

## **Implications of Herdsmen Attacks for Community Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

**L**ike the health of any nation, its security cannot be taken for granted. Attacks by herdsmen, without doubt, have become the most potent threat to national security in the last couple of years. What makes the attacks by armed herdsmen very disturbing are, the frequency, the level of destruction and sheer brutality. As at date, there have been wanton killings by herdsmen in Benue, Niger, Taraba, Kaduna and Plateau States that have resulted in massive displacement of people and loss of lives. The attacks are unprecedented when assessed on the basis of the frequency, the casualty, and sheer brutality. The fallout naturally is a huge humanitarian crisis in almost all the states affected. The development in almost all cases is characterized by high casualty rate and massive displacement of communities. The attacks have negative effects on rural community development on affected states. This study examines these effects and further identifies measures of mitigating this national menace. It is qualitative in nature and as such, data obtained from secondary sources are analyzed through qualitative technique. The study recommends the establishment of a regulatory framework in the country that will streamline the activities of herdsmen in the country.

**Keyword:** *Herdsmen, Displacement, Humanitarian crisis & Community development*

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## **Background to the Study**

The Nigerian nation is faced with security threats. One of the emerging and perhaps more disturbing is the activity of the Fulani militants. It has become a national and international concern. In June 2016, an attack occurred in Ossissa community in Ndokwa East local government area, Delta state and three more communities (Ugondo, Turan, Gabo Nenzev) in Logo Local Government Area, Benue State, total killings involving no fewer than 60 persons (Omawumi, 2016). On Monday, January 22, 2018, two reports from Adamawa and Ondo States were published. The killings in Benue and Taraba continue unabated. Clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, Ondo, and Kaduna have resulted in 168 deaths in January 2018 alone (Amnesty International, 2018).

The consequences of these clashes leave much to be desired. Hundreds of people lost their lives last year. The Amnesty reported added that in 2017, 549 deaths were recorded across 14 states, while thousands were displaced. In 2017, clashes between nomadic herdsmen and local farmers resulted in at least 549 deaths and thousands displaced across Enugu, Benue, Taraba, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Cross River, Adamawa, Katsina, Delta and Ekiti states (Amnesty International, 2018).

Farms are destroyed, crops lost and the incentive to plant anew dwindles with each attack. The cases are endless and leave affects community development, an especially agricultural development which is the mainstay of the rural economy. Several reports have shown that the government is still not doing enough to protect communities from these violent clashes. Worse, the killers are getting away with murder. The Fulani Herdsmen have unabatedly continued to cause havoc, mostly in the middle belt area of the country. The inability of the Nigerian Police and Military to contain them may spell greater doom for lives in susceptible areas. The Nigerian populace believes that President Muhammadu Buhari has deliberately shied away from commenting on the crisis, as it is widely known that he comes from the Fulani ethnic group.

There are several economic consequences to the widespread conflict. The position of this paper is that Nigeria might be reaching that stage when the intractable problem of herdsmen/farmer clashes will evolve into mini-wars between herdsmen and the entire community. It becomes necessary therefore to examine the trend and consequences of herdsmen clashes on community development in Nigeria, with an aim to identify strategies that may be useful in addressing this menace.

## **Methodology**

The work is a position paper and qualitative in nature. Data are obtained primarily from secondary sources and analyzed through qualitative technique.

## **Herdsmen attack in Nigeria**

According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index, these Fulani militants are the fourth deadliest militant group in the world with a record killing of 1229 people in 2014. The Fula

people also known as Fulani in the Hausa language, are a mass population widely dispersed and culturally diverse in all of Africa, but most predominate in West Africa. The Fulani's generally speak the Fula language (Fiki and Lee, 2005). A significant number of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats, and sheep across the vast dry grasslands of their environment, keeping isolate from the local farming communities, making them the world's largest pastoral nomadic group. They are massively spread over many countries and are found mainly in West Africa and northern parts of Central Africa, but also in Sudan and Egypt. The main Fulani sub-groups in Nigeria are Fulbe Adamawa, Fulbe Mbororo, Fulbe Sokoto, Fulbe Gombe, and the Fulbe Borgu (Omawumi, 2016).

Iro (1994) paints a picture on the peculiarity of the activities of the herdsmen. He maintained that they move from one place to another in search of pasture. In this process, the herdsmen have reportedly encountered cattle rustlers and made complaints to the relevant authorities who fail to investigate the issue, hence their purported reason for carrying arms about. During their journey, they frequently trespass farmlands owned by locals in their host communities, destroying crops and valuables. Attempts by farmers to prevent them from causing havoc are met with stiff and violent resistance. Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured and killed, while others are evicted from their homes (Ingawa, Ega, and Erhabor, 1999). Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking these opportunities to steal, rape, raze houses and kill innocent members of the communities they pass through (Iro, 1994).

In a reported presented by Omawumi (2016), below are some of the attacks by Fulani Herdsmen compiled from various news headlines between 2012 and 2016:

- a. September 30, 2012: A Fulani herdsman had been accused of murdering one Benjamin Chegue on his farm, the Director of Personnel Management in the Isoko North Local Government Council in Delta State.
- b. April 5th, 2014: Assailants opened fire on community leaders and residents that were meeting in Galadima village. At least 200 people were killed and an unknown number were injured in the attack. Sources attributed the attack to Fulani assailants.
- c. February 18th, 2016: Five persons were killed by Fulani herdsmen at Okokolo village in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State.
- d. March 5th, 2016: About 500 persons were killed by the rampaging herdsmen following a siege on Agatu local government area of Benue state. These communities include; Aila, Akwu, Adagbo, Okokolo, Ugboju, Odugbeho, Ogbaulu, Egba and Obagaji.
- e. April 12th, 2016: Fulani herdsmen attacked two villages in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba state on and killed 15 people.

