

THIRD CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH EAST REGION

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Abstract

The history of our nation Nigeria has been one characterized by severe and often violent crisis since its birth which has continued to threaten its existence as one indivisible nation. The state has been experiencing myriads of complex socio-political, ethno-religious, economic crisis emanating from inequality, corruption, oil disputes, insurgency and many others from tribal differences. Nigeria as a nation has had to contend with Boko Haram in the north, the Niger Delta Avengers in the south, now faced with one of the deadliest conflicts that has continued unabated and dangerously politicized. This conflict is mainly between the farmers and nomadic cow herders of Fulani extract. This paper attempts to examine the antecedents of these conflicts across the south eastern states with a view to identifying the underlying causes of this crisis and its general impact on the south east region of Nigeria. The paper adopted a qualitative research approach, drawing data from both secondary and primary sources. Study revealed that there have been persistent attacks on communities of the south east with increased criminal activities of kidnapping, rapes, wanton destruction of farmlands and loss of lives. Therefore, the paper recommends among others the reformation of existing ranches and establishment of new ones in the northern parts to curb cattle roaming; address environmental challenges of desertification that force herders southward, strengthen law enforcement and security strategies that will ensure equitable justice; restructuring of the already community vigilantes to modern community police for immediate response to crisis.

Keywords: Third Conflict, Nigeria, Implications, South East

Introduction

The frequent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria have resulted in the destruction of several lives and farmlands, and become a major threat to national security under the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. According to the international crisis group (2018)², the conflict between herders and farmers was six times deadlier than that of Boko Haram with a total death of 1,949 doubled the figure of the preceding year. In line with 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 2014³. Also in 2019, several of these crisis have been witnessed in the expected region of the south east Nigeria⁴. However, due to Boko Haram insurgency in the north as well environmental challenges of desertification which have great impact on arable lands herdsmen have been pushed down south in search of pasture and fresh water. This southward movement has pitted them against the farming communities degenerating into deadly clashes with increased death tolls and many other criminal activities recorded periodically. The farmer-herder conflict has become Nigeria's gravest security challenge, now claiming more lives than Boko Haram insurgency. It has displaced thousands and sharpened ethnic, regional and ad religious polarization, if not checked can lead to another civil war.

Studies from researchers suggest that in the past years, agricultural farmers and the pastoralist groups had a cordial and stable relationship that enabled the people to work side by side for decades (Olaniyan et al.,

2015; Olayoku, 2014; Okeke, 2014). This interdependent relationship among them is evident in the fact that both groups depend on each other for survival, and this has formed the benchmark for exchange and which brought about even development (Shettima & Tar, 2008). To further buttress the above assertion, the ICG report (2017) revealed that historically, relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. They lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship; the herders' cattle would fertilise the farmers' land in exchange for grazing rights. But tensions have grown over the past decade, with increasingly violent clashes arising from herders' constant encroachments in the farmlands and destruction of farms crops by their cattle. While the Fulani herdsmen maintained that they are free to move around the country because of freedom of movement, and that pastoralism forms part of the culture handed over to them by their fathers; the farmers see these movements into their farmlands as invasion and infringement on their communal and personal properties inherited from their parents.

This raises the question;

What happened? What went wrong?

We had no history of violence with the Fulani's....

We never had clashes with them.

We have coexisted together since the civil war

What then changed?

The answers can be located in the views of several authors and researches that have critically analysed the issues relating to farmers –herders crisis in the south region.

The Fulani herdsmen are predominantly Muslims who are traditionally cattle herders by occupation. The quest for a conducive environment to raise their herds keeps them moving from one geographical location to another, especially around fertile grass lands to feed their cattle and also market their cow products. The herders find the non diseased areas of south and specifically areas with pasture and water availability and no tsetse fly infestation (Iro, 1991); very suitable for grazing. The Fulani's are known to have originated from the Arabian Peninsula and Migrated into the West Africa to as much as 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa making the Fulani's the most culturally diffused spreading cultural traits from one region to another⁵. These Pastoralists having been confined to the semi-arid zones in search of grazing fields, share common religion with the farming communities where they find themselves more especially in the Hausa and Kanuri regions. Their dedication and commitment to Islam metamorphosed into the development of the military machinery used to launch the Jihad in Sokoto in 1864 and within 30 years, the Hausa and other peripheral kingdoms fell for Jihad and were conquered by the Fulbe (Fulani). The spread of Islamic hegemony by the end of Jihad was important factor in encouraging pastoral settlement. As the Jihad pushed further towards the ocean, some non-hostile environments around Ilorin (Nupes) were established for the herders to settle. The Fulbe pastoralists move early into the semi-arid regions of the sparsely populated regions.

