



Impact of Farmers-Herders Conflicts on the Socio-Economic Development in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria in the last decade has witnessed increased conflicts between farmers and herders in different parts of the country especially in the Middle-Belt states of Benue, Plateau, and Nassarawa. The fighting, killings and destruction of public and private properties which have always characterized these crises has attracted considerable local and international attention which has led to the incessant calls by several concerned groups, individuals and organizations for the establishment of ranches especially in the affected states. Benue State thus became the first state in Nigeria to tow the line of this call by establishing the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017. In the light of the above, this study examines the socio-economic impact of farmers-herders' conflicts in Benue state. The theoretical framework is anchored on the social conflict theory and thematic analysis was used to arrive at the conclusion of the paper. The findings indicated a number of factors responsible for the conflicts between farmers and herders in Benue State among which are; climate variability, inadequate cattle route, destruction of crop farms, population pressure, extension of cultivated areas, cattle rustling, conflict entrepreneurs, among others. Findings also show that the anti-open grazing law of Benue state did not yield the desired results. The work concludes that; Benue state government must muster the political will to enforce the laws made in relation to the farmers-herders' conflicts so as to attain the desired peace in the state.

Key Words: Conflict, Farmer-herder, Grazing, Natural Resources, and Socio-Economic Development.

Introduction

Farmers-herders conflict, a resource-induced contestation between nomadic herders and sedentary crop farmers emanates largely from shrinking natural resources (Edward, 2022), inadequate conflict mediation mechanisms, conflict entrepreneurs, economic factors, a decline in traditional mediation mechanisms (Tyav et al., 2020), inadequate land tenure laws (Pica-Ciamarra et al., 2007), and inadequate political will power to harness both kinetic and non-kinetic security measures in fostering peace among farmers and herders. In recent times, the



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growing confrontations led to an estimated loss of 1,269 lives across 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue State in 2016 and 1,536 lives in 2016 in Nigeria, a decline in the livelihood of farmers and herders, and has threatened food security with mass displacement of about 2 million persons across 27 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps in the state (Duru, 2022; Assessment Capacity Projects (ACAPS, 2017); Armed Conflict Location and Event (ACLED, 2018).

Historically, the origin of the farmers-herders conflict could be traced to the story of Cain and Abel and the Great Wall of China built by Emperor Qin Shi Huang to impede the marauding hordes from encroaching into his land entitlement (History, 2019). The biblical story of Abel (a farmer) and Cain (a herder) depicts the background of the farmers-herders conflict where the latter neutralized the former due to envy and the quest for dominance and control of natural endowment (Genesis 4:8). In pre-modern times, Lynn-Smith cited in Shettima and Tar (2008) gave a contrary background to farmers-herders conflict in the Spanish pastoralists' invasion and displacement of sedentary farmers in Latin America from their fertile arable lands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The historical background showed that farmers-herders conflict predates the current spate of resource-induced contestations between farmers and herders in Benue State Nigeria, as conflict over resources is bound to happen when intensification of cattle head and a growing human population occurs over limited and shrinking land resources. The forgoing is known as the tragedy of the common, a scenario where a shared land is inundated by livestock population with a resultant conflict between resource users and a decline in food security.

In contemporary times, the increasing spate of farmers-herders conflict in west Africa emanates from climate change-induced Sahelian droughts of 1968-1974 with a resultant famine, food insecurity, and loss of livelihood that spurred mass migration of human and livestock population in search of arable land and vegetation cover (Shettima & Tar, 2008). The background on farmers-herders in the Sahel region could also be seen in a report by Moorehead cited in Shettima and Tar (2008) where the shrinking Delta in Mali incentivized crop farmers to push further into the Delta, thus, impeding herders' access to grazing areas. The report revealed further that herders on the other hand employed destructive strategies such as crop damage and intensification of cattle head to vent their frustration which results in conflict with crop farmers. In Benue State, Nigeria, the leading preponderance factors influencing farmers-herders conflict include climate variability, population pressure (human and livestock pressure on limited land resources), an extension of cultivated areas, and intensification of herd size beyond the carrying capacity of arable lands (Tyav et al, 2020). A carrying capacity is a limit to which arable lands can support the growing herd size in a sustainable way (Shettima & Tar, 2008).