- f. April 19th, 2016: Twenty-five local government areas in Delta State grounded activities on the Benin-Asaba Expressway. They reported that the herdsmen allegedly killed over 23 persons. Interestingly, the police recovered 20 AK-47 rifles, 70 Dane guns, 30 double-barrel guns and over 1,000 live ammunition, mostly from Fulani herdsmen during this period.
- g. April 21st, 2016: Farmers in Lagun, Iyana Offa, Offa, Atagba, Lapata and their surrounding communities in Lagelu Local Council Area of Ibadan, Oyo State, alleged that a group of Fulani armed men attacked their communities at night, injured a guard and carted away valuables.
- h. April 25th, 2016: Fulani herdsmen attack seven villages in Nimbo in Uzo- Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State. About 40 persons were reportedly killed.
- i. June 16th, 2016: A 45-year-old renowned farmer was shot by gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen in Ossissa community in Ndokwa east local government area of Delta state.
- j. June 20th, 2016: At Least 59 Deaths have been recorded following recent attacks on Benue communities such as Ugondo, Turan, Gabo Nenzev – in the Logo Local Government Area by Suspected Herdsmen

In a study conducted by Bello (2013), some of the major causes of herdsmen-farmers conflicts are enumerated as follows:

1. Destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigational facilities, and infrastructure) by the herdsmen themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers.
2. Burning of rangelands, fadama and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important direct reasons cited by the herdsmen.
3. Increasing rate of cattle theft which, is often accompanied by violence.
4. Antagonistic perceptions and beliefs among farmers and herdsmen could compound conflict situation, especially due to failing institutions and fierce competition for resources

He maintained strongly that the conflicts have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity and food crisis particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized, with reverberating repercussions nationwide.

### **Implications for Community Development in Nigeria**

Community development is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. According to Anam (2016), community wellbeing (economic, social, environmental and cultural) often evolves from this type of collective action being taken at a grassroots level. Community development

seeks to improve quality of life. Effective community development results in mutual benefit and shared responsibility among community members. Such development recognizes:

- i. The connection between social, cultural, environmental and economic matters
- ii. The diversity of interests within a community
- iii. Its relationship to building capacity

Community development helps to build community capacity in order to address issues and take advantage of opportunities, find common ground and balance competing interests. Agriculture is the mainstay of the Nigerian rural economy. The sector contributes largely to the existence and well-being of the rural populace. Development in the rural sector cannot be mentioned without mention of the functionality of the agricultural sector. Incessant herdsmen attacks on farmlands have a direct consequence on agricultural development and food security.

Bello (2013) disclosed that conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have existed since the beginnings of agriculture and increased or decreased in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental and other factors. He explained further, "increases in the herd sizes, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compelled the pastoralists to seek for more pastures beyond their limited range". Climate change is identified as one of the greatest threat by putting great pressures on the land and thus provoking conflicts between them. However, improvements in human health and population have enhanced a much greater pressure on land. Since the 1980s therefore, there has been a marked expansion of cultivation of the fadama (riverine and valley-bottom) areas. This means that both the farmers and pastoralists have engaged in fierce struggles for access to such valuable lands which, more often than not, result in increased conflicts and violence (Bello, 2013).

The effects of pastoralist and farmers conflict on community development are enormous. One major concern is the destruction of farmlands in affected areas. This obviously affects farm yield and production capacity. There losses of lives and material resources. This further affects household income and saving capacity of the rural farmer. During the conflict, families tend to migrate and a few others are displaced. Social peace and cohesion are distorted. All outcomes have negative effects on agricultural production in rural areas and to a large extend community development.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Improvement**

The current herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria have raised fundamental national questions for the survival of the Nigerian State. The failure of the state to manage and resolve such conflicts has put a question mark on the suitability or relevance of the federal structure to the Nigerian reality. Scholars have noted that the Nigerian government is paying lip service to the problem of herdsmen attack. The advocacy for "cattle colony" seems unrealistic given its various challenges. To move forward, the paper suggests the following,

1. First, the Nigerian government must make policies that are designed to enhance the Fulani herdsmen by ensuring that they secure rights to land use in order to reduce insecurity and mitigate the spate of conflicts. This will, among other things, bring about peaceful coexistence between the Fulani herdsmen and host communities. This also enhances the security of the cattle, to access grazing space or resources without pouncing on farmers' crops (Bello, 2013).
2. Institutional authorities at the Federal and State level must investigate these attacks and, where these investigations indicate criminal responsibility, prosecute those responsible and bring them to justice.
3. The law on grazing reserve in Nigeria should be amended and improved upon to accommodate emerging challenges. The government, at the Federal, State ND Local level must make herdsmen keep agreeing routes and farmers avoid farming across them with stern government policy and strict compliance.
4. Traditional strategies may be combined with the emerging ones to address the problem of conflict in Nigeria. This relates to how communities create local structures and networks for the purposes of engagement, participation, inclusiveness, mutual partnership and transformation of the environment through equity in resource utilization (Bello, 2013).

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