

## **Resolving The Farmers- Herders Conflict in Nigeria: A Way Forward for Sustainable National Development**



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**ABSTRACT:** The Conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria constitutes one of the greatest threats to peaceful coexistence, human and national security and as well as to efforts targeted at achieving sustainable national development. From desk research, the paper analyzed the causes of farmer-herder conflict and its implications for continued peace and security of lives and property of Nigerians. It also provided policy recommendations as way forward for Nigeria, in her quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals among the comity of nations.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is made up of a land size area of 923, 763 square kilometers. It has a topography that ranges from low lands along the coast of the lower Niger valley to the highlands in the Eastern border and savannah in the North. Its ecology ranges from tropical forest in the South to dry savannah in the North, normally characterized by a diverse mixture of soils, plants and animals (Ashigidi, 2019). The middle belt region has the largest land mass with a lush green savannah conducive for world class ranching and all forms of animal husbandry. With near-temperate climate and flora and fauna, nearly all fruits and vegetables can be grown in the region. The middle belt has very rich farmlands and is easily the food basket of Nigeria. In Nigeria, the farmer-herder conflict has existed since agriculture began, but due to the presence of tsetse flies in many parts of Africa, the incidence of the clashes was at a low level until the twentieth century (Blench,2004). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cheap trypanocides and some other veterinary drugs were used and this led to increase in sizes of herds to levels that compelled herders to search for pasture outside their usual areas of operation. At the same time, improved health services have increased human population which resulted to pressure on arable land. Blench (2004) observed that the persistence of slash and burn agriculture typical of much of semi-arid and sub humid West Africa has allowed farmers and herders to co-exist, especially through the exchange of crop residues for manure.

However, following the expansion of riverine and valley-bottom cultivation in Nigeria since the 1980s, the farmers and herders had to compete for access to wetland areas with a consequent increase in conflict. Although there is significant variability in social, economic and ecological parameters from one area to another, conflict is usually greatest where populations are most dense and competition for land highest.

Farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today poses a threat to lives and property, national food security, livestock production and eradication of poverty (Ibrahim, 2019). The herders are often more vulnerable because they are concentrated in the zones that are too dry to allow intensive farming. As of today, the entire country is affected by conflicts between farmers and herders. Blench (2010) attributed this trend to the collapse of traditional *burti* system of cattle routes, the declining importance of dairy production, migration, diseases, and the intensification of agriculture in riparian areas known as the *fadama* cultivation. According to Ibrahim (2019), the Fulani were mainly concentrated in the semi-arid zone of Northern Nigeria, mostly due to the prevalence of trypanosomiasis and other diseases that make cattle rearing in more humid environments in the south impossible without significant losses to the herds (p.138).

The conflict between farmers and herdsman constitutes serious threats to national and human security as well as peaceful coexistence in many communities in Nigeria. This paper therefore examines the implications of this conflict and the need to find lasting solution for sustainable peace, progress and Nigeria's national development.

### **CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

There has been attempts to understand the concept, dimension and nature of farmer-herder conflict. From time immemorial, farmer-herder conflict has been an issue that has occupied the minds and time of governments all over the world (Chatwin, 1989). But in Nigeria, its frequency and dynamics is beginning to task policy makers. This is because it is raising several questions that is at the core of the existence of the Nigerian state. Blench et al. (2003) underscores the uniqueness and peculiarity of the Nigerian situation in these words:

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“the situation of pastoralists in Nigeria has long been distinct from other African countries but that it was still historically rooted in competition for access to land. Conflict was transformed by key changes attendant on the demographic and veterinary revolution of the colonial era and again by the flow of oil revenues from the 1970s onwards which increased the market for pastoral products. However, in recent years, Nigeria has been constantly racked by civil strife, particularly across religious divide, and this has reconfigured herder-farmer conflict in new and striking ways. The absence of any concerted government response is a matter for concern in terms of rural development, but also because it is noted by the participants who take it as an opportunity to increase the tension still further” (p.1).