Farmers-herders conflict has impacted adversely on the livelihoods of sedentary farmers and nomadic herders in the state with a resultant ripple effect on food insecurity, infrastructural decay, mistrust, and social disharmony between farmers and herders. The conflict led to the loss of lives and displaced about 2 million people across 27 IDPs camps in 2018 (Duru, 2022) in the state. In 2017, a report by ACAPS (2017) showed that 14 out of the 23 LGAs in the state recorded 1,269 casualties from farmers-herders conflict in the state in



2016, resulting in a decline in the livelihood of farming households in the state. While works of literature abound such as Ogbe & Nyiagyaana, 2022; Erunke & Aku, 2022; Iji, 2021; Okoli & Addo, 2018; Apenda (2016) on the incidence of farmers-herders conflict among farmers in the state, empirical inquiries on the plight of herders are relatively absent. Herders have also been victims in the growing contestations with farmers as their major source of livelihood (pastoralism) which is dependent on fresh shoots in the Benue valley and the *Fadama* areas of Agatu LGA of the state is on the decline due to deprivation embedded in the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law (2017). In January 2023, a fine of 29 million Naira was levied on pastoralists by the Benue State Government after a trailer load of cattle was confiscated. Upon release, 27 of the herders were massacred in Rukubi, a village bordering Benue and Nasarawa States by a suspected military jet (The Defence Post, 2023, Amani, 2023). The cradle of farmers-herders conflict in Agatu LGA of the state was embedded in an estimated 234 cattle head rustled by suspected hoodlums in Adagbo communities of the area which lead to reprisals and perennial attacks between the two resource users (Idu et al., 2016).

The growing casualties, incidence, and impact of farmers-herders conflict on food security, national security, and peace building led to the formulation and implementation of various kinetic and non-kinetic measures by the Federal and Benue State Governments with public-private organizations to stem the tide and adverse effect of farmers-herders conflict on peace and food security in the state and Nigeria. A kinetic measure code named Operation Whirl stroke was initiated in Benue State in 2018 by the Federal government to neutralize armed men operating in Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, and Zamfara States and to foster peace between farmers and herders in the state (Ewodage, 2018) and the establishment of a military base at Agatu LGA of the state to curtail the invasion of marauding armed herdsman from Nasarawa axis towards Agatu LGA. Conflict resolution measures initiated by the Benue State Government to curtail farmers-herders conflict includes; the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law (2017), a joint peace committee of pastoralists and farmers headed by Idu Mathew Akpa with the representatives of pastoralists and herders to foster peace and unity between farmers and herders, a peace meeting held in Agatu in January 2017 by governors of Benue and Nasarawa States, Ortom and Al-Makura to end the incessant attacks on sedentary farmers in Agatu LGA of Benue State (Nigerian Tribune, 2017).

Despite the aforementioned measures, farmers-herders conflict is on the increase in Benue State with mass displacement of farmers from farming communities to IDPs camps and displacement of nomadic herders to neighboring states which is a recipe for food insecurity and underdevelopment.

Farmers-Herders Relations in Nigeria

Farmers-herdsmen relations, according to Onah & Olajide (2020), predate the formation of the Nigerian state, which can be traced back to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern peoples of the Nigerian territory into a single colonial entity. The possibility of conflicts between farmers and herders existed in the pre-colonial period, but there were also deliberate arrangements in place to prevent such conflicts and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. There existed arrangements across several localities in pre-colonial Nigeria that



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guaranteed peaceful and working socio-economic relations between farmers and herdsmen. Akerjiir (2018) posits that farmers and herders have co-existed for centuries across West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular despite the conflict that now characterizes farmers-herdsmen relations in Nigeria. These relationships had been peaceful, harmonious, and complimentary. Pastoralism and cultivation, which are the economic mainstays of the groups, have been reflected in the relationships. Pastoralists have relied on farmers' foliage for their cattle and staple food for centuries, while farmers rely on dung manure for their farms and cattle meat and dairy products. This symbiotic relationship has marked centuries of harmony and understanding between the two groups.

