



Beyond Ethnic Dimensions to Herders-Farmers Conflict: Land Governance and Resistance to RUGA Policy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Herder-farmer conflicts have been protracted in Nigeria in the last five years, especially in Northwest and North central Nigeria, where over 5 thousand people have been killed and hundreds of others displaced from their ancestral homes. Though, the conflicts between the nomadic herders and sedentary farmers are not new in Nigeria, the recent outbreak of violence in the rural grazing areas has been attributed to multiple factors ranging from climate change, increasing pressure on grazing lands and water resources which have necessitated that the herders moved to the South where their herds would have access to good pastures in order to survive. This study, which utilized a qualitative method of social research and sampled 144 participants across 12 states and 24 LGAs from the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, found that the recent escalation of conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria is caused largely by the issue of land governance that is rooted in Nigeria's abysmal federal structure which recognizes grazing routes in the North and at the same time empowers State Governors to have control over their lands following the constitutional powers granted them by the 1999 Constitution with the recognition of the Land Use Act, 1978. The study suggested that the solution to the challenge of herder-farmers conflict in Nigeria must go beyond improving inter-group relations to the handling of critical land governance issues that have made most Southern people resist the Rural Grazing Areas Policy of the Federal Government.

Keywords

Herder-farmers Conflicts, Ethnicity, Land Governance, Nigeria, Pastoralism

1. Introduction

The conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria has been rancorous and lethal in recent times, but the history dates back to decades of hostility between the pastoralists in the North and the farming communities in the Southern parts of Nigeria (Arowosegbe, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2021, Olufemi, 2021). While some experts have linked the crises to the age-long ethnic tensions between herders and farmers communities in Nigeria's Northwest and Northcentral, a good number of researchers believed the controversy surrounds the default federalist structure that Nigeria runs, which complicates land governance in the country (Adisa, 2018; Arowosegbe, 2020).

Nigeria, as a Federal state inherited a land tenure system that has continued to dangerously put the country on the path of disintegration through different claims to land rights, despite the existence of the 1978 Land Use Act, which

purports to unify land tenure systems in the country. One of the crises that has emanated from these controversies, is the herdsman-farmers conflict in North-West, North-Central and Southern Nigeria. This article is intended to interrogate the influence of land governance in Nigeria on the rise and escalation of herdsman-farmers conflicts in the rural grazing areas of Nigeria. The study utilizes the qualitative method of social research to sample the experiences of farmers, herders and other stakeholders in 12 states of Nigeria's 36 states in a study sponsored by Tertiary Education Trust Funds (TETFUND) in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Herdsman-farmers conflicts have existed for centuries, but the new twist to the conflicts leading to the deaths of thousands of people in Nigeria's North-West and North-Central, and Southern Nigeria has been traced to Nigeria's complex federalist structure, colonial legacy, environmental changes, climate change and lack of unity among the different ethnic nationalities in the country (Kwaja & Smith, 2022; Migot-Adholla, Hazell, Blarel, & Place, 1991; Olufemi, 2021; Usman & Nichol, 2022). Before now, pastoral agriculture used to generate minor conflicts between herders who reside largely in the North and farmers who reside largely in the South. Such minor conflicts could not be said to have led to large-scale deaths, burning of villages, rustling of cattle in an unprecedented manner and the violence that Nigeria witnessed today, in the 21st century (Adamolekun, 2005; Ako, 2009; Al Jazeera, 2018).

Unlike now that conflicts between herders and farmers have spread across Nigeria, including South-Western and South-Eastern Nigeria, conflicts between herders and farmers, in the past, existed largely in Nigeria's Northcentral states of Plateau and Benue, where tensions between the two groups had been over ethnic animosity and boundary rights. For instance, in the 1990s, especially when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, there were several clashes between the dominant Fulani groups in the North central and the other seditious indigenous groups in the region. Reports of sporadic shooting, slaughtering of innocent people and attacks on villages were common during this period in these parts of the country. During this era, Jos in Plateau state used to be the epicenter of violence as different opposing ethnic groups locked horns to claim ownership of the state.

Underlying this crisis was Nigeria's age-long ethnic crisis inherited from colonialism. Colonialism is believed to have laid a foundation for a fractured and fractionalized Nigerian society. It created the Nigerian state out of the fiat of colonial domination, not minding the differences in the ethnic composition of the Nigerian people (Adamolekun, 2005; Ake, 2000; Meredith, 2005; Mamdani, 2004; Olowu, 1991). Initially bent on using force and the indirect rule system to govern the colony, the British colonial masters' introduced annexed territories, sacked dissidents Kings and coerced native leaders across the country into the colonial subject (Ake, 2000; Mbaku, 2010). Accepting colonial rule, in the words of the colonial masters, meant that the colonized person would accept colonial laws, colonial institutions and domination.

Unable to continue with its initial force, it introduced the indirect rule system wherein the natives would be reached through their leaders. By adopting the indirect rule system, the Nigerian colonial state bifurcated the colonial society into three; the Europeans who have come to rule, and expropriate the resources of African people, secondly, the African collaborators, who have agreed to join the colonial masters to ensure the success of colonialism in the continent; thirdly, the natives on who were indeed the subjects of exploitation of the colonial society (Ekeh, 1975). In order to succeed in its colonial enterprise, the Nigerian colonial state introduced two systems of rule: in the South, it enforced indirect rule by ensuring that the customary laws, including land tenure system, were subverted and subjected to colonial laws. In the North, it accepted the Sharia Islamic Law and retained the Emirates system with minor modifications. By operating dual systems, Penal law in the North and Criminal Code in the South, it bifurcated the Nigerian society along ethnic nationalities.