By 16th and 19th centuries the Fulani's had established themselves at Macina (upstream of the Niger Bend) and Hausa lands, notably, Adamawa (in the northern Cameroon). Many of the Fulani's continued to maintain pastoral lives, but; some of them particularly those found in Hausa land gave up their nomadic life styles, settled in existing urban communities and were converted to Islam. This however made it difficult to differentiate them from the Muslim-Hausas of Nigeria (Idowu, 2017). They are found mostly in places like Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal and Niger. Their indigenous language is known as Fula. They constitute the fourth-largest ethnic group in Nigeria with an estimated population of over seven million (Burton, 2016; Oli & Nwankwo, 2018). Herders migrating into the savannah and rain forests of the central and southern states are moving into regions where high population growth over the last four decades has heightened pressure on farmland, increasing the frequency of disputes over crop damage, water pollution and cattle theft. In the absence of mutually accepted mediation mechanisms, these disagreements increasingly turned violent. Therefore, the herders have consistently maintained their stance:

"Our herd is our life because to every nomad, life is worthless without his cattle. What do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment of grazing fields and routes by farmers is a call to war! (RIN, 2009)

The spread of conflict into southern states is aggravating already fragile relations among the country's major regional, ethnic and religious groups. The south's majority Christian communities resent the influx of predominantly Muslim herders, portrayed in some narratives as an "Islamisation force". Herders are mostly Fulani, lending an ethnic dimension to strife. Insofar as the Fulani spread across many West and Central African countries, any major confrontation between them and other Nigerian groups could have regional repercussions, drawing in fighters from neighbouring countries.⁶

McGregor (2014) reveals the complexities of violent clashes between cattle breeders and sedentary agriculturalists across different parts of the country. The alleged involvement of camel pastoralists from the Republic of Niger in some conflicts in the north-western and central regions of Nigeria also highlights the need to investigate the multidimensional causes and the politicization of a problem that spills over to neighbouring countries (Blench, 2010; Krause, 2011; Abass, 2012; Audu, 2013; McGregor, 2014). Blench (2010) for instance, analyses the relationship between herdsmen and farmers as an economic exchange of dairy products for grain, access to local markets, and the provision of manure on arable land while the cattle consume crop residues. However, he claims that religious and cultural factors, among others, are key to peaceful relationships that became less cordial as the Fulani migrated further south. This has led to several agitations in the past, notably by the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), which advocates for the social, political, economic, and cultural integration of Fulani in communities where they settle (Awogbade, 1987). Idowu(2017) also observed that the violent disposition of the Fulani herdsmen have given rise to anti-Fulani sentiment in some parts of the country which has also continued to degenerate into hatred and by extension to other Hausas across the country. Others have pointed to possible Fulanist expansionist agenda of taking over territories of their residence with possible government collusion in this ploy thereby escalating sectarian tensions. (Nwosu, 2017)

Statement of the Problem

The attacks by the Fulani herdsmen have in the recent times taken a new dimension with wide spread of illegal arms and weapons across the country. Consequent upon this, 'the farmers in the communities have resorted to self defence though the use of local vigilante groups' (Abass, 2012 & Magregor, 2014). More worrisome is the fact that data on the incidences of these violent attacks in the south east region has been scantily reported. This assertion was corroborated by Agbudu & Onuba (2015), "Crisis associated with pastoral migration and grazing conflict between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers has been reported more in the Benue-Plateau area than the eastern region of Nigeria",

However, following the recent increase in conflict, the relationship between these two groups (herdmens/farmers) has deteriorated, (Chiagozie, 2014) with frequent news of tensions and attacks. Therefore, regardless of the root causes of the conflicts, the problem now is with increasing conflict around the south east region, and government's actions seemingly tolerable of the attacks, hence the need to articulate the incidences of these attacks and their implications on the region that have existed in the past with minimal group tensions.

