

The Implication of the Fulani Herdsmen Crisis on National Integration and National Development in Nigeria

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Introduction

The Fulani Herdsmen and farmers clash have Fulani become a real disaster for Nigeria in recent years. Quartz explains the Fulani move by climate change. As a result, the long droughts began. Then, desertification of previously rich pastures occurs. It caused the conflicts for pasture lands between the local villagers and pastoralists in the North of the country. The clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria periodically erupt for several consecutive years and each time take dozens of human lives. The cause of the clashes is the lack of land that one side uses as arable land, the other for pastures. In 2014, according to the Global Terrorism Index report, Fulani militants killed more than 1,200 people and then headed the list of the most fanatical terrorist groups in the region according to the BBC and 2,500 by 2016. The Fulani indisputably represent a significant component of the Nigerian economy. They constitute the major breeders of cattle, the main source of meat, the most available and cheap source of animal proteins consumed by Nigerians. The Fulani own over 90% of the nation's livestock population which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP and 3.2% of the nation's GDP (Eniola, 2017). Furthermore, the contribution of the Fulani to the local food chain and national food security cannot be overstressed. The Fulani, with their dominance in the Sahel region, are the best known and most numerous of all the pastoral groups in Nigeria. The traditional and unique Fulani encampment (*ruga*) consisting of temporary structures made of stalks, closely knit family members and livestock is the natural habitat of the orthodox Fulbe settlement (Eniola, 2017).

Environmental Scarcity as a Primary Cause of the Conflict

What is environmental conflict? Environmental conflict can be simply defined as conflicts caused by unfavourable environmental factors such as; degradation, scarcity, resources, demands and so on. Environmental scarcity occurs as a result of degradation and pressure on renewable and non-renewable natural resources which is very common in developing countries. It is due to inadequate availability of natural resources like water, arable lands, oil etc. This limited availability

of resources push people living in such areas to leave in order to have access to resources. Nigeria's far north is arid and semi-arid, with a long dry season from October to May and low rainfall (600 to 900 mm) from June to September. In 2008, the National Meteorological Agency reported that over the preceding 30 years the annual rainy season dropped from an average of 150 to 120 days. In the last six decades, over 350,000 sq km of the already arid region turned to desert or desert-like conditions, a phenomenon progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year.¹² In Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states, estimates suggest that 50-75 per cent of the land area is becoming desert.¹³ These environmental changes have wrecked agriculture and human livelihoods, forcing millions of pastoralists and others to migrate south, in search of productive land. Migration initially was seasonal, with herders spending December to May in the central zone before returning north. Over the last two decades, however, as available pastures shrank in the far north, herders have been staying in the central zone longer – from December to June or July. More recently, some have chosen to graze their herds there permanently. This has triggered increasing disputes over land and water use with central Nigeria's growing populations of sedentary crop farmers.

Causes of Scarcity

- **Demand-induced scarcity:** Population growth or increasing consumption levels decrease the amount of limited natural resources available to each individual. The population of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, has increased from 177 million in 1950 to 657 million in 2000, shrinking the amount of land and freshwater available to the average person. In the case of Rwanda, demographic pressures created extreme environmental scarcity that played a role in the 1994 genocide.
- **Supply-induced scarcity:** Environmental degradation decreases the overall amount of a limited natural resource, decreasing the amount available to each individual. In western China, overgrazing in portions of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau has combined with

drought to degrade precious topsoil over the past several years. Chinese scientists estimate that 900 square miles of land in the region degrade into desert each year. As a result, herders and farmers have found it increasingly difficult to earn a living in the area.

- **Structural scarcity:** Unequal access to natural resources in a given society makes them scarce for large segments of the population. In South Africa, the system of apartheid provided whites with 87 percent of the land, while blacks (almost 75 percent of the country's population) lived within restricted areas that accounted for only 13 percent of the land. Resources were also inequitably distributed within the restricted areas, as local elites controlled access to productive agriculture and grazing land.

