It is “a network, or ‘a plane’ of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena.... It provides interpretative approach to social reality..... It aims to help us understand phenomena rather than to predict them” (Jabareen, 2015). Central to conceptual framework is model. A model, or rather theoretical model, is “a broad system of explanation that is founded not so much on prior research findings but largely on untested and unproven assumptions about social realities” (Ekong, 2003 in Aliyu, 2015). The essence of model is to facilitate proper understanding by pointing at relationships existing among variables. The model drawn below consists of three boxes. The first box consists of independent variables which represent the reasons/causes of the present herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The second box consisting of dependent variables representing series or forms of the conflict itself, while the third box also consist of dependent variables representing the negative outcomes or effects of the conflict on nation-building in Nigeria.

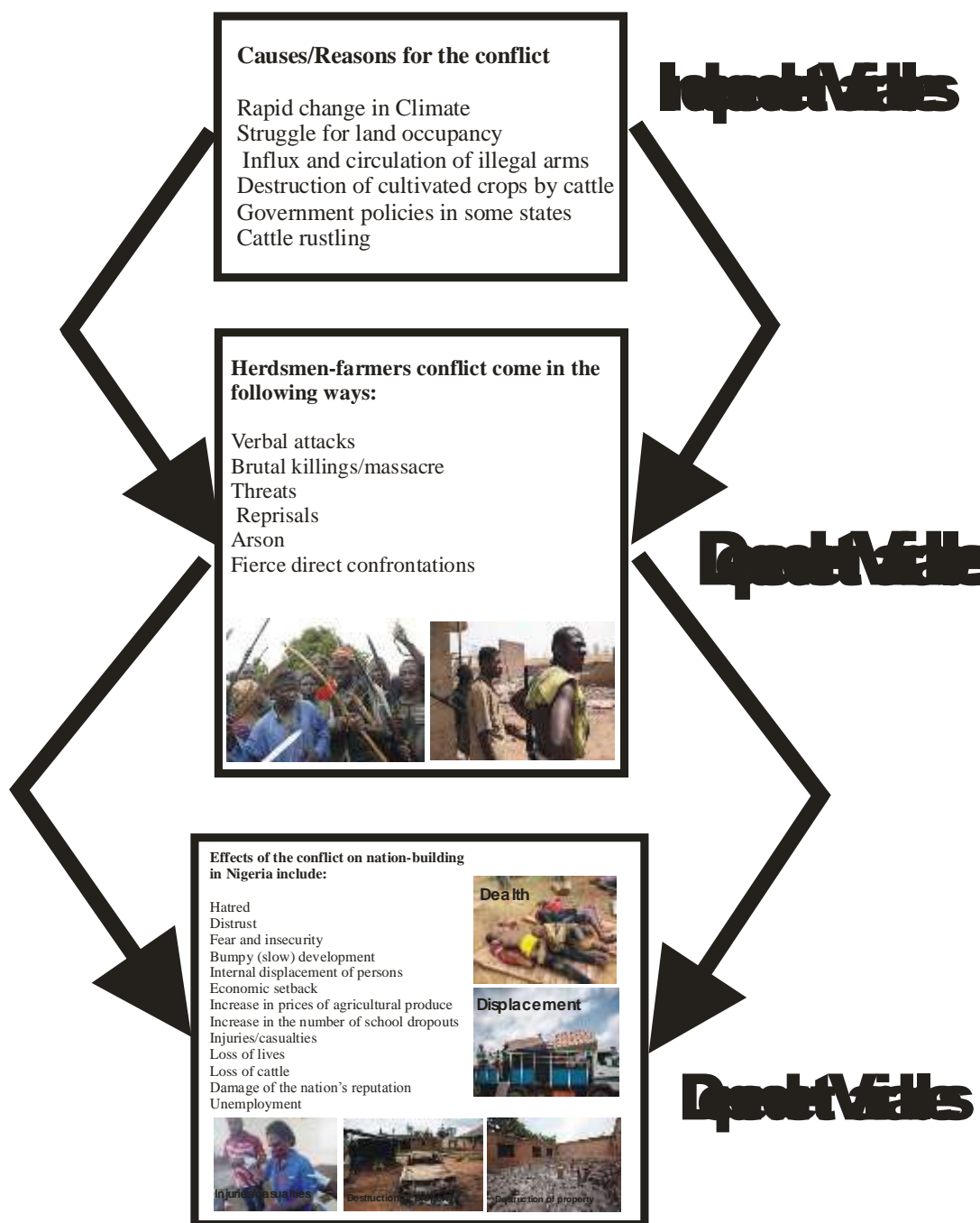


Figure 1: Conceptual model of causes of herdsmen-farmers conflict, its forms and its effects on nation-building in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Like most conflicts do, the herdsmen-farmers conflict is vigorously tearing down every tangible thing Nigeria could boast of, including our shaky and expiring national unity. There is acrimony in the hearts and minds of Nigerians as a result of the disgusting fallouts of the conflict. This is primarily because if one had not lost one's relations to the conflict, then he might have lost his property, shops and goods worth thousands and millions of Naira, farmlands and crops, livestock, love, or hope. Fear of insecurity and uncertainty also fills the atmosphere. All the above and host of others have set the Nigerian nation on the route of a failed state. Nevertheless, something can still be done by the government, particularly, to salvage the ugly situation, and placate Nigerians in order to restore their hope in the nation. But whatever must be done ought to be done very fast.

Recommendations

According to idealists, wars are not inevitable, but there are certain things to be done in order to reduce its oftenness. Put differently, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers may not be swiftly resolved or rooted out of Nigeria, but proper examination and application of the following suggestions will help to reduce the frequency and intensity of the conflict, at least. The suggestions are:

- i. Government at all levels (and its institutions in the country) should, with all sobriety, eschew formulating any policies that could be either anti-farmers or anti-herdsmen. Existing anti-farmers' or anti-herdsmen's laws/policies should also be either amended or revoked/abolished.