Theoretical Framework;

Conflict Theory

An understanding the concept of conflict, means an understanding of the theoretical ideas of Karl Marx, a German Sociologist whose work on conflict has remained critical to the analysis of conflict. Several definitions have been given as to the meaning of conflict. Conflict is serious disagreement and argument about something important. If two people or groups are in conflict, they have had a serious disagreement or argument and have not yet reached agreement. Conflict may be defined as a struggle between people with opposing interests, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. This happens where there is

miscommunication between people with regards to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals or values; when escalated can lead to non productive results. Drawing from Marx, conflict is inevitable, among groups/teams and in every human interaction; while results of such conflicts are not predetermined⁷. Marx opines that due to the never-ending competition over society's valuable and scarce resources, conflict becomes an inevitable outcome. The implication of this is that those in possession of wealth and resources will continue to protect and maximize these resources, while those without will do whatever it takes to obtain them. This dynamic means that the society will be in constant struggle between the 'haves' and 'have not'.

One critical factor in the view of Oluwapelumi (2019) is the presence of two or more actors struggling to secure a thing adjudged to be valuable of which when gained by any actor, amount to loss to the other actor. Mark and Syder (1971) posits that elements of conflict is the existence of result of scarcity, where the wants of actors cannot be fully satisfied and where the quest for such resources result in conflict behaviour. To this end, parties involved may employ physical force resulting in injuries and damages as well as possible elimination of opponent in a bid to secure the resources at stake. Again Conflict and consensus are two sides of a coin, conflict is not ultimately destructive; disagreements can result in agreements leading to stability. A poorly handled conflict can escalate and become violent or destructive.

Dahrendorf (1958: 170- 183) provided four contextual platform of conflicts, within groups which can applied to explain herders-farmers tension in Nigeria:

1. Every imperatively coordinated group has people with positive and negative dominant roles leading to two quasi groups with opposing latent interests.
2. The different quasi-groups organize themselves into parties, trade unions, factions with Manifest interests.
3. These groups will be in constant conflict over the preservation or change in the existing Status quo
4. These conflicts would lead to changes in the structure of their social relations, through Changes in the dominant relations.

In another way, conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals. Interdependence is another feature that captures the notion that people in a conflict are dependent upon each other.⁸Land resources for example land, crops, grass/pasture and fresh are all scarce resources in Nigeria needed by both parties for their sustenance. It is arguable that conflict would occur as both parties strive with another to pursue these resources, or one group tries to trespass or forcefully take over ownership of that already acquired by another. Tensions will rise when unguarded cattle tramples over farmlands leading to destruction of crops or farmers resisting passage; or by cattle rustling.

Frustration-Aggression-Displacement Theory

According to Wikipedia free encyclopaedia, the theory of Aggression proposed by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Seas (1939), state that aggression is the result of blocking, or frustrating a person's efforts to attain a goal. This theory is applied to not only human beings but also animals. When first formulated, the hypothesis stated that frustration always precedes aggression as aggression is the sure consequences of frustration. Years later, Miller and Sears re-formulated the hypothesis to suggest that while frustration creates a need to respond, some form of aggression is the possible outcome. Therefore, he posits, "While aggression prompts a behaviour that may or may not result in aggression, any aggressive behaviour is the result of frustration, making frustration a necessary condition for aggression to be released. Furthermore, frustration- aggression theory explains that those who are frustrated may have difficulty controlling their anger. This theory explains why certain situations cause some people to become violent or aggressive. When aggression cannot be remedied, it often escalates leading to violence.

Applying this theory to explain herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria, will be viewed from both groups' perspectives. The farmers whose livelihood depends on their crops see their land as an inheritance, which ownership cannot be transferred forcefully; neither will trespassing be allowed at will. Therefore herders constant encroachment and destruction of crops by cattle creates an atmosphere of tension with attendant

frustration leading to resistance. On the other hand, Fulani-herders see nomadic life style as a culture passed down to them by their fathers, and as co citizens are entitled to equal of freedom of movement , therefore any resistance to such passage would mean violation of such rights leading to frustration and possible aggression. These conflicts when properly managed can lead to violence with its attendant dangerous outcomes for both groups.