As Nigeria matured in age during the colonial era, ethnicity became a major tool of negotiating powers at the centre. This later metamorphosed into ethnic politics and the emergence of ethnic associations in the decades leading to Nigeria's independence. The formations of Nigeria's pressure groups during this period also followed this path to Nigerian development (Nnoli, 1987). The first association to be formed was the Ibibio Union, followed by Ibo Union and Egbe Omo Oduduwa, which was formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1949. The result of the formation of these groups was that ethnicity became highlighted in national development, even under colonial watch.

With the renewed struggle to decolonize African societies, Nigerian leaders such as Saudana Sokoto, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo formed political parties. While the NNPP had a nationalist outlook, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG) had the posture of an ethnic party. The crisis which epitomised this characterization began to emerge in Nigerian development when the Action Group moved a motion for Nigeria's independence in 1957, and the Northern People's Congress vehemently opposed the motion in the House of Representatives.

Though the colonial masters tried to mend the divisions among Nigerians through the 1954 Federal Constitution, the creation of the Northern, Eastern and Western regions had firmly reinforced the belief of the colonial masters in ethnic politics and bifurcation of the Nigerian society. This was the origin of animosity and crisis between herders and farmers in Nigeria but the crisis has today gone beyond this ethnic analysis to more complex issues such as the issue of land tenure system and climate change (International Crisis Group, 2020).

2.1 Nigeria's Federalism, Land Governance and Herdsmen-Farmers Conflicts

Nigeria, like many African countries, nurtured under colonialism, has been fraught with different types of crises. In the 1980s and 1990s, many of these unresolved crises reached their peak with the proliferation of armed conflicts in Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and violence in many West African countries over change in political leadership and military seat-tight syndrome. In Nigeria, the unresolved problems of the country's Federalism came into the limelight earlier than this with the 1967 Civil War, which almost tore the country apart. Today's multitude of ethno-religious and armed conflicts, including the herdsmen-farmers conflict, are a resurgence of the crisis of Nigeria's federalism (Adamolekun, 2005). Nigeria attained its political independence in 1960 as a Federal structure following the enactment of the 1954 Federal Constitution, which set the path to Federal government of the country. Before then, Nigeria was ruled under a unitary system of government with limited participation of members of the ethnic nationalities in the country. In order to amend this anomaly, the colonial masters introduced the 1954 Constitution, ultimately recognizing the diversity of the Nigerian people and the need to give each region the autonomy to determine its path to development.

The coming of regional governments: Northern, Eastern and Western regions set the pace for an inclusive governance of the land tenure system, which for decades after European takeover of affairs of Nigerian territories, had been under colonial land use system. This system, though, was intended to unify land tenure systems across the country, witnessed in its first decades, disparate land tenure systems in the Northern and Southern Protectorates. After Nigeria's independence, Nigeria's Federalism saw abrupt change of government from Civilian rule to Military government.

Though the coming of the military helped to retain Nigerian unity, it drastically changed Nigeria's Federal structure by concentrating too much power at the centre and giving the states limited powers over their resources, people and territory.

In a bid to correct this anomaly in Nigeria's governance system, the Military Government of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the 1978 Land Use Act. The Land Use Act, of 1978 has been described as a remarkable development in the history of Nigeria because it wrestled the powers to allocate lands within the states of the federation and transferred them to the Executive Governor of the State, thereby recognizing devolution of power that is expected in true federalism (Adisa, 2018; Ako, 2009). The wresting of the powers to allocate lands from federal government to state governments was and is not without resistance from the Federal Government.

Adamolekun (2005) noted that those who wanted the status quo to remain are the beneficiaries of Military Federalism. Military federalism is a type of federal structure where the government (either Military or Civilian government) runs the country like a unitary government, and concentrates powers and resources at the centre in order to favour the dominant interests within the federation. Expectedly, the retention of the power at the centre (the Federal government) got the favour of the Northern political interests, but in the South, it plummeted into deep political conflicts reminiscent of the Niger Delta crisis (Egwakhide, Isumonah & Ayodele, 2009). Such was the clamour for resource control in the Niger Delta and the attendant militancy, which saw the deaths of many innocent citizens as well as the destruction of Nigeria's resources. The argument of the agitators was that, by rights, they are entitled to control the resources within their regions. Countering the argument, the Federal Government noted that the control of natural resources across the federation is vested in the Federal Government of Nigeria by virtue of the 1999 Constitution, but the oil-producing states insisted on being in control of their resources. It was this controversy that led to the 2002 Supreme Court Judgment, which ruled in favour of 13 percent derivation formulae for the oil-producing states. Though, this issue was about resource control, it partly touched the controversy surrounding the muddling-through or military federalism, which Nigeria currently practices. It further highlights the political and economic contexts of the herdsmen-farmers conflicts and challenges of making a sweeping National Policy to regulate cattle grazing without the buy-in of the State Government, given the powers vested in the State Governments on the control of lands in their regions (Premium Times, 2020).

