



Herders-Farmers Crisis in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the State's Response

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Abstract

Herders/farmers crisis in Nigeria in recent time has constituted a major security threat in the country. Reports have it that herdsmen have wreaked havoc on a number of communities in the country, killing thousands of people and destroying property worth billions of naira. The persistent attacks on farming communities in states like Benue, Kaduna, Taraba, Abia, Ekiti, Delta, to mention but a few, have sacked people from their ancestral lands and destroyed their sources of lively hood. The seeming inability of the security agencies and other government institutions to curtail the situation has left much to be desired. This paper looks at the crisis between herders and farmers across the country and its attendant consequences on national development. The various perspectives or interpretations accounting for the sustained nature of the problems, and the response of the Nigerian state are also examined. Marxist theory has been adopted in explaining the sustained crisis between farmers and herdsmen, considering the fact that the crisis is purely economic. The paper finds out that, porous borders which give rise to unchecked influx of trans-human movement into Nigeria, absence of decisive policies that could avert possible re-occurrence of this, the failure of the Nigerian state to live up to its primary responsibility of protecting lives and property etc. are some of the contributory factors to the crisis. The paper concludes that to overcome this, the state should enact laws and provide the basic infrastructures that encourage modern animal husbandry and cause the various security agencies to live up to the expectation.

Keywords: Farmers, Herders, Crisis , State and State Response

Introduction

The sacred authority of the Nigerian state to regulate the activities of every citizen within her territory is being challenged by incessant cases of violent armed conflicts where the state seems helpless in arresting the situation. The state is distinguished from other associations by its sovereign responsibilities as encapsulated in the

doctrine of social contract (Appadorai 1994; 23). Several decades after the independence of Nigeria, this unique quality is fast eroding due to frequent re-occurrence of security challenges in the country. Some of the security threats include: herdsmen/farmers feud across the nation, the Boko Haram insurgency in the north east, the militancy in the Niger Delta, the Independent People of Biafra's (IPOB) agitation for independence in the south east and the kidnapping of

defenceless citizens across the country, among others.

These security challenges currently bedeviling the nation are largely due to the errors from the decisions and actions/inactions of the state over time. That the Nigerian state no longer enjoys the monopoly of the use of force is to state the obvious. Small and light weapons are freely available in wrong hands. The borders are so porous that the influx of such weapons is hardly checked. As a result, Nigeria has been turned into a war zone where threat to lives and property has become a common feature of the state. This is even made worse following the lack of decisive policies that could deal with the menace.

Although several of these security threats exist in Nigeria, the paper focuses on the crisis between herders and farmers. The emphasis on this one is due to the fact that it is a crisis within the same sector of the economy, the agricultural sector, which the present government has pledged to promote. And if the sector is crises ridden, how can it be developed to its full potentials? Other countries have developed their agricultural sectors and are getting fortunes out of it. For example, as at 2007, the production of meat and animals accounted for\$ 66bn (sixty six billion dollars) in added value to the U.S economy, while in England, ranches have become tourist destinations [The Authority April 26, 2016]. It is the opinion of this paper that, if the nation's agricultural sector is well handled, it can contribute reasonably to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation. But this cannot take place in the atmosphere of violence as is currently witnessed in the country.

Concept of State

The state is viewed by different scholars in different ways. To Chandran (2008):

A state is a form of political association or polity that is distinguished by the fact that it is not itself incorporated into any other political associations, though it may incorporate other such associations. The state is thus a supreme corporate entity because it is not incorporated into any other entity, even though it might be subordinate to other powers (such as another state or an empire). One state is distinguished from another by its having its own independent structure of political authority, and an attachment to separate physical territories.

The state is viewed in two main perspectives. In one way, it is viewed as a component part of the main sovereign entity. While in the other way, it is considered as a sovereign geographical entity that maintains order through a coercive authority. The paper focuses on the latter judging from the fact that the provincial states in the country lack control over the instruments of coercion, and they themselves have become targets of attacks as would be discussed in the paper. There is little or nothing the component states on their own can do to bring the crises to an end, due to the power structure in the country. The role of the state as used in the paper refers to the role of the central government (the agency of the state) in bringing the crisis to an end.