According to these authors, colonial Nigeria served as a gestation period for conditions that led to hostility between farmers and herdsmen. Both authors explain that colonialism brought non-pastoral peoples from the south into Nigerian territory alongside pastoral peoples from the north. While the northern climate was not conducive to cattle grazing all year, the southern climate was favorable for cattle grazing for the majority of the year, including when the northern climate was inclement. During the colonial period, this situation encouraged cattle herders in the far north to begin migrating south. Given a historical account, they posit that this period marked the start of an intensive migratory trend of grazing by herders across Nigeria, aided by advances in human and animal healthcare during this period. Herders used to make agreements with local community authorities on migration routes under the auspices of local governments during the colonial period. During this time, this helped to prevent conflicts between farmers and herders. Yet, as early as 1923, there were already complaints by farmers in the Northeastern parts about cattle trampling their crops. The farmers apparently could not oppose these developments during this period because colonial laws in Northern Nigeria favored the cattle owner over the farmer. The colonial regime was generally perceived as more favorably inclined to Fulani herders and other pastoral groups than farming groups.

Nonetheless, peaceful relations between farmers and herders were largely obtained throughout the colonial period. Peaceful relations also meant that herders could operate without the fear of cattle thefts. This was further ensured by the security system provided by the colonial regime. Herders, as a result, continued moving southwards during the colonial period. With time, the migration of herders and their cattle reached down to the Middle Belt areas. However, up to the time of independence, government action, including the mapping of grazing routes as well as communal arrangements for conflict resolution, ensured that peace was largely obtained. It was only around 1965 that situations of conflict were reported in the North-central parts of the country. Even then, notwithstanding that the conflict situation remained negligible throughout the early years of independence, the federal government realized what problems grazing was to pose to the country. There were, therefore, attempts to regulate grazing throughout the country. The first grazing law was enacted in 1965 by the Northern Nigeria Legislative Assembly (Adekunle and Adisa 2010).

According to Shettima & Tar (2008), farmers and herders have long had a cordial and stable relationship in the past, which allowed them to work harmoniously for decades. This interdependent relationship is evident because both groups rely on each other for survival, and it served as a benchmark for exchange and development. Both authors assert that agricultural



farmers and pastoralists have a long history and economic relationship, even though the two groups' points of contention were peacefully resolved. Narrating further, both authors explain that the activities of the pastoralist include the movement of their cattle to graze on farmlands that belong to crop farmers, while the farmers require from the pastoralist protein in the form of dairy products that are needed for their day-to-day consumption and manure to fertilize their fields.

According to Monod (cited in Akerjiir, 2018), the pastoralist group's survival is shaped by interactions with sedentary farmers. As a result, interdependence is evident because each group requires water, land, fodder, and other land uses for their economic activities. Unfortunately, as Akerjiir noted, this centuries-old relationship and interdependence have broken down, with numerous disputes now erupting across the various regions in Nigeria, resulting in widespread violence, death, displacement, and refugee crises. For centuries pastoralism and farming have continued to evolve in Nigeria, which has no doubt resulted in the constant struggle for resources.

Vanguard (2016) reported that in Enugu state, South-East Nigeria, in 2016, nine villages in the Uzo-Uwani local government area were attacked by Fulani herdsmen, resulting in the death of over 11 people and the destruction of millions of naira worth of properties. On the 5th of February 2018, suspected herdsmen attacked some local communities in Ketu Local Council Development Area, destroying their farmlands and forcing the closure of 30 primary schools in Ogun State. On February 28, 2018, armed Fulani herdsmen killed 20 people in Adamawa state during clashes in Gwamba village, Demsa Local Government Area, Adamawa State (This Day, 2018). The scale of the farmer-herder conflict has claimed lives and property, prompting many to label the Fulani herdsmen as more dangerous than the Boko-Haram terrorist group, which has terrorized northern Nigeria for years.