In some cases, different sources of environmental scarcity may interact, exacerbating the problem:

- **Resource capture:** When a resource becomes relatively scarce — say, because of population growth — it often becomes more valuable. This increase in value may motivate powerful groups within society to take greater control of the resource, making it scarcer still. In this way, the demand-induced scarcity that accompanies an increase in population may lead to an increase in structural scarcity following efforts to monopolize the resource.
- **Ecological marginalization:** When vital resources such as fertile land become scarce due to population growth and unequal access, impoverished people often move into ecologically-sensitive areas such as hillsides, tropical rain forests, and areas at risk of desertification. The rising population in these areas, combined with unsustainable land use practices, leads to environmental degradation and further scarcity.

Implication of Environmental scarcity

When people are pushed to the wall for so long, they will therefore return to react violently. Government must get its priorities right by ensuring the protection of lives and properties which is an essential and most important dividend which must be given to every individual no matter the tribe, group or religion. When people took to arms, either to

defend themselves from being attacked, its implications are;

Ethnic tension and conflict: As far as Africa is concerned ethnic conflict has been the main atrocities confronting the continent which have claimed so many lives. This could ensue as a result of fight over resources; land, water, farmland, precious stones, oil and so on. Cote D'ivoire, Nigeria, DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone are very good example. According to Wolff (2007) "An ethnic conflict occurs when a critical number of people have made the calculated decision to pursue their goals with violent means". In Nigeria, people in Benue view the ongoing tension in the state as a form of a tribe trying to have total control over the other which is a form of security threat to the state.

Exposing the weakness of security agency: When proper measures are not put in place by security agencies to forestall attacks being perpetrated by arm bandit, it is a situation of having little or no confidence in the security of a state, people took to arms either to defend themselves or a form of reprisal attack. This in turn will eventually be a breakdown of law and order, prevailing anarchy.

Food and national security: The conflict in Benue state, Nigeria undermines food and nation security of a state. As the state is known as the 'food basket of the nation', the main occupation of Benue people is farming. The fear of farmers abandoning their farmland due to fear of being attacked pose a serious threat to national security. Food and national security are human needs which are some of the phases of a secured environment. John Burton's human needs approach argues that "there are certain ontological and generic needs that will be pursued and that socialisation processes. If not compatible with such human needs, far from socialising will lead to frustrations and to disturb antisocial personal and group behaviour." People and their habitat must be protected.

Environmental pollution: Government must be sensitive towards the plight of its people. Environmental pollution happens in different ways. The sounds of arms in the process of attack, the spilling of blood, burning of houses and farmlands during a violent conflict and so on are all threat to a nation. For safety, people leave such environment to a well secured environment which is also another threat to the new environment due to its over population and also the shortage of food, water and shelter.

Causes of Conflicts between Farmers and Herdsmen

The causes of the conflict between the Tiv farmers and the cattle Fulanis could be grouped into two. The Immediate causes and the Remote causes.

(a) The Immediate Causes

These should not be understood as being the causes of the current conflicts. The

Immediate causes are the causes that are more easily prone to violence when there is a disagreement between the two groups. This must be differentiated from Remote causes which are latent, hidden more of a systematic cause which are more or less 'in-born' and appear to be embedded in the Tiv-farmers or/and the cattle Fulanis

(i) The first immediate cause is the 'deep rooted' cause. Both the Tiv-farmers and the Fulani herds-men must ever continue to depend on a common material for their existence. There is therefore bound to be conflict. What matters therefore, is to forget fighting to 'remove' or 'court' the conflict but to put the conflict under 'checks' or 'under bounds' since it has 'deep roots' or it's deeply rooted and simply inevitable.

(ii) The second immediate cause of the conflict is the Quantum nature of land. Land has a fixed value it is given by God to be fixed, not to increase. It may decrease, as it gets lost to agents of denudation. Therefore since the population of farmers is increasing, the population of the people of Nigeria and indeed Gwer-West local government is increasing by 2.8% (1963 Federal Government Census Figures) we expect that more people, more farmers will depend on land which has a fixed value hence the supply to demand relationship will not be balanced and as such conflict will arise as one considers the issue of ownership and also between the cattle Fulani as that graze where they are not expected to graze.