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for the analysis of this issue is the Marxist political economy

approach. Marxism is a theory that uses economy, especially the system of material accumulation to analyze the society. Derived from the teachings of Karl Marx, its founder, the theory is built on two central assumptions: historical materialism and dialectical materialism. Historical materialism here means that, to study a situation scientifically, one is required to know the stages of the society's development and where it has now reached. The idea is that, society can be best understood by examining the level of development of productive forces. While dialectical materialism on the other hand means that the society is ever changing and not static. And changes occur in the society as a result of the contradictions that exist in a particular mode of production. The way and manner in which the contradiction is resolved determines the nature of development. According to Marx, it is a resolution of the antagonisms between the bourgeois and the proletariat that would give rise to socialism which would be better than capitalism.

The suitability of this theory in analyzing the issue stems from the fact that this crisis is as a result of the contradictions within the agricultural sector of the economy, where cows convert crops of farmers into their food. Also, some countries had faced similar situations in the past but that has been resolved and has given way for better economic productivity. If Nigeria can learn from the history of those countries, it will serve her some good. The parties to the crisis should also note that as the society is

fast changing, Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind. The method of farming or rearing of animal adopted by our forefather's centuries ago cannot continue to remain relevant till today. Nigeria needs to adopt new methods of farming and animal husbandry in line with international best practices. We cannot afford to remain traditional in the midst of a digital world.

Farmers-Herdsmen Altercations: Issues and Perspectives.

Nigeria is predominantly an agrarian economy (Gbor 1993:65). It is a fact that, over 70% of its population engages in crop cultivation of various types. On the other hand, the rearing of ruminant livestock in Nigeria, as in many other parts of Africa has largely been in the hands of nomadic groups (who are mostly the Fulanis) who migrate from place to place in search of food and water for their livestock.

The crisis today is that, as human population is expanding; available lands for crop cultivation and livestock breeding are becoming inadequate in many parts of the country, especially the farming communities (Mamman 2007 and Ayih 2003). Thus, Hagher (2002:28) opines that, "nomads and farmers will always have their fights over land, because the farmer is a visionary who sees the green leaves as sacks of cereals to be sold or eaten and is also willing to pay the supreme price. The nomad converts the luscious green plants as food for his cattle and is willing to pay even with his life to feed his cattle". Adogi (2013) on the other hand sees the palaver from the point of the ecological factors, as he posits that, the predominant herdsmen of the lower Sahel and Sudan savannah ecologies from the

north west and north east of Nigeria and (elsewhere) are now migrating and gradually becoming natives (most times by way of the sword or barrel of the gun) in the middle belt region to find greener pasture for their herds. Whatever perspective one would wish to view the crisis, it still boils down to fight over land, which is fixed in nature, for cultivation or grazing.

The fear of the farmers is that the herdsmen will destroy their farmlands and their crops. They therefore do everything possible to protect their lands and crops which is a source of livelihood for them and their families. To the nomads, cattle's rearing is not just considered a business but a way of life. Thus, to restrict their pastoral activities amounts to cultural genocide. This has brought the two cultures into conflict, which usually ends up in violence, with loss of lives and property on both sides (Okoli and Atelhe 2014:76).

Rearing cattle in combat gear may soon force the nation into food scarcity. The issue is almost everywhere within the country. In the North-Western state of Zamfara, the epicenter has been Dansandau and Yar Galadima where over 70 farmers lost their lives in a peace meeting. In Southern Kaduna, it is in Kaura, Larmude and Sanga local government areas. In the North- East, the entire Taraba South has of recent not been a safe place for the farmers and herders. The North- Central no doubt has remained the worst hit with over 2,000 lives lost in plateau, Nassarawa and Benue. The activities of the herdsmen are in the Southern states of Delta, Enugu, Abia, Oyo and Ogun. (Sunday Mirror, May 4, 2014).