2.2 Open Grazing, Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict and the Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA) Policy

Open grazing of cattle has been part of the culture of the nomadic Fulanis for centuries and has also served as a significant source of income for their families. The practice, which cuts across African countries where the nomadic Fulanis could be found, received little resistance until recent times when such practice has been greeted with violent conflicts. Conflicts between herders and farmers have not only claimed over 5000 lives in Nigeria's Northwest and Northcentral, it has increasingly led to the displacement of farmers from their farmlands and the loss of cattle to the pastoralists who shared from this violence (Adeoye, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2021; Usman & Nichol, 2022).

In Kaduna, Kastina, Nassarawa, Benue, Plateau and Zamfara, nomadic Fulanis and farmers have been involved in violent clashes leading to the burning of houses, destruction of farm produce and sporadic shooting. The underlying causes of this conflict have been traced to several factors ranging from age-long ethnic struggle between the Fulani herders and the sedentary farmers, climate change, politics and disputes over land boundaries and ownership.

One of such underlying debates is the historical connection between the land rights of the people vested in the State Governors and the Federal might, to control all the lands in the Nigerian federation. Although, the issue of open grazing has been on for decades, there has been continuous resistance to the Federal power to allow for the continued open grazing of cattle while the people of the South suffered. This recent agitation is a new twist to the herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, Ondo and Osun States Governments in Southwestern Nigeria had, through legislation,

banned open grazing of cattle, premising their power on the 1978 Land Use Act. They argued that open grazing has led to the deaths of many people in their states and endangered the lives of farmers whose livelihoods depended on farming. The Anti-Grazing Law, on the other hand, is conceived by the Federal Government as a violation of the rights of every Nigerian to trade in any part of the country irrespective of ethnic nationality. In a nutshell, the land governance in Nigeria has been fraught by politics, and the age-long controversy of who has control over the landed property in each state of the federation. The debates have also surrounded the issue of whether the Federal Government has the right to designate some areas as open grazing routes, as it was done in the past, before the regime of the 1978 Land Use Act. This challenge was and is still responsible for the rejection and suspension of the Federal Government Rural Grazing Areas Policy (RUGA Policy) (Odoh, 2019).

3. Theoretical Framework

This work is hinged on meta-theoretical perspectives namely climate change ecological model, political economy of herder-farmers conflict and Ted Gurr Relative Deprivation and Herder-Farmers Conflicts.

3.1 The Climate-Change Ecological Model

The climate change ecological model is one of the most popular models for studying and explaining the challenge of herder-farmers conflicts in Africa. The theory combines the ecological model with political geography to construct a suitable model for explaining the rising herders-farmers conflicts in West Africa. It argues that as much as climate change and changes in weather conditions follow the pace they have followed in the last decades, there is a likelihood that the conflicts between the herders and farmers will continue. It states that conflicts between herders and farmers will continue in as much change in weather conditions remain unregulated or poorly managed by the government and other concerned stakeholders (Tariff, 2022). The model opines that the sharp movement of herders into Southern regions and areas is as a result of the reality that their herds will have access to sustainable grazing lands and water resources. When this happens, the changes in pastoralism will trigger conflicts because they will amount to damages to farmlands in countries where pastoralism has not been modernized (Adeoye, 2017; Brothem, 2021; Egbute, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2021; Kugbega & Young, 2021; Kwaja & Smith, 2020; Migot-Adholla, Hazell, ; Blarel, & Place, 1991; Tariif, 2022).

Although, the climate-change ecological model provides a robust analysis of the problem of herder-farmers conflicts, it does not historicize the problem and locate it within the political economy of an African state that explains the role of the state in the management and escalation of herder-farmers conflicts in the continent. This is the gap that the next theory-the political economy of herder-farmers conflicts fills.

3.2 The Political Economy of Herder-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

The Political Economy Approach locates the challenge of herder-farmers conflicts within the historical, social, political and economic conditions in the content created by colonialism and nurtured by the over six decades of the postcolonial state in Africa. The approach holds that Nigeria's multifaceted security problems, including those of farmers and herders conflicts, must be located in Nigeria's default and abysmal federalism imposed on the nation by the colonial masters and apparently mismanaged by successive governments in Nigeria since the 1960s (Adamolekun, 2005; Ake, 2000; Arowosegbe, 2020).

The model holds that the use of different and disparate governance models in land administration when it comes to pastoral agriculture in the North and South, has had significant negative effects on Nigeria's road to sustainable peace-building in rural grazing areas (Adeoye, 2017). It, therefore, suggests the adoption of a modernized system that avoids biased land administration and creates a sense of equity and unity in Nigeria's federation, irrespective of the ethnic group that is concerned in pastoral agriculture and farming.

3.3 Ted Gurr Relative Deprivation Theory and Herder-Farmers Conflicts

Ted Gurr's is basically a psychological and behaviourist approach to the study of political conflicts in developing societies. The model opines that political conflict is accentuated by perception of discrimination in access to power, resources and opportunities within a political system. According to him, conflict will occur when people perceive that they are not given equal opportunity to access power and resources and the feeling that if such discrimination is not fought, it will deny them of long-term political and economic rights (Gurr, 1993).

Gurr's Relative Deprivation Theory is applicable to the study of herder-farmers conflicts in Nigeria because it argues that apart from being pushed into violence by changes in weather conditions and lack of access to resources by herders and farmers in Nigeria, the conflicting groups are constrained by perception of relative deprivation. This is, however mostly common among farmers who think the RUGA Policy was an attempt to defend the rights of the nomadic Fulani herders to pastoralism at the detriment of the welfare of hundreds of farmers whose farm produce and property have been damaged (Adebayo, 2019; Odoh, 2019).