Herding is an occupation for the youths. The average age of a pastoralist is between 8 and 45 years. The herding community has rigid boundaries and does not easily admit outsiders. The average herder is limited both in his horizon and worldview because of the very nature of herding. But unfortunately those who they interact with and those that patronize them are not part of their in-group and more often than not, do not also share their worldview. In fact, at times some of the conflicts between herders and farmers have been attributed to language barriers and interpretative inadequacies. To the average herder, herding is not an economic activity but a lifestyle. The herder is probably the only entrepreneur that carries his entire business about. This migration exposes him to criminal elements and other forms of hostility from different groups. This may also explain why the average herder is always armed (Onuoha, 2016). This does not in any way justify the meting out of violence on anyone no matter the level of provocation. While the herder sees land and the grass and foliage on it as a gift of nature, the farmer sees it as the outcome of his endeavor. Wherever the herder goes, he is seen as a stranger who does not have any right or claim to land. The farmer feels and lays claim to the land.

Ikelegbe (2019) observed that the farmer-herder clashes are conflicts occurring between two occupational groups that are distinctive in perception and attitude to resources. While one cultivates ancestral and communal land and thus has strong historical and cultural sentiments to land, the other traverses enormous land spaces, and operates better without communal restraints on ownership, access and usage. The herders perceive the whole of West Africa as their homeland, have disregard for borders and laws, and have claims of access and use of resources that disregards land holdings and rights. Ikelegbe stated that the herders are hardened by harsh conditions of their occupation and lifestyles, and the relative deprivation; isolation and lack of basic needs and social services that they endure; the marginality and oppression that they perceive; and the depletions of their cattle stock through cattle rustling, insecurity and declining grazing resources (p.11).

The mindset and attitude of the herders are often not easily understood. A substantial proportion of the herders holding of cattle are owned by the middle class, and many herders and pastoral households are poor and live in very difficult conditions. These pressures and developments in part may be responsible for the increasing proclivity to youth criminality, generalized violence and recruitments into criminal and terrorist bands.

### **ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF HERDING IN NIGERIA**

Herding is an economic and business activity. Unfortunately, all challenges associated with this business have been seen through the lenses of ethnicity, religion and sectionalism with no attention paid to the economic and business realities. There are no reliable official figures as to the stock of cattle in Nigeria at the moment. This is because herding is done mainly informally and it is also not institutionalized. But some intelligent estimates may provide some insights for analysis. For instance, Nigeria has about 774 local government areas. It can be assumed that in each local government ten cows are slaughtered daily. That translates to about 7,740 daily and 232, 200 monthly, nationwide. At 365 days, the figure gets to 84,753,000 cows per annum. At an average price of N100,000 per cow, that is about N8,475,300,000,000 per annum. This is a business of about N706,275,000,000 per month and N1,935,000,000 per day. This business is estimated to employ close to 2 million people directly along the value chain. This includes butchers, loaders, transporters, mechanics, dressers, beer parlor and hoteliers and restaurants etc. Indirectly we have the milk sellers like supermarkets, skin and leather etc (Onuoha, 2016).

Milk processed from cattle can provide about 10 million jobs. At the home front in Nigeria a kilogram of cow meat sells at \$5.00 while internationally it is about \$25.00. It is generally acclaimed that cow meat from Nigeria is most preferred in countries like Turkey, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. The average live weight of Nigeria's cattle has been put between 250-400kg and could be improved upon by more than 50% (Okolo, 2018). Nigeria could indeed become a genuine exporter of quality beef products and offer traceability for its meat products. For instance, the abattoir in Bauchi has a processing capacity of about 1500 cattle per day and creating over 50,000 job opportunities. The supply chain for the animal husbandry in Nigeria is yet to be fully explored. The current economics of traditional cattle rearing is predicated on free land and free feed, and this is at the core of the herdsman community. Free land and free feed for cattle is unsustainable. Land, including farm lands, are owned by individuals, indigenous communities or state governments.

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Most farmers either own or lease lands from indigenous communities and invest in their crops. Appropriating these land and crops by force is a recipe for war which could erupt on a large scale if not urgently addressed (Okolo, 2018). The argument is that this is a critical economic activity that deserve attention. But unfortunately, this attention is not forthcoming. There is consensus among analysts that government's response to the farmer-herder crisis has been less than satisfactory (Onuoha, 2016).

### THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT

In the Bible, Genesis 4:1-5, gave account of how Cain is a farmer or cultivator while Abel is a herder or pastoralist. Abel's sacrifice was accepted while that of Cain was rejected. This has laid the foundation of the conflict, because over time, pastoralists and cultivators have subscribed to different faiths at least in Nigeria. In the same Genesis, but chapter 26:19-22, it was recorded how the herdsmen of Isaac and Gerar quarreled over some wells. The dispute was so intense that Isaac dug three wells to resolve the dispute. It is instructive that he named the first well *Quarrel*, the second *Hostility* and the third *Open Spaces* (The Apologetics Study Bible). Further, when the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot had misunderstanding over grazing land, this is how Abraham resolved the matter, "Please let's not have quarrelling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen since we are relatives. Isn't the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the right, I will go to the left" (Genesis 13:8-9).

The point being made here is that pastoralist and cultivator conflict has always been with human civilization. Second, its resolution has not been an easy one. In the two instances above, the resolution implied the provision of alternatives. Even in the case of Isaac, the alternatives were rejected three times. Third, the name which Isaac gave to the wells underscores his perception of the conflict (Onuoha, 2016). Onuoha lamented that in the present world, there are no many people like Abraham who would sacrifice for his younger nephew. Moreover, land is no longer acquired by the wave of the hand like Abraham did. Consider how frustrated Isaac was likely going to be, given the fact that the Philistines stopped up his father's wells. Abimelech asked him to leave and now while trying to make his own space, he and his servants had to go through all the effort to dig a well, only to have the Philistines commandeer it. And then it happens a second time. The Bible recorded that the land of Canaan was given to Abraham and Isaac by God, and yet Isaac can't seem to claim any of it for himself. It can be noted that many of the hurdles Isaac faced in this story are extremely similar to those of Abraham, up to and including issues over wells with Abimelech. It is instructive that after all this strife with the Philistines in Gerar, Abimelech eventually came to make a covenant with Isaac. This was also done with Abraham as well, however what is important to note is the tone of each of these agreements.

### THE FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Farmer-Herder conflicts in Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today poses a threat to national survival as thousands of people have been killed and communities traumatized, destroyed, devastated and displaced (Obaseki, 2019). In recent years, grazing violence has assumed frightening dimensions. Attacks on farmers take various forms such as the invasion of farms, laying of ambush, setting farms and houses ablaze, robbery and rape. On the flip-side, attacks on herders take the forms of cattle rustling, poisoning of livestock, the barricade of routes and farming on reserved lands. The frequency and severity of the conflicts have intensified since the 1990s along regional, religious, and ethnic identity cleavages, especially since 2015. Recent livelihood conflicts involve using sophisticated weaponry such as AK47 rifles, Improvised Explosive Devices, locally made guns, axes, bows and arrows, daggers, machetes, cudgel and petrol for setting property ablaze.

As a matter of fact, it is common knowledge that almost all the 36 states of the Nigeria federation have had their own fair share of this crisis with concomitant wanton destruction of lives and property. Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic explosion of violent conflicts associated with the deteriorating relationship between farmers and herders, cattle rustling and rural banditry in Nigeria. Though all 36 states have experienced this violence in some form or the other, the worse hit are north-eastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe that have about 40 percent of the total cattle, sheep and goats of the National herd (NWGPG, 2018). These states also have the highest number of grazing reserves, with 255 and 61 percent of the 415 nationally identified grazing reserves. There are also many kilometers of stock routes interconnecting these reserves. Furthermore, the highest number of transhumance and trade cattle, sheep and goats from ECOWAS countries, Chad, Cameroun, Central African Republic and other countries, come into Nigeria on North-Eastern International Transhumance Route (NWGPG, 2018).

Other States devastated by this conflict are: Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Zamfara, Sokoto and Niger states. National cohesion is seriously threatened by this phenomenon as many farmers and pastoralists have lost their lives and property in several orgies of violence. Many Nigerians are living in fear of attack or reprisal attacks due to the growing herders-farmers' conflict. It is common knowledge among Nigerian leaders and the led that the possibilities of peaceful resolution of the problem at hand is increasingly becoming difficult as various groups in either side of the divide are issuing threatening statements about their resolve to maintain their hardline positions.

The result is that the scale of loss of both herds and human life has been escalating and the victims are on all sides – subsistence farmers, commercial farmers and pastoralists (NWGPG, 2018). As the crisis of farmers-nomadic herders' conflict

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becomes a recurrent decimal in societies where open-grazing or uncontrolled grazing is in vogue, the security gaps thus created has given rise to other forms of violent crimes in the affected areas. These crimes like cattle rustling, armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom associated with pastoralism are assuming inter-state and cross-border dimensions. All of these have made a discourse on pastoralism and its impact on sustainable peace and development topical. In this light, it appears that the affected communities and states in Nigeria have been transformed into an axis of evil where there is unmitigated volume of criminal activities that has become an important security assignment for the security agencies.