Factors Responsible For Herders-Farmers Crisis

Several factors have contributed to give rise to the herders/farmers crisis in the country. Some of these factors are hereby identified and discussed below:

(a) Porous Borders

The Nigerian state has 1,500km land border with the republic of Niger and Chad in the North; 1000km land border in the West; 1700km border with Cameroon in the East and 700km coastline off the Atlantic Ocean (Okon et al 2011:21). Due to the long border Nigeria shares with her neighbours, the security agents have been finding it difficult to control trans-border movement of people and goods. The crises perpetrated in Nigeria by herdsmen have been severally blamed on foreign herdsmen, mostly from Niger, Chad, Benin republic etc. The border areas serve as entry points for sophisticated weapons that are fuelling crises. Explaining the cause of the southern Kaduna attack, governor El-Rufai, the governor of the state blamed the attack on foreign herdsmen from the neighbouring African countries mentioned above. According to him, the herdsmen were attacked in Kaduna in 2011, during the post-election violence where their cattle and human lives were lost. In his statement "the state government went to them and paid them compensation for the lost lives and cattle so that they will stop the killing in southern Kaduna" (Vanguard Dec, 3 2016). In relation to El-Rufai's claim, the Assistant National Secretary General of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, Ibrahim Abdullahi stated that, he was asked by the former governor of Kaduna state, Patrick Yakowa to go to the neighbouring

African countries and appeal to the people that lost their relations and cows in the 2011 violence so that they would not come for reprisal. When he got to Cameroon, he went to the house of a prominent Fulani who lost cows and six boys in the crisis, and they had a fruitful discussion and the man agreed to forgive southern Kaduna for the lost lives and cattle. He added that his host later took him to a warehouse within his estate and what he saw shocked him. In his words, "I saw all sorts of sophisticated weapons and I was told they were kept in readiness for revenge attack in southern Kaduna. He also took me to the forest and I saw a large camp and several young men receiving all forms of training on warfare" (premium times Tuesday, Sept 5, 2017). How these people cross into Nigeria with arms and cause mayhem unabated is due to our porous borders and lack of tight border security. The Nigerian customs services had put the value of intercepted arms and ammunition at 3.9billion (The Guardian, 15 March, 2003). In October 2011, cargoes containing 13 long-distance rocket launchers were shipped into the country from the republic of Iran through the Lagos port (The Guardian, 7 April, 2011). This goes to say, the influx of these weapons is the manifestation of what we are witnessing in Nigeria today, which is threatening our corporate existence and national development.

(b) Erosion of State's Monopoly over the Instruments of Violence

As a follow up from the influx of illegally acquired weapons is the fact that the Nigerian state has been fast losing monopoly over the instruments of coercion. Several weapons have gone into wrong

hands as discussed above. It is no longer news that Ak49 riffle has replaced the stick, which is a traditional instrument used by herders for guiding livestock. They freely brandish them around, and are ready to use them on people at the slightest provocation. It is uncontestable that the worst crisis challenging the Nigerian state today is the farmers/herdsmen conflict (as the Boko Haram is being given serious attention).

The proliferation of weapons has not only upturned or eroded the conventional notion of the state as exercising monopoly over the control of the instruments of physical violence, but has also questioned the Clausewitzian Trinitarian conception of "war-as an event that must identify the political leaders of states that declared and managed it"..... Okon and Dickson (2011:6-12).

The kinds of weapons used in these wars show how terrible the situation has become. Before now, communal wars were prosecuted with bows and arrows, machetes, clubs, and den guns or single barrels. State intervention in form of peace keeping were very effective because, the security agents drafted to such crisis ridden areas had enjoyed the monopoly of the use of sophisticated weapons whose fire power, the local warriors could not match. Destruction of lives and property was also very minimal. The situation today has, however exposed the weakness of the state in conflict prevention and management. In the works of Oche [2000]; Oyeneyin [2005]; Ploughshares [2010]; Okon and Dickson [2011], they all acknowledge that in recent times the weapons and tactics of these wars have changed. The types of arms that are most frequently used are AK-47 assault

rifles, K2 rifles, RPG- rockets, SMG etc. Recent experiences have shown that security forces are either reluctant to go for such peace keeping engagements or make tactical withdrawal with reports of insurgents having more sophisticated weapons than them.