(iii) We also see an immediate cause as being attributed to the large influx of herds-men into the Benue trough/Benue valley. Statistics have shown that the influx from Nasarawa to Benue is on the increase at a rate of 3 – 4% annually and 1.5 – 2% leaves the valley every year while 0.5 – 0.8% is consumed as meat in abattoirs, in the slaughter houses Federal Livestock Department Report (2004). By implication there is always a large percentage of livestock in the Benue valley every year. As was reported, the type of grass, the soil type that encourages and supports vegetation cover creates an enabling environment suitable for the

herdsmen to desire to pasture in this valley. The number of the cattle Fulani herds-men is thus increasing as the population of the farmers on this land.

(iv) Another cause, which immediately sparks up conflicts between the Tiv - farmers

and the Cattle Fulani, is "the claim by the Fulanis of their payment of compensation to the Traditional rulers" in Gwer-west Local Government of Benue state. The consultants were briefed by the Fulanis that it has been their custom to pay 'homage' to the chief of whichever area they wish to enter and graze. According to reports, before they even step on any place to make their nomadic camps', they first visit the nearest tax collectors who take them to the kindred head and to the District head. In each case they pay homage with money and collectively the herds-men contribute money to visit the paramount ruler of the Local

Government, which they do through their secretary The Miyette-Allah (MACBAN). This was confirmed by the Secretary of MACBAN. The money they believe gives them authority to use/graze the land. We must not forget to mention that the fertility of the soil in this valley is overwhelming; one does not need any fertilizer for crops production in this valley. Land here is thus valued jealously.

(v) Destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigational facilities and infrastructure) by the herds-men themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers.

(vi) Burning of rangelands and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herds-men.

(vii) Increasing rate of cattle theft which, is often accompanied by violence.

(viii) Antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herds-men could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources. In support of above claim, Ingawa, Ega, and Erhabor (2019) reported that the key underlying causes of farmer-herds-men conflict in Nigeria are:

1. Decline in internal discipline and social cohesion, as the adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods, and the authority of the traditional rulers is breaking down. This is exacerbated by increased rent seeking of the formal and traditional authorities in managing resource access.

2. Particularly severe on the traditional trek routes, which become favorite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of

animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas? Within the Fadama areas, this is exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the crop plots, which makes prevention of animals straying in the crop plots difficult

3. Inadequacy of grazing resources, as increasing crop cultivation (and increasing commercialization of the crop-residues) and poor management of the existing grazing reserves have resulted in a significant reduction in available livestock feed resources, in particular in the Northern States.

4. Moreover the high value crops introduced by NFDP (tomatoes and onions) produce almost no crop-residues for livestock feeding.

5. Finally, the regulation that twenty percent of the Fadama would need to be set aside for grazing (National Agricultural Policy, 1988) has not been adhered to.

The Remote Causes of the incessant Conflicts Between the Tiv-Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen in Benue State

(i) The first remote cause as was obtained in the cause of the study was "The Unforgiving" attitude or culture of the Fulanis: This fact was obtained from several Authorities vested with management of peace in the State. The secretary of Miyette-Allah (The Association of Cattle Breeders of Nigeria) Benue State Chapter also confirmed this fact. When the Tiv-men from Gwer-west was alleged to have attacked and killed over 80 cows of the Fulanis in what was called "IJOVPUPUU" meaning 'white mushroom' in the early eighties, little did the Gwer-west people, (The Tyosin people) from the three districts ever know that they will be attacked for that action thirty years after. Mechanism of the attack was explained to the consultants to prove that the Fulanis are still revenging the 'IjovPupuu' episode of the early eighties this is indeed remote, latent, hidden and cannot easily be traced to any known immediate cause.