Adams (2019) wrote that some worst case scenarios were recorded from January and March of 2016, and between 2016 and December 2018 when many persons were killed following series of clashes between herders and farmers in the region. Several farming communities were razed while agricultural activities were abandoned in areas known for bumper harvest of food crops like yam, maize, millet, cassava and potatoes thereby undermining internal security. The clashes affected the 2017 and 2018 harvest seasons because it started when farmers were harvesting their crops, especially, rice, yams, cassava and soybeans (Olayoku, 2019). With the 2019 farming season, some farmers were still taking refuge at various Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps for fear of attacks (Olayoku, 2019). Conflict is often triggered by cattle rustling, encroachment of herders' cattle on farmland and cultural differences. Sadly, with the federal government being always very slow in its response, this conflict has assumed dangerous dimensions because most herders are from the traditionally nomadic and Muslim Fulani who make up about 90% of Nigeria's pastoralists, while most of the farmers are Christians of various ethnic groups. Given the lingering crisis, some states in Nigeria enacted and are operating anti open grazing laws to deter herdsmen from open grazing of cattle in their territories. But the herders are insisting that their grazing routes have been taken over by farmers and buildings, hence in their movement through previously marked grazing routes, they encounter farmlands and the cattle eat up the crops resulting in the clashes with farm owners.

Experts and well-meaning people in Nigeria have suggested ranching as a veritable solution, arguing that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is no longer practicable for herders to continue their trade in the old way of trekking hundreds of kilometers with their cattle to find pasture. The herders however, view this as very reprehensible. Also, many citizens of Nigeria are strongly opposed to the idea of government using public funds to establish ranches for herders, who they see as doing private business. The citizens argued that if the government fund ranching, then it should also fund farmers and other businesses for equity.

The federal government had proposed the setting up of cattle colonies in each of the 36 states and the FCT, for herders. But this had been overwhelmingly condemned by Nigerians. From cattle colonies, the federal government proposed the introduction of rural grazing area (RUGA) in states. Again, the opposition to this has been so much, to the extent that the government had to put the idea on hold. Meanwhile, the incidences of the clashes, destructions and killings is continuing unabated, having been worsened by desertification, flooding and erosion.

Experience has been that hundreds of hectares of farmland belonging to individuals, corporate organizations and farmers' associations across the country had been destroyed by cattle. In some cases, to protect their farms from being grazed, some farmers decide to spray their farms with *Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane* (DDT) chemical. The resultant effect of this is death of cattle, which of course creates acrimony between farmers and herders. Usually, the farmers are aggrieved that when their farms are destroyed and they report to the authorities, no one is punished, therefore they seek means of protecting themselves, and the cycle of violence ensues through reprisals. For example, Olayoku (2019) provided a synopsis of this cycle of violence in Agatu area of Benue state, noting that between January and March 2016, no fewer than 300 persons were killed following series of clashes between farmers and herders in Agatu, Benue state. Olayoku observed that several farming communities were razed while agricultural activities were abandoned in areas known for bumper harvest of food crops thereby resulting in food crisis. He stated that the conflict equally affected the harvests of 2017 and 2018 because many farmers are still taking refuge at Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps. In his view, the transhumance activities contributed to an increase in violence, a change in cattle migration routes and the emergence of new groups of pastoralists and livestock farmers with different motives and more weapons.

### CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

Many authors have tried to explain the causes of the farmer-herdsmen clashes. For instance, some have looked at it from Neo-Malthusian theory of the scarcity of natural resources with exploding population. According to Malthusian theory, the development of mankind was severely limited by the pressure that population growth exerted on the availability of resources. Malthus maintained that whereas population grows at a geometric rate, the production capacity only grows arithmetically. Therefore, in the absence of consistent checks on population growth, there is a gloomy prediction that in a short period of time, scarce resources will have to be shared among an increasing number of individuals (Onuoha, 2016).