4. Methods

4.1 Research Design

This study is a National assessment of the relationships between intergroup relations and peace-building in the rural grazing areas of Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative method of social research with the conduct of In-depth-

Interviews for herders and farmers in 24 Rural Grazing Communities selected from 12 states and across the six geopolitical zones. A total of 144 In-depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted for herders, farmers and other stakeholders (security officers and staff of the Ministry of Agriculture whose responsibility was to help the government manage the conflicts and build peace in the affected communities) in the rural managing the conflicts. The breakdown is that 12 IDIs were conducted in two locals, each selected from the 12 states included in the study. The states are Adamawa, Anambra, Benue, Borno, Enugu, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Ondo, Oyo, Rivers, Delta, and Sokoto states, respectively. The criterion for inclusion was that the state must have had reported incidents of herder-farmers communities and only the rural areas where such conflicts had occurred were included in the sampled population.

4.2 Sampling Procedure

The multistage sampling technique was adopted for the qualitative aspect of the study. The first stage in the sampling procedure was to select the region. This was followed by the selection of states namely Adamawa, Anambra, Benue, Borno, Enugu, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Ondo, Oyo, Rivers, Delta, and Sokoto and then selected 24 local government areas. The last stage was the use of purposive sampling to select the rural grazing areas based on reports of volatility and occurrence of herdsman-farmers conflicts in the communities included in the study.

4.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using NVIVO Software. Before the data was entered into the software, the researchers created relevant sub-headings and categories suitable for the entry of the data. Reports generated from the data were then written based on the sequence of participants' narratives on the herders-farmers conflicts.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Does the Challenge of the Herder-Farmers Conflict Constitute a Major Security Threat?

The study found that herder-farmers conflict is a major security threat in Nigeria and a serious obstacle to stable and modern agrarian farming in Nigeria. This is because it is preventing the farmers affected by the conflicts from engaging in large-scale farming that is capable of breaking the vicious circle of poverty in Nigeria following the country's quest for diversification. While farmers suffer from loss of farm produce, damage to their landed property and bodily injuries and death, the nomadic herders are exposed to cattle rustling from militia groups fighting for the security of farmers since the state's capacity to end the crisis is believed to have failed. The experience of insecurity, however, varies but seemed to be uniform in states and communities where herders and farmers had old scores to settle, such as the outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts that had claimed lives and displaced hundreds of people from their ancestral homes. In Nasarawa State, a farmer noted that the conflict was usually caused by herders' invasion of their farmlands, and when reports were made to the community leaders, violence could break out because of the non-repentant attitude of the herders. The male farmer and Secretary to a Village Head in Nasarawa State made this remark while speaking about the security situation in Nasarawa State;

The major challenge is the destruction of farmlands by the herders. When this happens, the farmer will complain to the herders for the destruction, instead of them compensating they will rather claim right as such conflict will arise. Most often, the conflict leads to loss of lives and property (IDI, Male, Secretary to Village Head, Nasarawa State).

Speaking on the challenge of herder-farmers' conflicts in Adamawa state, a 52-year-old Pastoralist believed that the major causes of the herder-farmers conflict are not limited to herders alone but the two parties. He stated that the challenge was a major concern of everyone in the community, whether farmers or herders, because it was affecting the lives and properties of people. According to him;

Famers-herders conflict is a threat everyone knows that because as we live here in Numan, we don't use to sleep as we use to in the last five years because of the fear of attack from either the farmers to the herders or from herders to the farmers. That is how we now live in this town, and for quite a long time, we are experiencing such. In the last four years, over 4 Karke of cattle (more than 100 cattle) were lost by the herders here in Numan as a result of the conflict due to that issues of conflict as community leaders under the Emirate council, we now introduce a form for any herder coming from anywhere with the intention of staying here with us has to fill the form and returned to the emirate council, and part of what is contained in the form is the herder will abide the rules and regulation governing our land. And we are lucky that they accepted the form and abide by the rules in the form (IDI, Male 52 Years Old Hausa Pastoralist, and Adamawa State).

5.2 Effects of Herder-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

The study found that the effects of herder-farmers conflict in the last five years have been traumatic for farmers whose farm produce and landed property was damaged. A male Kanuri farmer in Adamawa State made this remark about the consequences of a persistent herder-farmers conflict in their area;

Herders-farmers clash is a serious problem that poses a serious threat to the country. So, this kind of clash has caused much damage to property, loss of lives, rustling and killing of cattle. In essence, this clash has seriously threatened food security, peaceful co-existence and the economy of the entire community and the country at large (IDI, Male 29 Years Old Kanuri Farmer, Adamawa State).

The reports from Kaduna State were not so different from Benue and Adamawa State, where the heat of the herder-farmers conflicts has been felt in the last few years. A 60-year-old pastoralist who was interviewed on the security situation in Kaduna State following the herder-farmers conflict has this to say about the conflict;

Actually, the herders-farmers conflict has become a serious threat to lives and properties because this conflict, in some cases, has led to the destruction of lives and properties, and when properties are destroyed, it is a great loss to a farmer, likewise the herder when his cattle are killed. In some cases, even houses are burnt down, and this experience breeds hostilities between herders and farmers; thereby making them perceive each other as enemies. The resultant effect of this conflict is the kidnapping, cattle rustling and banditry that we now experience as a major security threat in our communities today. In fact, this has dented the image of the Fulanis, as they are now seen as bad people. But in the real sense, even we, the herders have suffered losses from bandits because our Cattle are rustled away and even some farmers sympathize with us (IDI, Male Pastoralist, 60 Years, and Kaduna State).