(ii) The second remote cause of the conflict is attributed to the historic relationship between the Tiv man and the Fulanis. The Fulanis call the Tiv-man 'Munchi'. This is a Hausa word meaning 'we have eaten'. Historically the Tiv man is believed to have killed and eaten a Fulani cow when the Tivs and Fulanis were moving together in the migration train as was revealed through Ethnographic Studies. The Fulanis have the believe that as long as they are in the mist of the Tiv people, some of their cows must be lost, this makes a Fulani man to ever live suspecting a Tiv, man over the loss of their cattle (Eniola, 2017).

(iii) The third remote cause unveiled was that of 'mischief'. It was discovered that there were several instances where 'mischief makers' had set false alarm by saying that either the Fulani's or the Tiv people are coming for an attack. This had caused fears in the Tiv or Fulani community and the people either the Tivs or the Fulani's had to run for their dear lives and these mischiefmakers rooted, stole and caused other mischievous actions. This is of a great concern and it has several dimensions, which the consultants went ahead to investigate and concluded that these herdsmen who cause mischief are hired herdsmen who are not committed to their work. They do this so that they will falsely accuse the Tiv people of taking their cows but in the long run they are the ones who will arrange to take those cows in connivance with other mischiefmakers and sell the cows or transport them to other places for sale, when they might have executed their plans they usually go back to tell their 'masters' that they were attacked in some village and some cows were lost thus setting a revenge mechanism against the people of the area. This indeed is the current trend of the remote causes of conflict between the Tiv-farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Gwer-West Local Government and has been found to transcend to the other Local Governments too.

Response from the Government

The federal government has, explored various responses. In April 2014, then President Goodluck Jonathan's government inaugurated an inter-ministerial technical committee on grazing reserves, tasked with proposing strategies for ending the conflicts.⁵⁷ Concurrently, the government set up a political Committee on Grazing Reserves, chaired by then Benue state Governor Gabriel Suswam. The report issued by Suswam's committee called for the recovery and improvement of all grazing routes encroached upon by farmers and recommended that the Central Bank of Nigeria release a total of N100 billion (\$317 million) to the country's 36 state governments for ranch construction. The National Executive Council (NEC) approved these recommendations but Jonathan's defeat in the March 2015 elections interrupted their implementation. Although the central bank released N100 billion to state governments, they failed to construct any ranches. On 19 January 2017, the House of Representatives set up a committee to investigate accusations that the funds had been looted and report back within four weeks. The committee's findings

remain unpublished to this day. Soon after assuming office in 2015, President Buhari directed the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to formulate a comprehensive livestock development plan including measures to curb farmer-herder clashes. In August 2015, a FMARD committee recommended short-, medium- and long-term strategies, including development of grazing reserves and stock routes. On 25 January 2016, the government announced it was presenting a plan to the Nigerian Governors Forum to map grazing areas in all states as a temporary solution for cattle owners until they could be persuaded to embrace ranching. Most central and southern states, however, opposed the plan, which they viewed as favoring Fulani herders. On 3 March 2016, seeking to mollify this opposition, Agriculture Minister AuduOgbeh announced the government was sending a bill to the National Assembly to prohibit cattle from roaming in cities and villages. He added that the government had ordered fast-growing grass from Brazil to produce “massive hectares of grasses”, which would be ready for consumption “within the next three months”. More than a year later, there has been no further word about the cattle banning bill and the promised grass.

The response of the federal government to this crisis is least expected considering the sensitivity of it, and the things at stake. The response of the government has been that of avoidance and denial. As a matter of fact, according to Channels TV news report, when asked to explain why there is yet to be a solution to the killings in Benue state and other parts, the presidency said it is yet to be “officially” served with the summon and promised to respond when notified. The fact remains that every of the response by the government has been partial and wrong-sided which should not be so especially in a country like Nigeria with an heterogeneous population. The victimized ethnicity can assume it is an attack against their own existence or a form of relative deprivation

The federally-controlled Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) are thinly deployed in rural areas and often lack early warning mechanisms. Even when community and civil society groups get involved, both herders and farmers say the response to distress calls is often late. Herders say they sometimes have to seek revenge because security forces take no action against attackers who kill them and steal their cattle. Farmers say the agencies' failure to respond promptly to distress calls and

punish aggressors emboldens the herders.