Review of Violent Clashes across Nigeria

The root causes of the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria lie in climate-induced degradation of pastoral land and Boko Haram incidences in the far north, thereby forcing herders down south⁹. The escalation of this conflict has continued on the increase as a result of lack of available grazing settlements due to farm lands and the groups' traditional nomadic lifestyle, forcing passages through farms across the various states with severe damages to the crops. The rapid growth of ethnic militias among the fulanis in Adamawa, bearing illegally acquired weapons and the failure of government to prosecute and punish offenders have combined to give impetus to the destructive activities of these herdsmen.

Another reason according to the International Crisis group is the introduction of anti-grazing laws in Nov, 2017 which the herders in Benue and Taraba protested against as being inimical to their long dated pastoral living. Also the migration of herders into Moddibo Adama in Yola, Adamawa State sparked off clashes with the farmers in the state. The north eastern Adama has witnessed a number of violent clashes between the Fulani herders and farmers of Bachama ethnic group. The tensions were heightened after the November 20, 2017 introduction of the anti-grazing laws, when the youth militias of the Bachama attacked three Fulani herdsmen, killing at least 55 people, including 48 children. The incident was followed by a reprisal attack suspected herdsmen in five villages killing over 100 people. Though there were attempts by the government to stop further attacks but killings continued on a smaller scale. There has been a long existing herders/farmers tension in Taraba State according to ICS report (2019). The conflict experienced in Adamawa led to the deterioration of the farmers/herders relations in the neighbouring Taraba state to ban open grazing by the state government. But between January 4 – 17, 2017, violent clashes erupted between the farmers and herders, killing at least 124 people with many properties and live stocks destroyed and stolen. Scores have been killed since the incidents.

Benue and Plateau States have had their share of violent clashes over these periods. Reports by Akerjir (2018), revealed aspects of these conflicts. The Benue State Governor, Ortom signed the Benue State Law banning open grazing in May 2017 which took effect on November 1, 2017. The law permits livestock to only graze on ranches, people who rear livestock to buy land and establish ranches, prohibits movement of animals within the state by road, rail, not even through farmlands. The laws spelt out punishments for offenders, which includes 5 years jail term or one million naira bail. In other words it outlaws pastoralization. The reason for this law was to eliminate conflicts that may arise through trespass and destruction of the farmlands by herders and their cattle. The TIV, Idoma and Igede farmers, who constitute over 90% of the Benue population strongly supported this, but the Fulani's and others herders associations e.g. MACBAN and Miyetti Allah opposed the law for lack of consultations and does not represent the members' interest. Secondly, the law did not give people time to purchase land to purchase land for the establishment ranches, thirdly the law is viewed as being detrimental to their long existing culture of pastoral life style. Also denies them their constitutional right to free movement and residence in any part of the country.

In spite of the effort of the state according to the report to avert crisis by putting appropriate measures, tensions between herders and Tiv farmers degenerated into deadly violence. According to the ICG report (2017), the extent of the attacks has had serious impact on economic human lives with severe political and security implications. From September to June 2018, farmer-herder conflicts have led at least 176,000 dead in Benue state, with so many displaced. Some have fled to other parts of the country, while some are left in IDP camps in school and church premises in very appalling conditions. Noteworthy is the fact since January 2016, not fewer than 10 communities in Agatu Benue State have witnessed violent attacks. The impact on local economies is very significant, with insecurities which have disrupted agricultural activities of a state known for its massive contribution to food production in Nigeria.

The South-East Experience

Historically, the Fulani settlers and their families were permitted in many host communities due to the cordial relationship between the sedentary farmers and herders (Osaqhae, Suberu & Genyi, 2004). Notwithstanding, herders-farmers conflict is not new especially in the northern parts of Nigeria that are largely dominated by Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups, with the group competing with other minorities over political and religious based sentiments. But this cannot be said of the south eastern Nigeria, a region adjudged to have been living peaceably with their migrant neighbours. But following the recent issues in the North, Boko Haram rampage, desertification which mounted pressure on the herders to migrate to other regions of the south east to settle permanently in an attempt to find pasture for their herds.