5.3 Patterns of Herder-Farmers Conflicts

Sharing their experiences with the researchers, the herders and farmers noted that the conflicts between herders and farmers could take different patterns from the use of cutlass, small arms and light weapons to the use of sophisticated ammunition that was capable of causing irreparable harm to the communities. A 29-year-old Kanuri farmer in Adamawa described the situation this, way;

Herders-farmers clash usually occurs during the rainy season when people started farming or, I can say, when the farm yields started growing. During this period, herdsman usually take the cattle for grazing, and in the process, they destroy peoples' farms which serve as a prime factor in causing the violence. During the violence, locally made guns and small arms like knives and machetes were used, in very rare cases, you can see modern guns like AK-47 (IDI, 29 Years Old Kanuri Farmer, Adamawa State).

5.4 Causes of Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

The West African Sub-Region has, since the early 1990s, witnessed dramatic changes in weather conditions. Environmental changes coupled with the dramatic effects of climate change are believed to have had significant impacts on agricultural production. Unlike the past when farmlands were hardly affected by large-scale drought and flooding, today's pastoral agriculture and crop production in the West African Sub-Region, including Nigeria, is threatened by the combined effects of climate change and increasing scarcity of lands for agricultural production. These changes in weather conditions, coupled with the existing hostile relationships between herders and farmers in Nigeria, are believed to have aggravated the recent conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria. Like Ghana and Cameroon, herders in Nigeria are increasingly being driven to the South, where they think their cattle would have access to good pastures in order to survive.

5.4.1 Climate Change

Speaking on the negative consequences of climate change on farming and pastoralism in Adamawa State, a participant had this to say;

Climate change and worsening environmental conditions affecting our fertile land and water have contributed so much to the problem. Due to this change, herders tend to move their cows to other areas for grazing, such as the far south or even outside the country. However, on moving from one place to another in search of arable land for grazing then likely the cows may enter a farm and destroy it, which further escalated to violence (IDI, Male, 29 Years Old Kanuri Farmer, Adamawa State).

5.5 Does Ethnicity Contribute to the Clash between Herders and Farmers?

The research attested to the fact that Nigeria's herder-farmers conflict is partly caused by long years of strained ethnic relationships evidenced in spiralling ethno-religious violence in different parts of the country. Today, the violence has been compounded by the economic hardships in the country and the struggles for survival in the face of a weak state. One of the participants from Numan in Borno State explained further on the severity and complexity of the problem in today's Nigeria when he stated that;

Some years back, we had issues or clashes of religion here in Numan and many lives were lost and also apart from that, on daily basis, we use to have clashes between farmers-herders which are affecting the economic development of the town and the villages surrounding us. During the fight, different arms are

being used, ranging from sophisticated weapons to smaller ones, such as guns, AK47s, to machetes, axes etc., to kill people, and some are even using traditional ways of fighting where you will just wake up in the morning to see an entire community been killed and houses burn down (IDI, Male, 52 Years Old Pastoralist, Adamawa State).

On the issue of inter-group relations, the 52 years old pastoralist stated that;

We use to have intermarriages among the different ethnic groups, but, it is not that much we use to have intermarriage among Bachama and Waja, Waja and Bula, all are farmers and many more ethnic groups, but, it is very difficult to see intermarriages between Bachama and Fulani and they are constantly fighting because most of the Bachama's are farmers while Fulani's are herders, the two ethnic groups hate each other with a passion to me. Their form of relation is always partial and nothing serious, like when it comes to fighting each other and throwing bad words against one another (IDI, Male 52 Years Old Pastoralist, Adamawa State).

5.6 Youth's Restiveness, Economic Hardships and Government's Inaction on Herder-Farmers Conflicts

I will say the major cause of the farmers-herders conflict is a result of lack of patience from both sides of the farmers and the herders and also a lack of commitment from the government to provide a lasting solution to cattle roads across the nation. Lack of demarcation on areas that were supposed to be for farmers and areas where herders should use and move their cattle without hitches, all these, have contributed towards what we are experiencing as a farmers-herders conflict. Another cause is that most of the herder's children are very stubborn they don't listen to their parents, and also they use to abuse substances they move cattle into peoples' farms and destroy farms and farmers in retaliation if they kill the cattle or injure the herders it will then end up to serious conflict if measures have not been taken at the right time, all these added to the causes of the farmers-herders conflict here in Numan Adamawa State. Also, due to economic hardship many people go into farming to survive, and this let competition in farmland to the extent that some people farm on cattle routes and when these herders are returning from southern part of the country and found that cattle roads are blocked they have no alternative than to destroy the farms and move on while, the farmers will not allow that and this use to lead to conflict between them (IDI, 52 Years Old Pastoralist, Adamawa State).

5.7 Open Grazing and Herder-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

5.7.1 Disputes Over Land

Increasingly, the conflict between herder-farmers in Nigeria is believed to have been escalated by farmers' inability to access their farmlands and the continuous attempts by herders to encroach on their farmlands irrespective of the economic costs to the farming communities. This was the position maintained by a Local Government Chairman in Sokoto State when asked about the immediate cause of the crisis in the state.

