

Herdsmen/Farmers Clashes: Implications for National Security in Nigeria

Usman Abu Tom

Nasarawa state University, keffi, Nigeria

Suleiman Aminu Kandi

Nasarawa state University, keffi, Nigeria

&

Shawai Joseph

Nasarawa state University, keffi, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Herdsmen-farmers clashes have grown, spread, and intensified over the past decades and today pose a threat to national cohesion. Thousands of Nigerian citizens have been massacred, communities have been destroyed and so many pastoralists and farmers have lost their lives and properties in an ugly situation of killings and destructions that are not only destroying livelihood but also affecting national security. There is hardly any community, region, or state in Nigeria which has not witnessed herdsmen-farmers clashes in the past decades. The ripple effect of the herdsmen/farmers clashes in Nigeria today cannot be overemphasized. These clashes have been an issue that one can conclusively say, from a microcosm of the general way of living in the country – that is, living in a state of combustibility underpinned by differences such as religion, political affiliation, gender, culture, tribe, and even wealth. The average Nigerian today lives with a sense of suspicion towards other Nigerians who are dissimilar to him in the aforementioned features. Suffice it to say that the herdsmen/farmers clashes currently witnessed across the country are considered by many to have developed from the factors of religion and culture, where, albeit misconstrued, the herdsmen are believed to be predominantly Muslims of Fulani origin and the farmers, primarily Christians with ties to other cultures.

Attacks by herdsmen, without a doubt, have become the most potent threat to our national security in the last couple of years. What makes the attacks by herdsmen very alarming are, the frequency, the height of destruction, and gruesome brutality by the "yet to be identified herdsmen". These clashes and attacks in almost all cases are clouded by high casualty rate; massive displacement and humanitarian crises posing threat to internal security.

The Nigerian population has grown from 33 million in 1950 to about 192.3 million at the moment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). This phenomenal increase in the population has put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralists. Interestingly, the demographic increase has led to an expansion in cultivated farmland and a reduction in available grazing land for pastoralists that are characterized by competition over dwindling resources. It is worthy of note that in the far

north, the effect of desertification as well as the crisis of energy, which has metamorphosed into deforestation, coupled with climatic uncertainty and lower or absence of rainfall have made it more difficult to sustain the increasing population, pushing many farmers and pastoralists with livestock southwards. This has taken place gradually over decades with an apparent increase over the past decade – and has added to pressure on land and water in Central and Southern Nigeria. One of the outcomes of this process has been the blockage of transhumance routes and loss of grazing land to agricultural expansion and the increased southward movement of pastoralists has led to increased conflict with local communities in the Middle Belt.

The country at the moment is faced with an avalanche and catalog of threats that have huge implications for its corporate existence and internal security. These challenges include, but are not limited to the calls for restructuring the country and separatist threats to pull out of the "unholy marriage" of 1914; the threats constituted by the insurgents in the northeast despite the huge successes made in tackling the menace. Other challenges of concern include the economic downturn and harsh conditions of living, as well as, lack of employment and poverty amongst the masses. This is the worst of all time, for any Nigerian government at state and federal levels to be confronted with other issues like the clashes between farmers and herdsmen. At the moment there have been gruesome killings and destruction of lives and property by herdsmen/ farmers clashes in places like, Taraba, Benue, Nasarawa, Zamfara, Taraba, Niger, Kaduna, and the Plateau States that have resulted in massive displacement of people and loss of lives. The attacks are unprecedented when assessed based on the frequency, the casualty, and sheer brutality. The fallout naturally is a huge humanitarian crisis in almost all the states affected. State response in these lingering clashes has been both ad-hoc and reactive with no concentrated and sustainable strategies of conflict management and peacebuilding beyond the deployment of security personnel.

This makes one wonder whether the country is gradually sliding back into a Hobbesian state of nature, where life was short, brutish, nasty; solitary, and where might was right all the time. Decisive action must be taken to ensure the wanton killings by the armed herdsmen are curtailed as the threat is capable of snowballing into a serious situation that could set the country ablaze. This is occasioned by the fact that the threats have gone beyond the borders of the Northern states. It should be pointed out that the dangerous activities of the armed herdsmen have serious implications for the corporate existence of the nation. A careful assessment of threats to national security reveals the activities of the armed herdsmen more than any other security challenge in the country at the moment constitute the most dangerous. In the last year, the activities of the armed herdsmen have resulted in unimaginable destruction and displacement of many communities and loss of thousands of lives. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to interrogate the herdsmen-farmers clashes and their implications for national security in Nigeria. The paper is divided into six sections with the introduction as first. The second section focuses on conceptual clarification; the third is the theoretical framework of

analysis, while the fourth section discusses the causes of herdsmen-farmers conflict. The fifth section examines the implications of herdsmen-farmers clashes for national security. The sixth and last section is the conclusion and recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Herdsmen