However, regardless of the remote causes of these conflicts especially with the current deterioration of relationships between farmers and herders, caused by open grazing with its severe impact on crops and arable lands; the problem now is that conflicts resurfaced in another dimension, widely increasing by day; the farmer now seeks to protect their farmlands, and herdsmen adopt violent mechanisms in safe guarding the cattle during grazing (Genyi, 2004). This has led to the spread of small and dangerous arms, possession of illegal weapons during grazing activities by these herdsmen or pastoralists in guise for self defence against attacks by farmers or host communities. Reports on the increasing farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria by Akerjir (2018), on cattle rustling and criminal impostors as Fulani herdsmen revealed that there have been several cases of cattle theft in a nearby village to Nimbo community called Aku where over 300 cows were stolen. This allegation of cattle rustling was the major reason the Ukpabi Nimbo community came under attack by the Fulani herdsmen. Cattle rustling have always taken the shape of organized crime with a huge criminal tendency (Okoli & Okpaleke; 2014, Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

The following were the account of attacks on Nimbo community in Enugu State (Akerjir, 2018); Findings revealed that a major event occurred in 2009, where a Fulani herdsmen shot a farmer in his farm because his was caught by a trap on the farmers trap. In 2012, two young men were shot dead because they confronted the Fulani herdsmen with words to leave their farm; another incident occurred in 2014 about a woman who was accosted by a herder demanding for sex, she played along and after the herdsmen have undressed, she grabbed his male organ and crushed the scrotum with stone. His body was discovered by other herdsmen the next day. This led to a reprisal with one dead and many others injured. However, the April 25, 2016 was the deadliest with a death toll of 10 people and several others injured, with claim by the Fulani herdsmen that the youths of Ukpabi nimbo community killed an Alhaji (a cattle owner)¹⁸. In similar report recorded by Mamah, Ndujihe, Nwokpara and Ozor (2016), about 40 persons were killed by armed Fulani herdsmen at Nimbo Uzouwani Uwani Local Government Area, Enugu State, barely 24 hours after stories filtered that no fewer than 500 heavily armed Fulani herdsmen sneaked into their community in preparation for this attack.

In a related report, another attack was carried out by herdsmen in Ndiagu, Ahaukwu in Akagbe-Ukwu community, in Nkanu-West local government Area of Enugu State, where six (6) months pregnant Mrs Ijeoma Agbo had her stomach ripped open by over 50 rampaging herdsmen, who invaded the community and also killed a seminarian by name Lazarus Nwafor¹⁰.

Similarly in Uzo-uwani local government area, Enugu State, a 40 year old Dr Nnamdi Ogueche, a senior lecturer at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and administrative secretary of the Uzo-uwani Local Government Area was killed by suspected Fulani herdsmen. Shortly before his death, Ogueche was said to have presided over a peace meeting between his kinsmen of Adada town in Uzouwani and the herdsmen¹¹. Sunday Trust of August 18, 2019 on ¹² raised concerns over the killing of a catholic priest of the St James Greater Parish, Ugbawka in Nkanu East local government Area of Enugu State along Ihe-Agbudu road in Awgu by suspected herdsmen on Thursday 1st August, 2019. In the same vein, a taxi driver Mr Kenneth Igwe who ran into the operation was also dragged into the bush by the gunmen and Killed¹³. According to same report, in less than four days after the killing, suspected armed herdsmen abducted a traditional ruler, Igwe Sunday Orji and his wife around the Ogbakwu Umuogbe end of the Enugu-Umuahia expressway, a

small distance away from where Fr Offu was killed. The Kidnappers demanded the sum of ₦50million as ransom and he was released after an undisclosed amount was paid.

Another Parish Priest of St Patrick's Catholic Church Nومه, Rev Fr. Ilo was also attacked on Wednesday July 17, 2019 while return from Enugu. Ilo escaped with bullet wounds while his car was riddled with bullets. Another Daily Trust report had it that Rev Fr. Clement Ugwu was kidnapped 9pm on March 1, 2013 and subsequently shot dead in front of the gate of St. Marks Catholic Church Obinofia Ndiuno in Ezeagu local government Area. His decomposed body was later discovered 20km from the place where he was abducted.

Pastor Eunuch Adeboye confirmed the abduction of five (5) ministers of the redeemed church of God who hailed from the south east along Ijebu Ode axis by suspected herdsmen on their way to the church yearly ministers conference, August 1, 2019 ¹⁴. In March 2014, suspected Fulani herdsmen allegedly murdered 85 years old Tamgbo Ogueji, a member of the traditional rulers' cabinet at Eke community in Udi local government area of Enugu state¹⁵.