It is a conflict that involves the herders-farmers base on their usage of the land, this shows you that the land is very critical in the conflict because they are both users of the land. The conflict generates much concern, especially for the authority, because a lot of criminals who commit serious criminality in the rural community hide under the name of herder-farmers conflict (IDI, Male, Local Government Chairman, Sokoto State).

A similar position was also maintained by most of the participants in Adamawa State when asked to state the immediate cause of the herder-farmers conflicts in the state. The remark of 29-year-old Kanuri farmer summarizes this general feeling about disputes over lands by the herders and farmers;

Dispute over the use of land is the major cause to my understanding, this is because if the land is sufficiently available to the level that all farmers can get farms and herders can have enough places to take their cattle for grazing, then this conflict will not have happened. Therefore, the problem is not about land ownership or boundaries but the availability and use of the required land (IDI, 29 Years Old Kanuri Farmer, Adamawa State).

In Oyo, some participants noted that the conflict between the nomadic herders and the sedentary farmers is caused more by land disputes than differences in ethnicity;

To be frank with you, this is not about ethnicity. It is about livelihoods. We had good relationships in the past to the extent that we engaged in inter-marriage (IDI, Male, 64 Years, Yoruba, Oyo State).

Another participant also noted that:

It may contribute in part like we are Yoruba; you are Fulani. However, the main contributing factor is the economy. They are trampling upon our means of livelihood, and we are saying no. I can't accept intermarriage any more. In the past, we had cordial relationships (IDI, Male, 55 years, Yoruba, Oyo).

In the Bura Community of Borno State, a participant stated that the challenge was not only about the invasion of farmlands by herders but the non-adherence to local and international grazing routes by farmers due to changes in weather conditions. This problem was often responsible for the escalation of the crisis because herders would believe that the farmers had flouted the existing traditional land governance arrangements because of their economic interests. The participants summed up the scenario this way;

There are, in fact, international cattle routes that run from Damboa all the way up to our local government area and then on to another local government; however, as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, some of these grazing routes are being ignored by us farmers. Let's say this location is marked as an international cattle route, and you say no because cattle don't follow there. Then, you went and replanted the area. When the Fulanis return, you tell them it's normal and that you are the one who is in the wrong, not them (IDI, Male 56 years, Farmer, Borno State).

5.8 The Land Use Act, Anti-Open Grazing Law and Escalation of Herder-Farmers Conflict

The study's findings about the possible relationships between the Land Use Act, of 1978, Anti-Open Grazing Law and the escalation of the herder-farmers conflicts in Nigeria are revealing. The study found that awareness about grazing routes is high in the North and pastoralists believed that the nation's governments must respect the rights of the herders to the routes in order to protect them from the attacks of farmers and rustling of their cattle by militia groups. The study also established that the idea of open grazing is still an acceptable cultural practice among the Fulanis and is weaved around the Fulanis' political system wherein a Fulani child is trained and socialized on how to graze cattle and integrate it into his or her economic life, hence attempts to infringe on this right by outsiders could evoke violence.

Paradoxically, a good number of farmers interviewed in the South wanted the idea of open grazing to be abolished, including the grazing routes which were established under the regional government in the North. Since the nation now has a uniform land law-the Land Use Act, 1978, most farmers in the South sampled in the course of the study believed that the law should be the basis of land administration in Nigeria. This position was strengthened by their resolve to support the government in enforcing the Anti-Open Grazing Law in their states.

A Senior Official in the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture who spoke about the challenge of herder-farmers conflicts in the State stated that the recent escalation of the conflicts is caused more by the people's suspicion that the herders are increasingly penetrating the South and the North to take over their lands;

Just like your question suggests, two parties are involved that is, the farmers and herders. And both parties have their interests which border on their well-being. The interest of both parties is about land and other related resources. Both farmers and herders need land due to the growing population. Hence there is no adequate land for both parties and this often results to the conflict that we are talking about (IDI, Senior Ministry Official, Male, Benue State).

He added that a sharp response from the State Governments to the controversy over open grazing and the Federal Government Rural Grazing Areas Settlement Policy was the Benue State enactment of the Anti-Open Grazing Prohibition Law, 2017 which forbids herders from grazing their cattle openly. When asked if new steps taken by the State Government would resolve the land governance problem, he remarked inter alia;

Yes, I believe that the introduction of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) by the Federal Government of Nigeria can effectively end the controversy over open grazing and the protracted herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The plan aimed at taking large hectares of land and designating them as grazing reserves to where crop farmers will not be allowed access for farming. The programmes of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) have been taken up in some states. The idea of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) is in sync with the position of Benue State on ranching. In fact, ranching is a microcosm of this plan. I think the position of the Benue State Government is now being understood by the whole world (IDI, Senior Ministry of Agriculture Official, Male, Benue State).

He, however, cautioned that;

The problem is that some people have ulterior motives for the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). The inherent challenge is that livestock is not just cattle; we have goats, sheep, pigs etc. But you will notice from the document that the emphasis is on cattle. Now, if you acquire a large portion of land in Benue State and you designate it as a grazing reserve, will it not be important for the federal government to ask the Benue people what type of livestock he or she wishes to graze in those areas? In other words, an average Benue person is not conversant with cattle rearing. In Nigeria, we all know that one ethnic group is conversant with cattle rearing, which is the Fulani'. So our suggestion as a state (Benue State) about the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) is that it should be based on the

peculiarities of regions or states. The state should suggest the types of livestock that are suitable for the people (IDI, Senior Ministry of Agriculture Official, Benue State).