The more typical response has been to deploy the police, and sometimes the army, after clashes take place. In a few cases, police have arrested and prosecuted both herders and vigilantes bearing firearms. More often, the country's dysfunctional law enforcement and criminal justice system fails to arrest or prosecute any perpetrators. Moreover, authorities have generally treated these crimes as political rather than criminal acts, arguing that sanctioning suspects could spark further violence. Even if commissions of inquiry are established, they typically are used as instruments to temper tensions rather than pursue justice. These responses, however well meaning, create a climate of impunity. Under the Buhari administration, the security response has been particularly questionable. In February 2016, following public outcry over attacks by herders that killed scores of people in ten farming villages in the Agatu area of north-central Benue state, Buhari ordered an investigation. Nothing has been heard about it since.

On 24 April 2016, Information and Culture Minister Lai Mohammed said the government was working “silently” toward ending the violence, promising: “In few weeks from now, we will begin to see the result of that”. Again, there was no follow up. In April 2016, after widespread condemnation of an attack on UkpabiNimbo in Enugu state, the president ordered the police and military to “take all necessary action to stop the carnage”, pledging that stopping herder attacks had become a priority. Since then hundreds have died in more clashes. On 15 July 2016, the chief of defence staff, General Gabriel Olonisakin, announced “Operation Accord” to stop the violence. Nothing more was heard of that campaign. Following clashes in southern Kaduna in late 2016, which killed between 200 to 800 people, the army deployed troops to the area. Still, attacks have continued.

Effects on National Development

- Displacement of the Tivs in the three districts from their places of origin. They have thus become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within the Local Government and have found refuge in other districts, towns and settlements including Agaigbe, Naka, Atukpu, Tse-Iorbogo and other missionary centers outside the conflict areas including Mission Station Ajigba of the NKST Church other Christian centers like the Catholic Church premises in Agaigbe and the voluntary organization in the Local

Government Areas. In a similar view the Fulanis have dared not go near the boundaries of Gwer-west Local Government Area. They were also displaced from where they had found pasture.

- **Poverty:** Because the people displaced are peasant farmers they now depend on others to give them land to plant crops on a smaller scale than what they have cultivated before. This is leading to low agricultural yield mainly to support their existence at a subsistence level. Their economic well-being is thus tempered with because of this conflict. Their cash crops production has reduced, their subsistence level also has dropped. Naturally by the use of simple Regression Techniques using the yield from their farms post conflicts and pre-conflict at the new places of abode and their former places respectively, the results has shown their impoverished levels due to this conflict.
- **Reduced standard and levels of education** has been noticed. Their unhealthy looks were also visually observed. This last conflict has led their children to be out of school for about one year, as their parents cannot afford the school fees.
The low capital base leads them to poor health. They are unable to purchase drugs prescribed in the clinics available around where they are. This will definitely lead to very low Human Capital Development Index if it is to be measured on them.
- **Environmental degradation** has been found to be high particularly in areas where the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are staying. Refuse disposal heaps, human wastes and associated household wastes create environmental degradation as drainages are found to be blocked due to poor sanitary conditions and above all potable water is found to be lacking during the dry season.
- **Economic Downturn:** According to a 2015 study, the federal government was losing \$13.7 billion in revenue annually because of herder-farmer conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states. The study found that on average these four states lost 47 per cent of their internally-generated revenues. In March 2017, Benue state Governor Samuel Ortom asserted that attacks by herders coming from more

northerly states, and possibly also from Cameroon and Niger, had cost his state N95 billion (about \$634 million at that time) between 2012 and 2014.⁴² Communities and households also pay a heavy price. The ethnic Nzor-Tiv Global Association estimated its Agatu communities in Benue state lost N65 billion in property (\$204 million) during the early 2016 herder attacks.