(c) Elite's Conspiracy

The role of some elites in the feud is considered inciting. This has generated a lot of fear, distrust, hatred, frustration and anger which is not good for our national unity. On the part of the herdsmen, they are represented by Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN). While the traditional rulers or community leaders represent the farmers as the custodians of lands. In an interview in Tell Magazine (Nov 16, 2012), Alhaji Sale Bayari the former National Secretary of MACBAN, answering a question on why the Fulani herdsmen are perceived to be naturally aggressive, he said:

This is a hostile environment in which the Fulani man lives. You have to be as hostile as your environment for you to survive. There must be a balance of terror for you to survive in the jungle. The Fulani herdsman is a man that believes the entire world is after him and what he has. He believes he has to arm himself to the teeth...he, the Fulani man has found himself in a situation where if he does not pay somebody to take care of his enemies, the enemy will kill him and take over his property.

Such comments from a man of the status of Alhaji Sale Bayeri about the need for "*balance of terror*" to survive as a herdsman and to ... "*pay somebody to take care of his enemies*" are

clear issues of the elites instigating the incessant attacks and counter attacks.

On the part of the farmers, the O'odua People's Congress came in defence of the farmers during the crisis between the herdsmen and farmers in Shaki Oyo State. They claimed to have responsibility to protect the Yorubas anywhere in the country. Joshua [2010; 109] captures their reactions thus:

The Hausa-Fulani has eaten up Nigeria; that is why we are getting poorer and poorer. They are quietly eating the Obasanjo regime to the marrows. They have now asked their animals to come and eat up the little that we are trying to provide for ourselves in the villages into which we have all been condemned. We won't accept that. The animals that come here to eat out crops belong to same people that are systematically killing Nigeria. We cannot sit in the house and still risk breaking our necks.

These events are quickly becoming unbearable for the Nigerian state. This is because, it is generating a lot of fear, distrust, hatred, frustration, anger and it is capable of disintegrating the country. Also Nasiru El-Rufai, the Kaduna state governor, while justifying the herdsmen attack on southern Kaduna had this to say "the Fulanis don't forgive. If you offend a Fulani man, it does not matter how long it takes, even if it takes one hundred years, he will surely come back to revenge" (Vanguard Dec 3, 2016). In his opinion, the communities being attacked had offended the Fulanis by either killing their cows or in other ways. It is surprising to hear that the number one law officer of the state is

justifying impunity and killing of human lives for the sake of cows. Even if Fulanis' cows have been killed in a community, is it not better for them to approach the relevant authorities for redress? Or are they above the law? Or better still, is it the whole community that partook in the killing of the cows? Every community has bad elements, (including Fulani's) but it is not justifiable to visit the crime of a few criminally minded persons on a whole community. These are the elite who could have helped in proffering solutions to the crisis, but unfortunately, they have been found fanning the embers of war.

The State Response to the Scourge

The Nigerian state in its wisdom may have tried to resolve the crisis, but interrogating the steps so far adopted, this paper is of the opinion that, the state has not really shown the political will to resolving the impasse once and for all. To deny that, the state has refused to act while the feuds last may sound insensitive. The problem is that its efforts are not good enough. Some of the approaches taken by the government are hereby appraised. One of the measures taken by the government has been the deployment of security personnel to the affected areas. The army, the police and other security agencies have indeed tried to live up to their constitutional responsibility of maintaining law and order. This measure has not, however, been able to yield the needed result due to some obvious reasons. One of which is that the security personnel are deployed to the affected areas after much harm has already been caused. Again, the government and security personnel themselves have often times been seen