The town of Nkpologu community in Uzouwani local government area of Enugu state was thrown into mourning in January, 2015 following the news of the death of a young woman on New Year 's Eve during a robbery attack on a commuter bus allegedly carried out by suspected herdsmen. In summary, out of the 482 communities in Enugu state, no one can point out any community that has not had its fair share of the barbaric activities of these herdsmen ranging from robbery, killing, rape, maiming and kidnapping which have inflicted sorrows and pains on farmers in host communities, living them perpetually in fear in their own land. In Igbo

“asi na o bia b'onye abiagbune ya, ka o na na, mkpu mkpu afukwa na ya”

The invasion of farmlands in Ebem and Akanu communities nearly erupted in bloodbath save for the wisdom displayed by the community leaders whose timely report save the situation, thereby preventing the youths of the community from reprisals.

In Abia State, Ndi Okereke Abam in Ovukwu autonomous community in Arochukwu local government area was invaded on Friday November 6, 2016 by suspected herdsmen¹⁷. No fewer than six persons sustained bullet and machete wounds and were rushed to the hospital. This was as a result of a misunderstanding between the farmers whose bags of rice were feasted on by their cattle. A plea by the farmers for the cattle rearers to take the cattle away from the farm resulted in attacks with machetes.

Also in Abia State community of Uzuakoli in Bende local government Area, Ebem and Akanu communities in ohafia and Umuchieze in Umunneochi, witnessed cases of deadly clashes between rural farmers and herders. In similar circumstance, another crisis loomed in Nvosi community in Isiala ngwa south council in Abia State between the natives and the herders over their refusal to allow the cattle rearers graze their cattle in their farms lands. Members of the community have decried the nefarious activities especially that of destruction of farmlands and crops valued at millions of naira.

In Anambra State, the news of clashes with farmers is not new neither is the killing of farmers by suspected herdsmen and destruction of farmlands unpopular. The incidences of these attacks have been witnessed especially in Anambra east and west local governments who are predominantly farmers. During the first week in April 2019, the people of Anam community of Anambra West Local Government Area saw an invasion into the farm settlements into their farmland (Agweopia, Iyiogbu and Iyinkolo camps) by suspected herdsmen leaving at least 6/six people, while 30 others with various degrees of injuries. Some of the victims were beheaded, several houses burnt and many women raped.

Several parts of the state in Awka North and Ogbaru local governments known to be the food baskets of the state are under attacks by these herdsmen; it is either a woman is raped to death while in her farm land or one farmer is attacked and killed. Residents of Igala and Anam communities in Anambra state have cried out over the frequent rape of women by Fulani herdsmen in the area. This has led to organized protest to express their displeasure and grievance over the persistent devious activities of these herdsmen in the area²⁰.

In Imo state, there have been reports of incessant unabated killings allegedly perpetrated by herdsmen in some parts of the state. According to vanguard report of March 21, 2018 ²¹, over the attack by suspected herdsmen in Okigwe local government area of the state; They claimed that herders have taken large swaths of their land and at the same engage them in violent attacks. Some communities could not harvest their crops for fear of attacks. Not less than 3000 herders were said to have invaded the Umuorji Uratta community in owerri north council, Imo state, killing a Benue native and leaving others wounded. Similarly report by vanguard (2019) revealed an attack on two Hausa natives by suspected herdsmen in attempt to stop them from grazing on a cultivated land along Uratta, Owerri North Local Government Area.

An eye witness reported;

“you cannot find grass on the land these herdsmen were entering, only Crops”. “People who are supposed to be our brothers are killing us just because We asked not to enter into land that has crops”.

The Ebonyi state governor, Chief David has accused herdsmen especially those resident in Afikpo North, Onicha and Izzi local government areas of the state of assaulting and harassing women sexually. He lamented that these herdsmen have been carrying out some devious activities in the area especially the defilement of their land by forcing women into sex. Uba (2018) revealed that residents of ufu-eraku village in Ugwulangwu community in Ohaozara local government in Ebonyi state had lived in fear of possible attacks by herdsmen who seized a large portion of their farmlands and demanded ‘taxes’ from villagers, leading to residents vacating their homes for fear of strikes by herdsmen²².

Four people have also been reportedly killed in a separate attack on Onunwapu community in Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi state after the ban on open grazing by Governor David Umahi of Ebonyi state. Protesters took to the streets of the state capital on Ebonyi over the rape of a 70 year old woman from Isu community in Onicha local government area until she went into a coma. The old widow was preparing her evening meal and was brutally raped until she went into coma with broken hands and legs.