- ii. Complaint commissions/organizations (e.g. the Farmers/Herdsmen Conflict Resolution Committee in Abia State) should be established in various Nigerian states and communities where none is in existence. The commission should entertain complaints from farmers and herdsmen and ensure justice prevails in every case brought before it. Also, the commission should be rooted in fairness, impartiality, equity and neutrality in the discharge of its duties to avoid creating more grievance and bitterness.
- iii. Peace studies should be included in our educational curriculum and be vigorously taught right from primary school so that every Nigerian child would know from infancy the import of peace and the gainlessness of violence/conflict.
- iv. Traditional rulers and chiefs of various farming communities should help equip or teach their people the need to shun jungle justice no matter what, and rather settle their differences with the herdsmen amicably.
- v. Free education should be provided for Fulani herdsmen (both young and old) by the government to help annihilate illiteracy.

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APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict and its Implications on Nation-Building in Nigeria

By Obiwuru Chidera Rex

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this questionnaire is to analyze the conflict between herdsmen and farmers, the implications of the conflict on nation-building in Nigeria as well as the possible solutions to it.

Please provide valid answers to these questions as the information you provide herein will be considered in the course of the research. Thank you!!!

PERSONAL INFORMATION

First & Last Name.....

Address.....

City.....Sex: M F

Occupation.....

Email.....

OTHER INFORMATION

Have you seen Fulani herdsmen in this locality before? Yes No

How often do they visit this locality with their animals? Daily weekly monthly yearly

Have there been clashes between them and farmers in this area? Yes No

If yes, what could be the reason(s)? If no, what could be the secret behind their peace?

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.....

Fulani herdsmen have changed from canes to guns. True False

If true, what could be the possible reason(s) for the sudden change from canes to guns?

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.....

Do you agree that the military is really not doing what they supposed to do to put a stop the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria? I agree I disagree

Why?

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.....

Has the conflict between farmers and herdsmen affected your life as a person and the lives of persons of this community? Yes

No

How has it, if yes?

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.....

The conflict between the two agriculturist groups, in what ways has it retarded or slowed national development in the country?

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Taking up arms for self-defence, can it deter the herdsmen from striking in most farming communities?

Yes No

Why?

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.....

What solution(s) would you proffer to this conflict in Nigeria?

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