Similarly, Sunday Audu (2013) did a study and focused his analysis on fresh water scarcity as the main cause of the conflict between farmers and herders in the midst of growing human population. But, in their study Ofuoku&Isife (2009)

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identified the causes of farmer-herder conflict as destruction of crops, contamination of streams by cattle, over-grazing of land, disregard for local traditional authorities, female harassment by herdsmen, harassment of nomads by community youths, indiscriminate bush burning, defecation by cattle on the roads, cattle theft and straying of cattle. Odoh&Chigozie (2012) in their contribution attributes the conflict to climate change. They argued that increasing desertification and drought is driving the conflicts between herders and farmers. They anchored their analysis on the eco-violence theory, that the immediate cause of Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict in northern Nigeria is natural resource scarcity that the remote cause is climate change which has through drought and desertification led to the worsening incidence of natural resource scarcity and worsen conflict between the two.

Okoli&Atelhe (2014, p.83) identified the under-listed causes;

- i. disputes arising from claims and contestations regarding land ownership and use;
- ii. struggles for grazing/farm fields in the light of the diminution of arable land in the state;
- iii. destruction of farmlands/farm-crops by Fulani herd;
- iv. provocation of parties – farmers and herders alike – through trespass on cherished valuables;
- v. increasing deprivation and livelihood crisis in the context of growing ecological resource scarcity and lack;
- vi. politicization of native/nomad differences through mobilization of clannish, ethnic, religious, or other primordial sentiments;
- vii. increasing pressure on land and resources thereof as a result of rising population;
- viii. indigenization and sedentarisation of grazing communities in the state;
- ix. culture of criminal brigandage and opportunism among the youths of both sides of the conflict divide;
- x. inefficient land use laws and administration;
- xi. politicisation of the indigene-ship question.

Experts have fingered desert encroachment, unpredictable weather conditions, unprecedented sea level rise, rapid population growth, unsustainable agricultural practices and flooding as some of the causes of the incessant farmers and herders' clashes in Nigeria. Expatiating on the increase of population in the country, NWGPG (2018), noted that Nigeria's population rose from about 33 million in 1950 to over 200 million in 2019. The United Nations had projected more growth in Nigeria's population in the coming years. According to the UN, Nigeria's population will rise to about 364 million in 2030 and 480 million in 2050 (NWGPG, 2018). The Group observed that this will put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralists, cause expansion in cultivated farmland and a reduction in available grazing land for pastoralists, and increased competition over dwindling resources (NWGPG, 2018). The effect of this, is demographic displacements leading to geographical cum occupational mobility for economic survival. Increase in population also mean that there are more farms than before and the consequence is less land for herders to graze their animals, and thus leading to conflict between the native farmers and herders, who are mostly migrant in their operations.

### IMPACT OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT ON NIGERIA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The farmer-herder conflicts have had devastating impact on the well-being and collective existence of people in Nigeria. The desperate and often unlawful action(s) taken by some herders in the struggle for pasture and water for grazing, and/or the equally unlawful retaliatory acts by farmers often lead to violence and destruction and thus hampering national development. Nigeria's experience has shown that the farmer-herder conflicts have been linked to violent clashes, destruction of agricultural resources, dislocation and displacement of people, and killings and destruction of communities. The conflict is driving human and internal insecurities characterized by violent criminalities such as cattle rustling, rural banditry, brigandage, kidnapping, trans-border crimes, terrorism and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Ikelegbe, 2019).

Fayemi (2019) observed that the fatalities recorded from the farmer-herder conflicts outnumber those of the ongoing devastating insurgency in the North East. The United Nations Regional Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in a recent study revealed that farmer-herder conflict has led to loss of lives in Nigeria than in the rest of West Africa combined, with the violence extending beyond isolated clashes between farmers and herders, to large settlements and communities, and with hundreds of people killed in single violent episodes (UNOWAS, 2018).

It has also been revealed that Nigeria loses about 14 billion United States Dollars per annum to farmer-herders conflicts. For a monocultural economy seeking to expand and diversify, this is a great loss. It is contradiction that Nigeria is losing huge revenue at a time it should harness every opportunity to expand and provide employment and start-up business opportunities for millions of Nigerian youths. The farmer-herder clashes are also posing a dangerous threat to food security in Nigeria. Studies revealed that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons constitutes a serious security challenge, and is directly linked to increased crime rate, rape, criminal destruction of livelihoods, cattle rustling, drug abuse, communal clashes, robbery and

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kidnapping (Fayemi, 2019; Onuoha, 2016). The violent attacks, kidnappings for ransom, raping and prevention of farmers from accessing their farms perpetrated by the armed herdsmen are sowing fear and putting the cost of food out of the reach of the citizenry and thus constituting a clog in the wheel of national development.