According to Premium Times (2018), the media's frequent use of the term Fulani to describe killer herdsmen is not only a stereotype, and the unbalanced reporting of the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers has exacerbated the conflict. The conflict between pastoralists and farmers has existed since the beginning of agricultural practice. This conflict is caused by scarcity of resources, specifically land. The conflict has recently taken on a new level of insecurity, increasing the number of casualties and displaced people across the affected states. Regardless of the herders' and farmers' disagreements over scarce land resources, incidents of conflict that resulted in fatalities between the two groups were not as common as they are today.

Theoretical Framework-Social Conflict Theory

The social conflict theory is attributed and traced to the writings of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883), Max Weber, (1864 – 1920), Talcott Parsons (1902 – 1979), Ralf Dahrendorf (1929 – 2009). Others include Emile Durkheim, Lewis Coser to mention a few. Social conflict theorists view social stratification to be based on conflict among classes and blocked opportunity. According to Coser (cited in Alabi, 2018: 276), 'social conflict is the struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to



gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Such conflict may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Intergroup, as well as intragroup conflicts, are perennial features of social life.'

Social conflict theory explains that human societies are wholes or systems of interrelated parts and that human society are in the process of constant changes through internal contradictions and conflict. According to Marx (cited in Alabi, 2018), social conflict arises as a result of economic indifference between groups. Some of the basic assumptions of the social conflict theory are:

1. In a society, there are sub-groups and in each of these groups, members have different sets of beliefs, values, and norms, thus making conflict inevitable.
2. Conflicts emerge between individuals and groups as a result of opposing interests or competition of limited resources
3. Struggling and conflict typically lead to some groups and individuals controlling and dominating others and patterns of subordination and domination are self-perpetuating
4. Dominant groups disproportionately influence resource allocation and societal structure.

The theory of social conflict is relevant to the subject of discourse in the sense that Benue state is characterized by widespread inequality, unemployment, and endemic poverty as a result of deprivation over time, creating an environment conducive for violent conflict between 'indigenes and settlers. Furthermore, this has been exacerbated by over-reliance on low-yielding arid lands for farming and grazing, as well as limited irrigation channels and lack of improved agricultural techniques. The state's deplorable social facilities and healthcare system are unable to meet the needs of the growing population. These factors have contributed to a decreased life expectancy. There is also significant economic disparity among the people of Benue state, with the poor and 'settlers' becoming more inclined to committing crimes as a result of hunger, starvation, and deprivation, while the 'rich and indigenes' continue to amass wealth at their expense.

Thus, the farmers-herders' conflicts in Nigeria, and particularly in Benue state, has frequently been linked to stratification and deprivation such as the right to farm and graze, and the inability to access perceived wants or desires a development which breeds discontent and animosity between both groups. Benue state's socio-economic backwardness, caused by bad governance, combined with other factors such as poverty, illiteracy, inequality, injustice, and the opinionated nature of religion, predisposes the youths to be easily enticed to violence. Many of the herders and farmers are victims of economic barriers, alienation, and harsh economic and political structure in the state.

Farmers-Herders Conflicts and Socio-Economic Development in Benue State.

Farmers-herders conflict is seen as a contention between herders and farmers over the use of shrinking or dwindling land resources (Edward, 2022). Farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria is a struggle between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers over land or other resources necessary to enhance livestock holdings and crop production (Adu, 2013).

While Moritz (2012) asserts that farmers-herders conflict is influenced by social-cultural factors such as religion, livelihood practices, and other cultural practices, Pica-Ciamarra et al. (2007) showed overstocking of livestock beyond the carrying capacity as the leading cause of farmers-herders conflict which is prevalent in the semi-arid border between Mali and Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Senegal, in the highlands of Ethiopia, highlands between Tanzania and Kenya, and in the highlands between Uganda and Kenya.