5.9 Efforts of Government at Mitigating and Controlling Herder-Farmers Conflict

Since the outbreak of the herder-farmers conflicts in Nigeria around 2017 and 2018, the Federal and State Governments of Nigeria have been making considerable efforts to de-escalate the violence and restore normalcy to the affected communities. The Federal Government initiatives include the deployment of security forces to arrest the situation and bring culprits to book. This strategy has worked in some areas, and in other places has failed where there have been tensions between the Federal Government and state governors who believed Federal Government intervention is biased towards a particular ethnic nationality in the conflict.

One of the participants who did an evaluation of the Adamawa State Government strategy at ensuring an end to the herder-farmers conflicts in the state made this remark;

The government was committed because if you look at the conflict we experience in 2006. The State government, during the administration of Boni Haruna, the former Governor of the State, set up a committee, and the report of the committee was adopted, where an Emir was dethroned, sent to court and imprisoned. The emir is still serving a prison sentence for his role in the conflict. From then till now, no government in the state is ready to tolerate any form of conflict, be it farmers-herders, ethnic or religious conflict. Immediately anything happens, the government will set up a committee, and the recommendations and report of the committee are been adopted immediately (IDI, Male 52 Years Old Pastoralist, Adamwa State).

5.10 The RUGA Policy, The National Livestock Transformation Plans and Community Policing in Conflicts affected Communities

This study found that the Federal Government of Nigeria has been making frantic efforts to find lasting solutions to the land governance and herder-farmers conflicts. One of such strategy was to review the idea of open grazing, which has been practised in the North for centuries. After the review of the practice, the study found that the Federal Government of Nigeria came up with the Rural Grazing Areas Settlement Policy in 2019 with attempts to pilot the project in the North and introduce it to other parts of the country.

Following the controversies trailing the introduction of the RUGA Policy and the resistance from the South and some Governors in Northcentral Nigeria, the Federal Government of Nigeria was forced to suspend the RUGA because it was largely perceived as an attempt to forcefully take over the lands of farmers and hand them over to the pastoralists. Subsequently, the study found that the RUGA Policy was replaced with the National Livestock Transformation Plans, which would encourage the establishment of cattle ranches in conjunction and consultation with the State Governors and the host Communities. This approach to the management of the herder-farmers conflicts seemed to have had considerable levels of acceptance among stakeholders but the tensions still remained high where the herder-farmers conflicts have been lethal.

The study also found that apart from introducing the Anti-Open Grazing Laws, Governors from the Southern States of Nigeria have introduced forest guards. One of the field officers who covered Enugu in Amalla Community of Udeno Local Government stated that the State Government had introduced Forest Guards who helped to guard the community and protect farmers from herdsmen attacks. In Obiaruku community in Delta State, where the study covered, it was discovered that hostility between the host communities and the Fulani herders was still high due to the tendency of the herders to invade farmlands in search of pastures for their cattle.

Paradoxically in the far North in Biu Local Government of Borno State, part of the strategies of the State Governments was to ensure that parties comply with the grazing routes that had been established since 1959 for smooth movement of cattle across the region, but the question remains that most of the movements of the herders and farmers are now to the South where such demarcations rarely existed.

6. Discussion

Protracted conflicts between Fulani nomadic herders and the sedentary farmers have continued to raise concerns in Nigeria, especially in the Northwest and Northcentral regions where over 5 thousand lives have been lost and hundreds of people displaced from their ancestral homes. While conflicts between the Fulani nomadic herders and the sedentary farmers are not new in Nigeria, the recent upsurge of the crisis in the North and across the South has raised new fear about the unity and the security of the Nigerian federation.

The concerns of the government stem from the fact that the Nigerian federation as a colonial configuration has been entangled in different types of conflicts since independence, some of which have threatened the corporate existence of the federation. From the Nigerian civil war, Niger Delta militancy to Boko Haram insurgency, conflicts between two or more ethnic groups in Nigeria have dotted the nation's history attesting to the difficulty of managing a multiethnic society such as Nigeria. They also attest to the fact that the herder-farmers conflicts cannot be completely absolved from the challenge of ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria. This study was designed to investigate the role of land governance in the resurgence of herder-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, given the fact that the Nigerian federation is already confronted

by a myriad of other ethnic conflicts. It argued that if herder-farmers conflicts are partly orchestrated by the ethnic tensions in Nigeria's Northwest and Northcentral, the recent escalation of the violent clashes between herders and farmers is caused more by struggles for economic resources and lands than ethnicity.

The study found that the immediate causes of the herder-farmers in Nigeria in the last five (5) years are multifaceted, namely: climate change- the rising climatic conditions in the North leading to deforestation and scarcity of grazing lands and water resources for herders to herd their cattle in the region. It was also established that the increased hostility that accompanied the Boko Haram insurgency causing the Fulani herders to lose many of their cattle to the raging violence as well as the insecurity of cattle which is the major economic livelihood of an average Fulani man or family. These findings aligned with the research of George, Adelaja, Olufemi & Awokuse, (2022) on explanatory factors responsible for herder-farmers conflicts in the North.

