

Editorial

Addressing the problem of herdsman-farmers' conflict in Nigeria

Resource-based conflict is one of the severe security challenges threatening Nigeria's corporate existence. In more than 100 years of existence of Nigeria as a country, it has experienced the resurgence of conflict between farmers and herdsman in some parts of the country.

The grazing system in Nigeria coupled with the climatic change in some parts of the country makes Nigeria vulnerable to conflict between farmers and herdsman. For example, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) gives every Nigerian the legal right to reside and conduct business activities in any part of the country. On the other hand, some parts of Northern Nigeria where most of the herdsman come from experience serious climatic changes that make grazing nearly impossible during dry season. This situation compels herders to migrate to other parts of the country, notably the South and middle belt in search of greener pasture. Where this happens, farmers and herdsman with contrasting interest cohabit with a possibility for disagreement.

While herders make efforts to ensure that their herds graze and drink water, farmers equally protect their farmland against herdsman invasion. Herdsman also protect their herds against rustling. This sometimes creates a sense of distrust between both groups even before anything ever happens. Both groups also have legitimate reasons to protect their sources of income; hence, they do so with commitment. Normally, disagreement breaks up between these two groups when they are unable to manage their differences effectively. Studies (e.g., Abbass, 2009; Adebayo & Olaniyi, 2008; Abba & Usman, 2008; Olabode & Ajibade, 2010) have attributed farmer-herdsman conflict to: competition over resource use, particularly land; population growth of herds and human; production system; southward movement of pastoralists into the humid and sub humid zones; incomparable goals of the disputants; and behaviour that undermine the goals of each other.

In recent times, the conflict between farmers and herdsman has caused irreparable damages to the country. For example, the Institute for Economics and Peace (2015) in its annual global terrorism index states that herdsman now pose a serious threat to stability, and there has been an ongoing conflict over access and control of land between the semi-nomadic Fulani herdsman and farmers in North-Eastern Nigeria. There have been reports of a link between Boko Haram and Fulani militants, particularly with regards to smuggling and organized crime (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). In the 2016 report, the Institute for Economics and Peace describes herdsman as Fulani militants, groups of semi-nomadic and ethnic-based pastoralists who engage in conflict with farming communities. Also, the Benue State Governor during the signing of the anti-open grazing law revealed that between 2013 and 2016 alone, Fulani herders killed more than 1,878 men, women, and children in cold blood, with 750 people critically injured, 200 missing, and over 99,427 households destroyed (*Punch* Editorial, 2017).

The Federal government of Nigeria has suggested different solutions to bring an end to the conflict between farmers and herdsman. Examples of some of the suggested solutions include: Cattle Colony, Fulani Radio, and RUGA settlement, but suggested

solutions have been rejected by many states governments. There is also public disapproval of Federal Government's suggested solutions so far. Some States such as Benue, Ekiti, and Taraba have enacted anti-open grazing laws, but the Federal government does not seem to support such initiative. This makes the implementation of such laws difficult, but state governments do not have control over security personnel. While the Federal Government is still thinking of ways of addressing the conflict, it has continued to occur in some parts of the country. Considering the seeming rejection of federal government's suggested solutions by the Nigerian masses, *Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (IJIS)* launched a survey to determine the views of Nigerians on how best to address the lingering problem.

The online survey opened on May 11, 2019 and closed on August 15, 2019. A total of 543 persons responded to the survey. We found that 78% of Nigerians who took part in the study reported that the Federal Government of Nigeria has not done enough to end the conflict in some parts of the country. Also, 81% of the respondents said that the Federal Government has the ability to end the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. Additionally, we found that majority (71%) of the respondents said that open grazing should be illegalized. The implication is that the respondents viewed the stoppage of open grazing through an act of parliament as an important step towards curbing the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria.

Based on the popular views of Nigerians, our opinion at *IJIS* is that the Federal Government of Nigeria must summon courage to support a legislation that criminalizes open grazing. The conflict between farmers and herdsmen has lingered for too long and Government must not continue to troubleshoot. It is time to stop open grazing and promote ranching.

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