There was other numerous accounts of the violent attacks by suspected herdsmen in the south east, which may not be exhausted in this paper, but may be included in future researches probably of empirical nature.

Drivers of these Conflicts

1. **Politically motivated:** Politics plays a significant role with regards to farmers/herders tension in Nigeria. Some local leaders often encourage intergroup conflicts for political gain. The government at various levels has shown complete lack of political will needed to proffer solutions to the ongoing crisis between farmers and herders. The government has been perceived by some ethnic groups especially the opposition parties as being sympathetic to the activities of the herdsmen being a Fulani man.
2. **Government inactions:** As a follow up to the previous point, the federal government perceived inactions over the consistent attacks by these herdsmen have emboldened the herders for more attacks. The federally controlled Nigeria Police force and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSDC) are rarely deployed to the affected areas, even when they do; response to early distress calls is often late. According to ICG report (2017), farmers report that agencies’ failures to respond to distress calls and punish offenders have left the farmers and herders with the option of self-defence; resorting to handling matters on their own, further aggravating the conflicts.
3. **Anti-Fulani sentiments:** There has been an existing prejudice against the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, now worsened by the recent activities of the herdsmen. Idowu(2017) pointed out that the violent disposition of the Fulani cattle rearers have given rise to some anti-Fulani sentiment in some parts of the country especially the south, aggravated by the tales of gruesome attacks across the country, thereby breeding hatred. This has continued to drive tensions at the slightest contact.

4. **Wide spread of illegal arms:** One of the major causes for the continued intensity of these conflicts is the increasing spread of small and sophisticated weapons in Nigeria. The fact that many vigilante groups in the host communities (including farmers and herders) have access to small and sophisticated weapon have continued to encourage deadly attacks. Minor disagreements or provocations often degenerate into violent clashes, leading to destruction of lives and properties.
5. **Ethno-religious drivers of conflict:** In the south east, the Biafra Separatist group has described the attacks as part of a Northern plot to overthrow and overpower the people of the South-East and forcefully take over their land. Some have even blamed the President for deliberately failing to curb the Fulani herders menace, accusing him of protecting his pastoral Fulani background²³. Among the Christians, herder attacks are widely seen as a subtle form of Jihad (IGC Report, 2017). Also according to the statement by Dr Sam Uche, Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria (March, 2016), these attacks is an attempt by Fulani's to Islamize Nigeria. The foregoing ethno religious drivers have helped to ignite extreme intolerance leading to tensions at the slightest provocations.
6. **Culture-language barrier**
Movement of pastoralists into new terrain, where language, religion, culture and landholding patterns are unfamiliar.

Implications for the South-East Region

1. Demographic issues -

Rapid population growth tends to overuse the country's natural resources. This is particularly the case where the majority of people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. With rapidly rising population, agricultural holdings become smaller and un-remunerative to cultivate. There is no possibility of increasing farm production through the use of new land (extensive cultivation). Consequently, many households continue to live in poverty. In fact, rapid population growth leads to the overuse of land, thereby endangering the welfare of future generations.

Again most importantly, there may be future conflicts as to original owners of the land, taking the case of the Australian Aboriginal people gaining recognition for their rights on land held under lease in the Northern Territory of Australia became a major battleground, spearheaded by the influx of the white foreigners of the British descent who annihilated almost the entire population.

2. Region of constant red alert -

A once peaceful region has now been put on red alert, constantly experiencing threats and attacks from herdsmen. Just recently the south east youths have given herdsmen ultimatum to vacate FUTO, the premises of the federal university of technology, Owerri, Imo state by Fulani herdsmen who have taken over the school. The then president General; Chief Goodluck Ibem said the activities of the herdsmen who now use the campus for grazing and habitation with their goats and cattle were causing tension on the premises. They have been asked to leave or face being arrested and prosecuted. We know what that means to the security of the place.

3. Economic implications -

Mercy Corps Report revealed that the incessant attacks have had drastic effect on food security which have caused a loss of \$14 billion in three years. This global humanitarian organization, funded by the British Department for International Development (BFID) carried out a research between 2013 and 2016 on the causes and effects of the perennial clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. The findings showed that the persistent conflict is destroying the country's economic development to a large extent. The gruesome attacks on Enugu State (Nimbo) and other eastern states especially Akwa North and Ogbaru local governments known to be the food baskets of the state have had severe economic implications to include: reduction in crop yield, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties, Rapes and deaths.; loss of products in storage and destruction of public and private buildings. All these combine to inflict hardship, reduction in agricultural supplies with its attendant hike in cost of available food.