### **WAY FORWARD FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The ongoing security and programmatic efforts of the government at the state and federal levels notwithstanding, the following measures will be helpful in addressing farmer-herder conflict for sustainable nation development:

**The return of government to rural areas.** There is absence of government in most of the affected communities in Nigeria. This is because projection of state power diminishes as it goes farther from the cities and seats of government. This makes the rural communities highly prone to activities of warlords and criminals. There is need for increased and effective presence of government in the rural communities.

**Establishment of ranches and grazing reserves.** The establishment of grazing reserves provides the opportunity for practicing a more limited form of pastoralism and is therefore a pathway towards a more settled form of animal husbandry. Grazing reserves are areas of land demarcated, set aside and reserved for exclusive or semi exclusive use by pastoralists. At the last count, Nigeria has a total of 417 grazing reserves, out of which only about 113 have been gazetted (NWGPG, 2018). Obaseki (2019) observed that the 4800 hectares of the Sambisa Grazing Reserve is an ideal and symbolic place to start up a ranch that could be run easily by the military. He recommended this idea for the North west region, saying that the military should be encouraged to establish ranches in the 565,000 hectares Gidan Jaja Grazing Reserve. NWGPG (2018) argued that this will significantly improve security and cooperation with herders.

**Legal framework of operation.** A deliberate system of harmonizing the relevant laws and policies that governs grazing reserves must be put in place. One of the greatest difficulties in addressing and resolving issues surrounding farmer-herder conflict is the politicization of legal regimes and the blockages to the enactment of or implementation of laws that can redress the key challenges posed. Most of the herdsmen operate as if there are no laws in the land (NWGPG, 2018).

**Peacebuilding and continuous dialogue.** To be able to foster peacebuilding and sustainable peace and unity in the affected areas, the federal, state and local governments should set a machinery in motion to constitute tripartite peacebuilding committees on how to nip brewing crisis in the bud. The atmosphere between farming communities and herders is extremely bitter and negative (NWGPG, 2018). For the past ten or so years, there has been a dramatic explosion of violent conflicts associated with the deteriorating relationship between farmers and herders, cattle rustling and rural banditry in Nigeria.

**The Media.** There is need for the development of a media code for reporting issues of farmer-herder conflict and associated cases of banditry and kidnapping. The code can be used on sensitizing the media on the relevant international standards of reporting. This should involve conflict sensitivity and strict journalistic standards. Messaging around farmer-herder conflicts must be mindful of sensitivities and the use of polarizing terminologies and concepts and the interpretations that often arise from them. From the evolution of the discourse on farmer-herder crisis, there has been issues like, 'Anti-Open Grazing Laws', 'Cattle Colonies', 'Ruga', and the 'Ranching Phenomenon'. If the media and government at all levels can accord due priority to the right messaging and perceptions on these sensitive issues, the useful ideas often proposed to resolve the problem would not be subjected to misinterpretations and politicization (Fayemi, 2019).

**Strengthening of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.** NWGPG (2018) observed that one of the most important dimensions of the growing conflicts between farmers and herders has been the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. It is noted that in the past, when conflicts arise, they were settled by village heads and Ardos, (Fulani community leaders) and if need for payment of compensation arises, there were traditional systems and knowledge of how to assess damage done and the amount necessary to compensate. Currently there is a breakdown of these traditional mechanisms, and efforts to redress this should be done as soon as possible.

**Development of a comprehensive policy framework for livestock management in Nigeria.** One of the reasons for the existential crisis in livestock production in Nigeria is lack of a comprehensive policy framework for livestock development and regulation. Piecemeal sectoral approach to livestock development will not suffice. A new policy framework that will be mutually beneficial to farmers and herders should be developed.

**Reviving the irrigation culture in Nigeria.** Irrigation practices in the north will provide lush vegetation for feeding animals and this should be encouraged.