Herdsmen are owners or keepers of herds of animals like cattle. They usually move their herds from one place to another in search of pasture and freshwater. In Nigeria, it is predominantly the occupation of the Fulani ethnic group. In this view, this paper argues that herdsmen are, individuals or persons who own and rear cattle for commercial purposes. Buttressing this claim, Idowu (2017), explained that the Fulani (also called Peul or Fulbe) are people of obscure origin that expanded eastward from Futa Toro in Lower Senegal in the 14th century. By the 16th and 19th centuries they had established themselves at Macina (upstream of the Niger Bend) and Hausa lands, notably, Adamawa (in northern Cameroon). Many of the Fulanis continued to maintain pastoral lives; some, however, particularly in Hausa land gave up their nomadic pursuits, settled in existing urban communities, and were converted to Islām. This has often made it difficult to differentiate them from the Muslim-Hausas of Nigeria (Idowu, 2017). They are concentrated principally in Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal, and Niger. Their indigenous language is known as Fula and it is classified within the Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo language family. The Fulani constitute the fourth-largest ethnic group in Nigeria with an estimated population of over seven million and they are the primary producers of the meat and milk, accounting for about 90% of cattle ownership in Nigeria (Abbas, 2012).

They rear different species of cattle such as the Keteku, Muturu, and Kuri, but the Zebu is identified as the most common and they are also the major suppliers of skins, bones, and horns (Adeoye, 2017). Fulani herders can travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture. They are often armed and visibly move about with weapons (like daggers, machets, arrows, etc) to protect their livestock. Due to their violent nature and associated killings, the group was recently described as the world's fourth deadliest militant group (Mikailu, 2016).

National Security

The term "security" may be looked at as a state of being protected from danger or tension. For a nation, security presupposes conditions of peace, stability, order, and progress. National security has been perceived in different ways, each of which shows significant variable underlying ideals. National security is the protection of a nation from the danger of breaking up. Ray (1987) sees national security as the desire and capacity for self-defense. Ochoche (1998) opines that national security focuses on the amassment of military armament, personnel, and expenditure. The above definition sees National security to have changed over time. It has expanded to include international economics,

long-term goals of national development, and reconciliation, which are very vital for the security of any nation. With this approach, Asad (2007) stated that national security cannot be narrowed down to exclusively military terms. Socio-economic and cultural aspects, problems of development and modernization, and national integration should be deemed important in considering what national security entails. In our view, national security is much more than territorial defense and should focus on the physical, social, and psychological equality of life of a society and its members both in the domestic setting and within the large regional and global system. According to Mathew (1989), Global development now suggests the need for another analogous broadening definition of national security to include resources, environmental and demographic issues.

This paper argues that the national security question involves a lot of variables. It practically and religiously touches on all facets of human existence. It touches on health matters. It encompasses psychological security as well as arms security. Several variables may expose a nation to danger. To that extent, national security may also be viewed as a multidimensional and continuum process which aim is to safeguard national values and aspirations. Suffice it to say that the most sacrosanct values of any sovereign state are its survival, self-preservation, and self-perpetuation. A state that is capable of protecting its citizens from harm equally enjoys immense capacity for enviable development and peaceful coexistence.

CAUSES OF HERDSMEN-FARMERS CLASHES IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has a large pastoral population, the logic of whose livelihood is often misunderstood. What is better understood is the culture of farming which is rooted in a specific location and has activities that take place regularly. The assumption that pastoralism is in itself an irrational production system is far from the truth. Pastoralism is the main livestock production system in much of Africa where pastoralists live in semi-arid zones. It is a historically developed strategy to cope with uncertainties associated with climate change, the build-up of parasites, and other related challenges. It is above all an efficient way to produce livestock at relatively low prices through the use of non-commercial feeding stock.

It is on record that the pastoralists have been able to meet the meat demand of Nigerians with a relatively high level of efficiency using different methods through the use of farm residue and open range grazing. Nigeria has a landmass of 98.3 million hectares, 82 million hectares of arable land of which about 34 million hectares are currently under cultivation (Daily Trust, Tuesday, January 9, 2018 p.10). In crop farming, human beings only directly utilize about a quarter of the total biomass. The other three quarters are in the form of crop residue and low-quality crops, which are not directly useful to people. It is this residue that cattle convert into meat and milk. Also, cattle utilize grasses on fallow lands, non-arable poor quality lands, open ranges, and Fadama in the same manner. The herders move their animals to these locations to access these opportunities. This system of production is fast breaking down today as violent clashes

between the herders and farmers have emerged and created serious national crises which have impacted national cohesion.