4. Violence on vulnerable groups -

Some vulnerable groups like women, aged and children have been helpless in the face of these attacks. Many women have been raped and husbands killed, leaving them with families to cater for. Some Aged women even raped in the process while the elder men watch in misery as their families go through this trauma.

5. Environmental Damages;

a. Contamination of the Stream by Herds:

Contamination of the stream is resented by south easterners who see the stream as one place to be kept pure with different rules guiding usage. Therefore incessant defecation by herds and passage destroys the sanctity of the stream and becomes another source of the herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. The stream is the source of domestic water supply for most rural farming communities. Contamination of the stream leads to the outbreak of cholera, and prevents use for certain domestic purposes e.g., washing of leaves etc

b. Indiscriminate Defecation on Roads:

The major roads used by rural communities, though as earth roads are well cared for. As these nomadic herdsmen take their cattle through these roads, the cattle drop their dung indiscriminately on the road. This angers the host community and when the nomads' attention is brought to it, they show no remorse. This again is considered a disregard for the host community traditional authority.

c. Scarcity of land

Scarcity of land due to rapid population growth leaves few land space for agricultural use. Therefore, demand for land for the sole purpose of grazing in the south east opens doors for conflict. No community will want to give out their ancestral land for private use in guise of grazing fields.

Moreover, the pressure of rapid growth of population forces people to obtain more food for themselves and their livestock. As a result, they over-cultivate the semi-arid areas. This leads to desertification over the long run when land stops yielding anything.

6. Increase in Criminal activities -

The south east region has witnessed several nefarious activities involving the herdsmen in the recent times. There have been cases of killings of innocent people with particular reference to the killing of Rev Fathers, kidnapping along high ways, armed robbery etc. While the attack by the Boko Haram set have lingered for years due to the failure of successive governments, another wave of attacks are now being carried out by armed herdsmen of Fulani origin across the country and make peace elusive especially in the southern and middle belt region, yet government is making plans to establish settlements in these states. A case of one living side by side with a perceived enemy.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The events of past and current depicts we are on the verge to face another round of full blown crisis. The recent warning by the umbrella body of the cattle rearers (Miyetti Allah) to the governors to allocate lands for grazing in the states has opened another media war that could degenerate into sectarian crisis. The governors of the south-east, south-south and middle Belt have vowed not to donate lands in their regions for herdsmen settlements despite threats by the group on November 3, 2019. Taraba State stand on 'No Ruga' settlement remains unchanged; Benue State Governor has dared the herdsmen to bring in their cattle to Benue and see the consequences of flouting the state's anti open grazing law. The south east governors have warned that no cattle should be brought in on foot. Consequently given the various media wars and high state of insecurity across the nation especially with the massive loss of lives and properties as a result of Fulani herdsmen and Farmers conflict and its attendant negative implication there is therefore the need to stop, Nigeria's spiralling deadly conflicts in order to avert its likely disastrous end.

The government must therefore come up with policies that are geared towards bringing to an end the Fulani herdsmen/farmers crisis that lies like "A TIME BOMB" ready to explode, when it does, we may be landing into yet another destructive civil war. Therefore, having explored other contributions of other writers on the subject; paper recommends the following;

Grazing reserves have remained a policy with the Federal Livestock Department until today and their value has become more evident since mobile pastoralists increasingly need reserved wet season-grazing in order

to avoid crop damage. Therefore, government should embark on a reorientation policy of creating awareness and developing a positive mindset of acceptance of the National grazing project, which may be a way to eliminate open grazing, geared towards minimising contact and encroachments on farms lands. Resuscitate existing Ranches across the country while establishing grazing in consented areas. They may adopt the Sustainable Ranching Model (SRM) practiced in places like Brazil Mexico, Colombia but not yet in any Africa country will attract investors like milk companies, leather companies etc, and thereby creating employment for youths especially in south east. Government security agencies should collaborate with the local vigilantes groups with a view to providing them with adequate political and material support, including weapons where necessary. And finally, provide reporting centres where cases are reported and compiled for hearing.

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