The impact of farmers-herders conflict on socio-economic development in Benue State will be assessed from the impact on farmers' livelihood in Benue State and livestock holdings of herders in the state with a spiral effect on food security. Farming is the major occupation of the indigenous people of Benue State as staple food such as yam, rice, cassava, soya beans and fruits are grown in large quantities to meet subsistence needs and household expenditures. Livestock holding is the main source of livelihood of pastoralists and migrant herders in the state which are scattered along the river banks in Agatu LGA along Benue -Nasarawa Toto LGA border and Guma LGA along the bordering communities with Doma LGA of Nasarawa State. Farmers and herders have cohabited in time immemorial in the state in a symbiotic arrangement with farmers largely depending on pastoralists as the source of protein in meat and dairy products. Herders, on the other hand, depends largely on farmers for staple foods, veterinary and medical services, livestock market, and worship center (Mosque for Friday Jumat) that are domiciled in farming communities. With the forgoing, Shettima and Tar (2008) posit that the farmers-herders relationship includes the use of farm residue (cereal) by pastoralists cattle head for feed and farmers' source of protein in meat and dairy products of herders. It revealed further that, the grazing of cattle head on farm residue acts as a source of manure for farmers.

There was a cordial relationship between farmers and herders in Benue State before the heightened tussle between the two. Benue people, notably the politician often engage the service of pastoralists to rear their cattle head as a form of investment. These herd sizes were domiciled with the Fulani's depending on the arrangement of payment, either by commission or cash payment until they are needed by the owner. Despite the symbiotic relationships, there were pockets of conflict which is inevitable when humans as social beings interface with one another. These conflicts often occur as a result of grazing of cattle head into crop farms of indigenous farmers and cases of rape, assault, and contestation over water points that were mediated amicably by the traditional institution. The breakdown in the traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and the adverse negative effect of climate change coupled with population pressure significantly influenced the current spate of farmers-herders conflict in the state. Farmers-herders conflict in the state led to the death of an estimated 1,269 persons across

14 LGAs in the state and displaced an estimated 2 million people across 27 IDPs camps in the state (Duru, 2022; ACAPS, 2017)

Farmers-herders conflict generates fear and mistrust between farmers and herders in the state as farmers are in perpetual fear of going to their farms while, herders on the other hand are skeptical about grazing freely in the open grassland, water points, and *fadama* areas in the state. On the other hand, livestock holdings of nomadic pastoralists which depend on fresh forage in the *Fadama* areas and water points along the banks of River Benue are significantly on the decline. The Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law (2017) and the introduction of Livestock Volunteer Guards, and the Benue State Community Volunteer Guards in the state impedes the sovereign importance of the movement of herds as heavy fines are imposed on herders upon arrest of cattle heads. A recent scenario was the ₦29m fine by the Benue State government on pastoralists on 25th January 2022 after which an estimated 27 of the pastoralists were killed in a raid by a helicopter in Rukubi village in Doma LGA of Nasarawa State, a bordering village with Benue State (Amani, 2022; The Defense Post, 2022). The Fulani pastoralists are often the victims in the ongoing farmers-herders conflict where a significant portion of their cattle head is in perennial fear of being rustled by suspected hoodlums in the state. A notable episode was the kidnapping of Ardo Mama and the rustling of an estimated 200 cattle head by suspected hoodlums in Adagbo community in Agatu LGA of the state which marked the beginning of the crisis in one of the most affected LGA in the state (Idu et al., 2016).

The increasing spate of farmers-herders conflict is aggravating the inflationary rate (24.32% in January 2023) in a staple food (Adegbesan, 2023) with a resultant food shortage among the 65% of Nigerians that are prone to food insecurity (Osagie, 2013). Edward (2022) report that the farmers-herders conflict had a devastating impact on the livelihoods of farmers and herders in villages of Bassa, Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, Riyom, Mangu, and Jos South LGAs of Plateau State with the destruction of food crops such as maize, guinea corn, millet, hungry rice (acha), yam, rice, and potatoes of farmers, while, the herd size of herders were rustled and killed by farmers. The report showed further that, the farmers-herders conflict in the state has impacted negatively on the sustainable livelihoods of both farmers and herders and has exacerbated the rate of food insecurity in the state and Nigeria as Plateau State is a major player in vegetable production in the country.