There appears to be no consensus among groups, scholars, conflict managers, and government at all levels on the causes of the conflict. It should be stated that farmers have continued to cite the destruction of crops by cattle and other properties by the pastoralists as the main causes for their clashes, on the other hand, the pastoralist argues that burning of rangelands; Fadama and blockage of stock routes and pollution of water points by farmers are major reasons for clashes with farmers. As such, competition-driven clashes between arable crop farmers and pastoralists have become common occurrences in many parts of Nigeria in the past three decades. No wonder, that clashes over agricultural land use between farmers and herdsmen accounted for 35 percent of all reported crises in communities in North Central Nigeria as far back as 1965 and as recent as 2015. This paper argues that there is a spatial differentiation in an avalanche of conflict occurrence in Nigeria, as more clashes took place more frequently in resource-rich areas like the *Fadama*(flood plains) and river valleys than resource-poor areas.

The Fulani cattle herdsmen have identified conflicts arising from land-use as the major challenge they face in their occupation. This challenge mainly occurs in the period of the Fulani herdsmen movement. Suffice to say that the herding season begins with the southward movement of the herds and along rivers and stream valleys from October to December – marking the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry season. January to February is the harmattan season that is characterized by longer grazing hours, herd splitting and more frequent visits to stable water sources. These thus increase the southward movement of the herds. The months of March and April are usually the toughest for the herdsman and his cattle, as it is the hottest period in the grazing calendar. Indeed, he now herds his cattle only in the evenings and nights. May and June signify the end of the dry season and vegetation begins to appear. This also marks the beginning of the northward movement of cattle herds. From this period up till September, which is the peak of the rainy season, though characterized by cattle-breeding, more milk production, and shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production. Farmer-herdsmen conflict, therefore, becomes prevalent during this period.

The resultant increase in competition for arable land has oftentimes led to the serious manifestation of hostilities and social friction among the two user-groups in many parts of Nigeria. The damaging or intentional grazing on crops has been pointed out as the most predominant cause of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. According to Adeoye (2017), the deliberate grazing of cattle on crops, farmers' encroachment on grazing reserves, water holes and cattle paths, and indiscriminate bush burning by herders are notable causes of conflict between the groups. These conflicts have not only heightened the level of insecurity but have also demonstrated a high potential to exacerbate the food crisis in Nigeria due to the loss of farmer lives, animals, crops, and valuable properties.

The clashes in some states in north-central Nigeria, such as Benue, Taraba, and Nasarawa states can be seen as a resource-based conflict between herdsmen and farmers that has continued to pose a threat to the lives and properties of the people in the area. It is worthy to note that farming and cattle-herding respectively are predominantly associated with distinct ethnic groups. The threat to internal security occasioned by these clashes is quite real. Fasona & Omojola (2005) observe that there appears to be a “nexus” between the patterns of the clashes and human security. 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. The cattle herdsmen are now being found in the south – the Guinea savannah and forest belt - in search of pasture for their herds.

HERDSMEN-FARMERS CLASHES: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

One cannot discuss national security in Nigeria today without mentioning the threat posed by the activities of the herdsmen. In recent times, the activities of the armed herdsmen have resulted in unimaginable destruction and displacement of many communities and loss of thousands of lives and properties especially in Benue, Zamfara, Plateau, and Nasarawa states. The impact of the herdsmen-farmers clashes cannot be understated. Amnesty International cited in Nwosu,(2018) puts the deaths at 168 in January of 2018 alone, and property worth millions of naira have been destroyed and some persons displaced as a result. It is also pertinent to state that these clashes since they began have harmed the country's economy. This ugly scenario has added to the humanitarian challenges in the country. Equally very disturbing is, the fact that the herdsmen-farmers clashes have without doubt aggravated the feeling of mutual suspicion between communities. The herdsmen, who before now peacefully coexisted with communities all over the country, are now perceived to be enemies. Farming communities in the country never had serious disagreements with Fulani herdsmen in the past. It was a common practice to invite them to stay on the farms after the harvest for purpose of enriching the farmlands. All these seem to have been lost due to the ongoing attacks.

Also, seen in the context of peaceful coexistence the clashes between herdsmen-farmers are setting the stage for dangerous polarization of the country along ethnic and religious divides. Compounding the rather fragile situation is, the utterances of some state governors threatening to declare herdsmen persona-non-grata in their states. Equally very disturbing is how some political classes have continued to fuel very disruptive sentiments for cheap political goals. The call by some politicians, religious leaders for their people to be armed and the mobilization of the ethnic militia is, to say the least very unfortunate. Granted that the security establishment has failed in some cases but regardless, the calling for self-defense is unjustified and smacks of subversive intent. Such things only happen in failed states.