Specifically, this study attempted to do a comparative study of the effects of ethnicity and land governance on herders-farmers conflicts. The findings across the regions are quite revealing. First, in the North, the study showed that there had always been interethnic conflicts between the Fulani herders and the indigenous populations in Northwest and Northcentral Nigeria but they were not bloody as we have in the case of herder-farmers conflicts. In Benue State, the study found that this challenge is more like a time bomb waiting to explode once government fails on its part to cater for the needs of the generality of the people. The study found that the recent escalation in the herder-farmers conflicts in the state is caused more by unlawful access to farmlands and damage of farm produce of the sedentary farmers by herders whose activities in the state have increased following the Boko Haram insurgency in the North and limited grazing lands due to climate change. Though, Benue State Government and other state governments in the region have put in place some conflict resolution mechanisms to reduce tensions between the two groups, it has been argued that the formation of militia groups by farmers have further compounded the peace process in the region. This is because of the allegations that some youths who have been engaged in these local security networks also involve cattle rustling, thereby endangering the trust needed to sustain peace. This finding aligned with the reports of the International Crisis Group (2021), which linked herder-farmers partly to the formation of vigilantes and militia. The development, instead of dousing the tensions in the region, has further escalated more violence as some militia groups engaged in unwholesome activities capable of truncating the peace being seriously sought by the government.

The study found that tensions between the Fulani nomadic herders and the sedentary farmers are high in the South over herder-farmers conflicts than in the North because of the Federal Government introduction and eventual suspension of the Rural Grazing Areas of Nigeria policy (RUGA), and the South-Western, South-Eastern and South-Southern enactment of Anti-Grazing Laws. The suspension of RUGA and the subsequent introduction of the National Livestock Transformation Plans are believed to be an attempt by the Federal Government to arrogate the lands belonging to the people of the South to the North under the guise of the promotion of a modern form of cattle grazing. Some Ministry Officials spoken to in the South noted that it would be difficult for the Federal Government of Nigeria to continue with the policy of demarcation of grazing routes which were practised in the old Northern region. An official in the Ministry of Agriculture of a particular Southern state noted that the policy today runs contrary to the provisions of the 1978 Land Use Act (recognized by the 1999 Constitution), which vests the power to allocate lands in the Governor of a State.

In Delta State, it was not only difficult to conduct interviews relating to the herder-farmers conflicts, but it was also tasking convincing the people that this study was a baseline study to interrogate people's experience of herder-farmers conflict in the state and an attempt by the government through TETFUND to establish the process of building sustainable peace in the conflict riddled-communities in Nigeria. The study found that the enactment of the Anti-Open Grazing Law has reduced the activities of nomadic herders (open grazing) in the South, but it has deepened tensions between the Fulani and sedentary farming communities. For instance, in Oyo and Ondo States, tensions have continued to rise over the nomadic herder's deviance to the Anti-Open Grazing Law enacted by the State Governments. The law, the research found, protects the sedentary farmers while it exposes the herders who engage in open grazing to attacks.

In the Southeast state of Enugu, participants expressed satisfaction with the government's decision to ban open grazing, given the negative and traumatic effects of herder-farmers conflicts on the security of lives and property in the state. When asked if the conflicts have always been the same in the state, the participants noted that it is partly due to the politics of land ownership and the increased activities of the Fulani herders, which have continued to damage their farmlands and endanger their lives. Unlike before, participants noted they are more afraid of the herdsman attacks because there has not been a concrete attempt by the Federal Government of Nigeria to bring the perpetrators to book. This finding aligned with the International Crisis Group (2021) which held that government ineptitude towards ending the clashes is responsible for the tensions in the country.

The study found that a new dimension to the herder-farmers conflict is the emergence of bandits in the rural grazing areas who now take up arms, kidnap people for ransom and demand huge sums of money from their victims. With this development, the respondents noted that government must do more than make the Anti-Open Grazing Laws but also deliberately create security networks that can guarantee the security of the lives and property of their people.

The study found that suggestions on ways of finding lasting solutions to the grazing of cattle varied across the regions. In States where Anti-Open Grazing Law has not been passed, people preferred that the old grazing routes be clearly demarcated. This type of suggestion was common among the Northern participants. For instance Adamawa State

in Numen, it was found that the demarcation of grazing routes had brought relative peace to the community. The research, however, found a different outcome in the South, where people bluntly rejected the idea of open grazing. Open Grazing was conceived as alien to modern civilizations. Most of the sedentary farmers who participated in the study wanted a more civilized approach to the rearing of animals such that the security of farm produce as well as the human beings in the agriculture sector could be guaranteed.

On the issue of Alternative Dispute Resolution, a good number of the respondents held that effective Stakeholders Engagement and Community Consultation by the governments (both Federal and State) are very central to the continued management of the herder-farmers conflict and restoration of peace in the troubled communities. Now that tension is high in the country due to the politics of brinkmanship and ethnicity, the people wanted the government to embark on a more reassuring land governance system that does not intend to give the lands of some people and hand them over to others without mutual and legal contractual agreements. This path if follow has the likelihood of exploding the already peace process achieved in some rural grazing areas.

7. Conclusion

This study has found that both ethnicity and access to lands contribute to the ongoing herder-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, but the recent upsurge in the herder-farmers conflicts is caused more by the scarcity of lands resources such as access to grazing lands, water resources for cattle as well as food for the livestock. As it stands, the study found that the Nigerian government must focus more on making land resources available to the herders and securing the farmlands for the sedentary farmers whose livelihoods also depend on the annual or quarterly productivity of farm produce for commercial and subsistence living. It should also, through genuine national policies such as the National Transformation Livestock Plans, resolve the governance issues over lands for the grazing of cattle by establishing cattle ranches.

Declaration of Conflict

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper

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