Government Response to the Challenges of Farmers-Herders Conflict in Benue State

The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has become continuous and extensive with crippling implications for human lives and their sources of livelihood. Although scholars, policymakers, and development workers have devoted attention to the conflict, the patterns, and dynamics of the conflict, as well as the direct and indirect actors in the conflicts, are constantly changing. The continually changing character of the conflict makes efforts at resolving it by both state and non-state players problematic. Apart from the legislative measures enacted by some state governments, many attempts have been made, and continue to be made, to resolve the farmer-herder crises in Nigeria. Apart from the visible activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), state governments, religious leaders, and community leaders also contribute to such

efforts. Egbuta (2018), Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin (2018) outline the following as some of the responses to the growing farmer-herder conflict across the country by both the federal and various state governments in Nigeria:

Deployment of Security Operatives

The federal government's approach to farmer-herder conflict in most cases has largely involved the deployment of men and officers of the security services. Since 2001, a Special Task Force called Operation Safe Haven (STF-OSH) has been deployed to Plateau State. This Task Force is made up of military officers and police officers tasked with restoring order and stability. The federal government also extended its jurisdiction to Kaduna state. Nonetheless, there have been reports that STF-OSH security services sent to protect at-risk farmer and herder communities have perpetrated crimes and human rights violations against the communities they are sent to protect. In fact, the deployment of security services has often resulted in local animosity and increased divisions, as many communities regard them as partisan.

Creation of Grazing Reserves

Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin (2018) explain that, in 1965, the then-northern regional government of Nigeria launched one of the earliest initiatives to address the pastoralism dilemma exacerbated by rising conflicts between farmers and herders in the region. The northern regional government of Sir Ahmadu Bello came up with the Northern Region Grazing Reserves Act which established routes for migrating livestock and 415 grazing reserves around the country. The reserves were intended to set aside large range of land for herders to graze their livestock exclusively. While this was initially deemed a legislative solution, population growth, urbanization, and migration encroached on these designated areas, thereby limiting herders' access to and use of the reserves. Additionally, herders frequently struggled to find adequate pasture and water within the reserve's boundaries due to climate change and poor maintenance. Keeping livestock in one location increases their exposure to disease and banditry, which encouraged herders to keep their herds roaming outside the reserves limits. The federal and state administrations have been negligent in maintaining these reserves to address farmers' and herders' concerns. In the absence of a comprehensive response strategy by governments at all levels to mark and enforce the legislation regarding livestock corridors, existing reserves are being perverted.

Establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education

Through Decree 41, the then-military government of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1989 established the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE). The decree has metamorphosed and is currently referred to as the Nomadic Education Act, Cap. 20 of the Federation's Law. The program's primary objective was to economically and socially integrate nomadic pastoralists into mainstream society by providing relevant, functional, and mobile basic education and livelihood skills. Additionally, it aims to assist pastoralists in modernizing their cattle-rearing procedures to maximize economic potential, including dairy processing and selling, animal immunizations, and contemporary herding tactics. According to Kwaja and



Ademola-Adelehin (2018), the nomadic education program suffers from deteriorating infrastructure and human resource shortages, primarily due to lack of proper funding.

The National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016

In 2016, both chambers of the National Assembly attempted but failed to enact legislation to resolve tensions between farmers and herders through the contentious National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016. The bill was stepped down partly because the Land Use Act of 1978 empowers state governors with complete authority over the regulation of land ownership, alienation, acquisition, administration, and management in Nigeria. This and earlier attempts by the National Assembly to legislate on grazing reserves violated the 1978 Land Use Act and were interpreted as an attempt to usurp the governor's powers.