The other consequence of the attacks by herdsmen is the threat of arms proliferation. The situation has once more brought to the fore the dangers inherent in the proliferation of dangerous weapons in the country. The emergence of armed militia in whatever form or guise has unprecedented destabilizing effects on national security. This is why the call for self-defense must be treated with all seriousness.

According to Mercy corps, a global humanitarian organization, the incessant attacks have a drastic effect on food security and have caused a loss of \$14 billion in three years. This global humanitarian organization, funded by the British Department for International Development (BFID) researched between 2013 and 2016 on the causes and effects of the perennial clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. The study also pointed out that the ongoing conflict is thwarting the country's economic development to an enormous extent, and if conflicts were resolved, the average household affected today could see income increase by at least 64 percent, and potentially 210 percent or higher.

Also, states affected by Herdsmen-Farmers conflicts lost an average of 47% of taxes (Internally Generated Revenue) during these attacks. Other economic impacts include: impeding trade practices, reduction in crop yield, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties, loss of products in storage, and destruction of public and private buildings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper focused on Herdsmen/Farmer' clashes and security challenges in Nigeria. The paper utilized qualitative analysis to achieve the objectives of the paper. Generally, the paper revealed that farmers' seasonal struggle for scarce ecosystem resources has caused clashes in Benue, Nasarawa, Zamfara, Niger, Plateau states, and parts of the Southern Nigeria between Fulani herdsmen and farmers. These clashes have become more frequent, intense, widespread, and destructive with implications for national security. Since most of the Fulani herdsmen do not own or possess the land rights, they, therefore, depend absolutely on open land to graze their cattle, climax in intense pressure on land and incidence of conflicts. Ecological, climate change, and of course government policies on agriculture, especially the all-year fadama farming, are threats to herdsmen's access to pasture. However, additional farms acquired and encroachments of traditional cattle routes in the country have drastically reduced the grazing space for the livestock to access pasture areas and water points.

The country at this moment is faced with so many challenges that have huge implications for her corporate existence. These challenges include the threats by Boko Haram insurgents in the Northeast despite government claims of disseminating and incapacitating them; the calls for restructuring the country's federal arrangement and the separatist threat by IPOB to pull out of the federation.

The inciting sentiments by certain Nigerians cannot resolve the herdsmen-farmers conflict. To this, therefore, the paper recommends that the security agencies in the country need massive restructuring if the current threats to national security are to be

effectively dealt with. It must be stated that the response of security agencies to attacks by herdsmen is not satisfactory; the problem is that intelligence gathering, coordination, and timely dissemination of information are lacking.

There is a need for the establishment of grazing reserves that would provide the opportunity for practicing a more limited form of pastoralism and therefore a pathway towards a more settled form of animal husbandry. Nigeria has a total of 417 grazing reserves out of which only about 113 have been gazetted (Mikailu, 2016). Whether as Nigerians we support or oppose pastoralism, it is practically clear that at least in the short and medium-term, many herds must continue to practice seasonal migration between dry and wet seasons grazing areas. Also, the modernization of livestock could be a possible solution to the clashes. Nigeria has one of the lowest productivity levels of livestock in the world. It is for this reason that Nigeria imports very large quantities of milk, fish, and chicken. The Nigerian herd requires sustained efforts at quality development based on a modernization strategy that would transform the industry and move the country towards the objective of self-reliance.

Another possible solution is to carry out a comprehensive approach necessary to address the growing crisis associated with violent clashes between pastoralists and farmers in the country. The Federal Government should commission a large-scale research endeavor to carry out an in-depth investigation to understand the reasons for the escalation of violence, key actors, motivations, and agency fuelling the crisis.

Subduing the growth of hate and dangerous speeches on conventional and social media is also important at this critical moment in the country. There is a need for the development of a media code to be used in sensitizing the media in the country on the relevant international standards on reporting issues of conflicts and banditry. This process should involve conflict sensitivity and safety training and it should be based on very strict journalistic standards. Appropriate laws and regulations should be developed at both the federal and state levels towards ensuring that the margin of what is seen, as "free speech" in the media will be effectively regulated.

The government should as a matter of urgency initiate the digital tracking of cattle which involves inserting microchips in the animals' skin and tracking them with mobile phones. The application of such technologies could help to tackle the problem of cattle rustling and clashes that have become so rampant in the country.

Finally, the federal and state governments should appropriately respond to the disarming of armed herdsmen and farmer militias, immediate rehabilitation, and restoration of all the displaced communities to allow those displaced citizens to return and continue their farming activities for their sustenance and survival.

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