**The inadequacy and ineffectiveness of grievance mechanism in Nigeria, opens the nation up for people to resort to self-help.** There is a growing apprehension among the populace that the insecurity caused by the armed herdsmen is primarily for

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ethnic and religious expansionism at the expense of law abiding indigenous populations. Feelings that foreigners of Fulani ethnic stock have been given free entry into the country is so strong. Indigenous populations ask questions how the herdsmen find it easy to procure assault armaments and incubate terror cells in the forests without challenge by security agencies. As an interim measure, government should set up an effective grievance address mechanism to deal with farmer-herder conflict in a satisfactory and sustainable manner. Before now there is the Social Welfare Department of the Local Government. This is a task they can undertake. The various states ministry of women affairs and social development can also help. But some states have the adviser and bureau of conflict resolution. These agencies and offices can help. The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution could work closely with the National Human Rights Commission on this. (Onuoha ,2016)

**There is the need to formalize, institutionalize and regulate the herding business** and move it from a lifestyle and subsistence mode of operation to a profitable economic venture.

Fayemi (2019) also shared a few ideas on the possible ways authorities and stakeholders in Nigeria could resolve the farmers-herders conflict for sustainable national development:

- i. Effective strategic communication on government policies. Citizens must get timely and adequate information on any policy formulated to address this conflict. When this is absent, there is the risk that such policies will be misinterpreted and politicized.
- ii. There is need for ownership of and inclusiveness in policy design and implementation. For example, in the processes leading to the conceptualization of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), extensive consultations should be made with all stakeholders for the purposes of ownership and smooth implementation. These consultations could be through town hall meetings, workshops and specialized events.
- iii. Authorities of the Nigeria Immigration Service should ensure that only persons with valid travel documents are allowed to cross Nigeria's borders with livestock, despite Nigeria's adoption of the 1978 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods. Transhumance within and across national borders must respect state and other regulations, where in place. The Visa on Arrival policy of the federal government requires a rethink. Its good intentions are laden with several other disastrous consequences for continued peace and security in Nigeria. Nigeria can seek amendment to Article 3 of ECOWAS Protocol, with respect to the free movement of cattle and other livestock. Majority of the violent herders are those coming in from neighbouring African countries in large numbers, and showing no regards to boundaries, whether state or regional.
- iv. Rule of law and social justice must remain sacrosanct. The strengthening of mediation and other conflict management mechanisms should not in any way obviate the enforcement of laws as they relate to lawful conduct and the protection of lives and property.
- v. State Houses of Assembly seeking to regulate the conduct of farmers and herders should promulgate laws that give recognition to human beings as persons. All legislation must seek to foster peaceful coexistence and help in harnessing Nigeria's economic and socio-cultural potential.
- vi. Arguments for the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). There are arguments that the NLTP presents an opportunity for more modern approaches to livestock production, the development of commercial crop production to support livestock through the supply of fodder and other feed for animals, as well as the creation of cooperatives to facilitate improved access to inputs, infrastructure, finance, markets, and support services (Fayemi, 2019).The NLTP is a ten-year strategy that outlines five key priorities. The priorities are in the areas of Conflict Resolution; Justice and Peace; Humanitarian Relief and Early Recovery; Human Capital Development; and other Crosscutting Issues. It is an overarching federal government strategy that seeks to create a conducive environment for the transformation of the livestock sector in Nigeria. It provides details of how the agricultural sub-sector can become a catalyst for national prosperity and food security by bringing together the private sector, catalytic government services and capital, and targeted donor support. However, the problem with this, will be its implementation. It is important for the federal government to undertake adequate consultations with all stakeholders and work closely with states and local governments. There is already high level mistrust and suspicion by many people in Nigeria about the sincerity of the federal government on this plan. Suspicion is rife that government is trying to acquire lands for Fulani occupation.

## CONCLUSION

The farmer-herder conflicts have had devastating impact upon the well-being and collective existence of people in Nigeria, and it must be seen as an opportunity to transform the way business is done, and at the same time utilize the opportunity to foster peaceful coexistence for national development. Achieving sustainable national development presupposes having the capacity to prevent and manage intense divisions, conflicts and wars, including farmer-herder conflicts. Such capacity should involve the ability to manage vulnerabilities, social tensions and disputes. But good governance is central to doing this. Good governance

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generates fairness and justice, equity and equality, broad participation and human rights which are central to maintaining peace. Sustainable national development enhances access to basic needs and promotes employment and livelihood opportunities, social services, economic empowerment, poverty eradication and creates an environment of security and peace. An integrated approach that fosters peaceful coexistence between crop farmers, pastoralists, herders and their host communities is paramount.

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