taking sides with one of the parties to the crises. Whereas, a presidential task force against cow rustling has been inaugurated by the central government, no such thing has been done to protect the farmers and their crops. It took several calls from different quarters for federal government to intervene in the southern Kaduna and southern Taraba attacks on farmers where hundreds of people were killed and their property destroyed. Defending the silence of the president over the Kaduna killings, the special adviser to the president on media and publicity, Mr. Femi Adesina said it was needless for the president to speak on the bloodletting in Kaduna state since the governor assured that he was in full control of the situation. According to him, as the chief security officer of the state, it is the responsibility of the governor, who has pledged to bring the perpetrators to book to deal with the matter (Thisday Dec 27, 2016). The president who is the chief security officer of the nation refused to act when hundreds of his citizens were killed just because it happened in a state and there was a governor in that state. But if the president cannot speak on issues affecting states that threaten national security, what then will he speak on as the nation is made up of 36 states and federal capital territory? But the response was different during the Mambila militia attack on herdsmen in Taraba state. Here, the whole federal might was quickly deployed comprising the minister of interior, Abdulahaman Danbazau, the GOC commanding 3 Div Jos, Brig. Gen Peter Dauke and the inspector general of police, Ibrahim Idris. They personally visited the affected area and condemned the crisis, calling it genocide. They forgot that there was a state governor who was "in charge of

the situation". In reaction to this seeming bias stand, the governor of Taraba, Darius Ishaku lamented thus:

If the type of attention given to this one (the crisis) was given to the first one, maybe this one would not have happened. We are all Nigerians; for goodness sake.....while we would continue to work for peace, it is pertinent to point out that the federal government has to fine-tune its response style. You can't be swift in responding to crisis in one place and go deaf and blind in another. The central powers have to agree if they indeed care only about a fraction of Nigerians or indeed have the whole country at heart (NTA News Jul 1, 2017).

Whereas, the central government feels reluctant to respond when farming communities are attacked, it does not waste time in responding when the herders are attacked; which is what led to the governor's outburst.

The Benue state commissioner of police, Mr Bashir Makanma also flouted the governor's directive that armed Fulanis be sent out of the state. He instead rose in defence of the attackers when he said nobody has the right to banish anyone from any part of the country. Makama explained that the constitution permits everyone to reside anywhere in the country. "The herdsman should have been advised to leave. And if they discover that the people are not receptive to them, they would have left quietly rather than push them out. The state belongs to all Nigerians." He assured that the police would do everything to protect lives and property in the area. Whereas, the commissioner was in a way right on the

freedom of movement of every Nigerian, he forgot the fact that one's freedom of movement does not cover the freedom to carry arms and cause destruction to people's lives and property. Also the governor called for the evacuation of the armed herders, and not all Fulanis. At one point people are made to believe that the armed herders are foreigners, but at another they are said to be Nigerians and have the freedom of movement. But does it cover the freedom to kill and destroy? It is also interesting that the commissioner and his men never made any arrest while the crisis lasted. This stand by the elite confirms the allegation in some quarters that they are the ones fueling the crises. Opinions are rife that some of these elites own herds of cattle and have recruited the youths to help look after. In view of this, they look the other way when 'their men' attack, but come out in their defence when they are attacked.

The second approach is the use of conflict resolution committees. This approach is more of the top-down method of conflict management. According to Albert (1999) top-down method of conflict resolution means "reaching out to the leaders of the warring parties with the hope that if the leaders of the conflict come to agreement for peace, their followers would abide by it." Experience has, however shown that the resolutions reached by the committees are often breached. Sometimes, the committee members are complicit.

For instance, in March, 2014, an International Non-Governmental Organization, Centre for Human Dialogue (HD), had a tough time in an effort to reconcile farmers and herdsman in Plateau

state. The memo from Shehu Buba Umar, chairman of the Fulani community as reported in "The Nation" of March 18, 2014 reads;

we have withdrawn from the dialogue, and this is sequel to the killing of two young herdsmen and shooting of our cattle..... we are under pressure from our community and since we are representing them, we have no option than to oblige..... We have resolved not to continue the dialogue, until our lost cattle are found and if the security agencies refuse to help us recover our cows, we shall do that ourselves. The peace meeting can wait; we are going in search of our cattle.

It is clear from the foregoing that this measure has not yielded any positive result. And its failure is due majorly to the fact that the main issue in contention, which is land and the acclaimed right to its usage by both parties has not been resolved. It is also in view of this that the Benue State governor presented the position of farmers to the Senate Committee on National Security/Intelligence, Defence, Police and Interior on a fact finding mission to Benue State on farmers and herdsmen conflict as captured by Hope [2014;10] thus;

This is not the case of ordinary herdsmen who come around with their wives and children. These ones came with AK-47 to shoot and to kill without provocation. We are not saying that we don't want to live with Fulani's, but those that come with AK-47 are insurgents.