State-level Legislations Prohibiting Open Grazing

The Anti-Open Grazing Laws adopted by some states such as Benue, Ekiti, and Taraba which prohibit pastoralists from grazing openly in undesignated routes and fields, have exacerbated and deepened the already-existing tensions and crises between farmers and herders. For example, Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom signed the measure into law in 2017. Governor Darius Ishaku of Taraba State and former Governor Ayodele Fayose of Ekiti State both signed the bill into law in 2018. These bills facilitated herders' alienation, even though some of the herders have lived in such states for over a century. On May 22, 2017, the Benue State Government approved the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in response to the state's continuing conflict between farmers and herders. The law took effect on November 1, 2017. Other states have explored similar legislation in response to continuing disputes between farmers and herders within their borders in the aftermath of the Benue State legislation. For instance, on July 24, 2017, the Taraba State Governor signed the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill 2017 into law, which took effect on January 24, 2018. In other parts of Nigeria, similar strategies have gained traction. In May 2021, in response to the development of farmer-herder disputes in the south, the governors of 17 southern states passed a joint resolution prohibiting open grazing on their respective territories.

The Great Green Wall Initiative

The African Union (AU) launched the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in 2007 in response to the economic, political, and security concerns posed by climatic variability and environmental degradation. The GGWI set out to plant 8,000 kilometers of trees along the southern Sahel, supplemented by rural development and ecosystem management programs, to prevent the Sahara Desert's encroaching desertification. In 2013, the Nigerian government responded to the appeal by establishing the Great Green Wall Agency (GGWA) to combat desertification, which has resulted in herders migrating from northern Nigeria to the Middle Belt region in search of water and pasture. The GGWA's objective is to establish a green shelterbelt (wind-breaking trees) in Borno, Katsina, Kebbi, and Zamfara to defend the northern half of the country from desert encroachment. The GGWA constructed orchards and nurseries

in northern Nigeria, as well as solar and wind-powered boreholes, but their activities have halted as a result of federal government financial neglect.

The Federal Government's Comprehensive Livestock Development Plan

The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) announced in 2015, a comprehensive livestock development strategy. Through a review of the existing program, the objective was to address the persistent conflict between farmers and herders across the country and construct grazing areas and cattle routes. Despite the Nigerian Central Bank of Nigeria releasing a whopping N100 billion for this objective, no state has been able to create a ranch, reserve, or solve the issue of stock routes due to a lack of commitment and politicization of the issue.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The disputes between farmers and herders are currently one of Nigeria's most critical security challenges, particularly in the north-central part of the country. The disputes between farmers and herders have resulted in casualties of 1,868 lives, toppling casualties from activities of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad (JAS) and Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) at 1,536 in 2016 (ACLED, 2018). It has wreaked havoc on the welfare and social cohesion of Benue people. The frequent attacks and reprisals attack by suspected armed herders and hoodlums in the state has displaced an estimated 2 million people across 27 IDPs in the state (Duru, 2022) with a resultant adverse effect on social harmony and food security in the state. This makes Benue State which is the Food Basket of the Nation susceptible to hunger with an estimated 132,818 people facing imminent hunger and food insecurity (ACAPS, 2017).

Despite the prolonged nature and character of the conflicts between farmers and herders in Benue state, efforts such as Operation Whirl Stroke, peace meetings between farmers and herders, and Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law, 2017, among others have been made to address the rising tensions. Despite these efforts, the challenge remains. The protracted conflict between herders and farmers in Benue state has caused thousands of lives and inconceivable economic losses. The clashes between both groups have not and cannot stop, since the root causes remain. These violent clashes have resulted in the loss of lives, the destruction of public and private properties such as schools and hospitals, the displacement of people from their communities, the exposure of women and girls to sexual vulnerability, a huge economic burden on the state government and revenue loss, rising food prices, increased division among the people, and, most importantly, a general decline in agricultural activities and food product production. While the state government have come up with an anti-grazing law to cushion the clashes between herders and farmers, the study concludes that there is a significant adverse impact of farmers-herders conflict on food security (socio-economic development) in the state as the formulated Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranching Establishment Law (2017) is inadequately enforced to foster peace and economic development in the state.



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