- **The loss of large cattle herds, crops** (due to population displacements and damage to irrigation facilities), as well as increases in transport and labor costs in post-conflict environments all increase poverty and food insecurity in affected communities – and beyond. The conflicts, particularly herder attacks on farming communities, have spawned dangerous political and religious conspiracy theories. One is that the attacks are part of a longer-term Fulani plot to displace indigenous populations and seize their lands. Among Christian communities, herder attacks are widely seen as a subtle form of jihad. In March 2016, the prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, Dr. Samuel Uche, said: “We are aware there is a game plan to Islamize Nigeria, and they are using the Fulani herdsman to initiate it”. In the south east, Biafra separatist groups describe the attacks as part of a northern plot to overwhelm the peoples of the south and forcefully convert them to Islam. Some southerners accuse President Buhari of deliberately failing to stop herder aggression, pointing to his pastoral Fulani background and his position as life patron of the cattle breeders' association, (MACBAN), to buttress their charges. These charges are not supported by any solid evidence, but they are aggravating inter-faith distrust and undermining the country's fragile unity.
- **The Sultan of Sokoto, Mohammed Sa'adAbubakar III**, spiritual head of Nigerian Muslims and a prominent Fulani, has repeatedly stressed that Fulani herders who kill should be prosecuted as criminals and even terrorists, but many remain unconvinced in a country with deep inter-faith suspicions. Communities in the middle belt and south have formed self-defense vigilante groups, some of which have threatened organized reprisals. In March

2014, Leonard Karshima Shilgba, an ethnic Tiv academic and thought leader, warned that if the federal government could not stop the attacks, “the Tiv people would also demonstrate that they equally have the right and also the capacity to raise a standing army of thousands from each ward and kindred”.

- Many people are being killed in the conflict; both young and old.

Effects of Government Response

The response of the government has put the population, both the affected and non-affected ones in a state of fear and insecurity. They no longer have confidence in the protection the state offers. This is because the government has proven incapable of protecting the people or at least trying to increase the security strength in affected areas.

Thus, the people have resolved to taking laws into their hands and putting up an act of self-defense against the perpetrators. This begs the question of if we are gradually retrogressing back to the “state of nature” in Nigeria?

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is the need for the government to take quick and effective action against this crisis before it degenerates into a full blown civil war. Also the communities should employ traditional means of conflict resolution among themselves. The federal government should formulate and implement the proposed National Ranch Development Plan to prevent the occurrence of frequent altercations between farmers and herdsmen that often arise from destruction of farm crops by cattle.

1. The security in the affected regions should be improved on actively. The federal government and its security agencies should intensify operations against cattle rustlers, improving systems to track livestock movement and trade, arresting individuals who carry illegal firearms and prosecuting suspected assailant. The police capacity has to be strengthened to curb rustling and banditry. The establishment of the various regional security outfits such as 'amotekun' is a welcome development.
2. Further down the road, government should consider shifting their strategy for curbing cattle rustling from active violence to negotiation and mediation.
3. There is urgent need to reform and improve grazing arrangements.. The federal

government also should follow through on its plan to establish new grazing reserves in the ten northern states that have already provided 55,000 hectares to that end. It should help state governments develop these areas following the model provided by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which is funding three reserves in Sokoto State.

4. The federal ministry of agriculture and rural development, along with various other relevant local and international agencies, should apply the ideas and resolutions generated at the National Conference on Transforming the Nigerian Livestock Industry, held in Abuja in September 2017, in driving the formulation and implementation of the proposed plan. Governments of some states, like Benue and Taraba, that recently introduced new laws prohibiting open grazing, should exercise restraint in enforcing such laws, and encourage a phased transition to ranching. They and other state governments should promote ranches, including by clarifying processes for acquiring land and obtaining credit, devising modalities for ranch management training, and encouraging private-public partnerships.

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