The third attempt made by the government to resolve the crisis has been the resolve by

the National Assembly to make legislations that would regulate the conduct of both the farmers and herdsmen to give peace a chance to reign. Two opposing and contradictory bills were sponsored by two different senators. One sponsored by Senator Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso representing Kano central sought an Act of the National Assembly to establish grazing reserves and routes, and the other sponsored by Senator Barnabas Gemade, representing Benue North East sought an Act for the establishment of ranches where cattle and other livestock of herders can be domesticated. The proponents of the grazing reserve bill were of the view that a proper demarcation of existing grazing reserves and cattle routes would help solve the problem. The opponents of the bill on the other hand argued that 80 per cent of these reserves and routes proposed around 1975-1980 were not gazetted and more than half of it has been taken over for other purposes including establishment of schools, sitting of industries, markets etc. With these two bills in the National Assembly, the battle ground was shifted there. And the law makers had a tough time dealing with the bills. Instead of the senate to argue the bills on their merit and come out with a position that reflects the prevailing circumstances and conforms to international best practices, the bills were referred back to the state Houses of Assembly. Stating the reason for this, Senator Ike Ekweremadu who presided over plenary stated that the senate lacked the powers to deal with matters that are on the concurrent list, except on the exclusive list (Punch Nov 9, 2016). And this position was supported by majority of Senators present. This was however a way of shying away

from its constitutional responsibility. Matters on concurrent list are not to be exclusively dealt with by only states, but to be performed by both states and federal government. With the resolution, however, the affected states swung into action and passed into law bills prohibiting open grazing. Prominent among these states are Ekiti, Benue and Taraba. This has however been greeted by stiff opposition from the Miyati Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN). They carried out public demonstrations to register their grievances over the passage of the anti-grazing bill. At a press briefing in Abuja, the national president of Maiyetti Allah Kautal Hore, a Fulani socio-cultural association Abdullahi Bello and the secretary Alhaji Salleh Alhassan kicked against the law and vowed to mobilize its members to resist its implementation. They described the law as “wicked, obnoxious, repressive and a deliberate attempt to enslave them” (Vanguard June 2, 2017). With the development described above, the end is not yet in sight. The Fulani herders feel wronged by the passage of anti-grazing bill by these states and the matter has already become confrontational. And if the words of El-Rufai are anything to go by, the affected states should be expecting bigger attacks.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of the paper, the following recommendations are hereby made to help solve the herdsmen/farmers crisis:

- a. The federal government should outlaw open grazing and legalize ranching as the standard practice

for animal husbandry in the country. This would not only help in resolving the impasse between farmers and herders over land but will also take care of rustling and other dangers faced by herders in the course of wondering from place to place in search of food and water for their livestock. The Brazilian and Indian experiences should be applied in Nigeria. Brazil has cow population of over 200 million and India with over 300 million cows, and yet they don't witness the kind of crises we face in Nigeria over grazing space. If ranching has worked for Brazil and India, it can also work for Nigeria. The making of prohibition of open grazing law by the federal government will go a long way in removing the confrontation that now exists between the herders and the states that have passed the bill into law. The entire country will be united on it as a national law

- b. The federal government should set up a Ranching Board which will be saddled with the responsibility of establishing standard ranches with good facilities for lease to the herders at subsidized rate.
- c. With ranching in place, tough security measures should be put in place to check the influx of cows from other African countries into Nigeria for the purpose of grazing. In fact, this would be easy to do when open grazing is criminalized.

- d. Proper education and orientation should be given to the herders on the advantages of ranching, which include among others: disease control, availability of water and quality food, elimination or control of cow rustling etc.

Conclusion

Security of lives and property is the primary responsibility of any government. It is also a statement of fact that no meaningful

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- development can take place in the atmosphere of violence. If agriculture should be promoted to diversify the Nigerian monoculture economy, adequate security must be provided for all players in this sector of the economy in particular and for the country as a whole. Nigeria must adopt international best practices in driving her agricultural sector for optimal performance.
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