

THE RESURGENCE OF FULANI HERDERS AND LOCAL FARMERS CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE-BELT, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Hardly a week passes without a media report of clashes between the nomadic Fulani herdsmen and local farmers which result in the wanton killing of innocent individuals especially women and children in most of the states – Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa etc of middle belt region. In the mainstream discourse, the destruction of crops by cattle, blockage of stock routes and water points have been cited, among other things, as the root causes of the conflicts. However, this article attempts to unravel, using evidence from primary and secondary sources, which build upon the state fragility model, the recent causes of the resurgence in Fulani pastoralists and local farmers conflict from 2010 to 2015. The findings show stark underdevelopment of institutions of conflict management and resolution, high culture of impunity, Politico-religious expediency, foreign incursion of herdsmen from neighbouring countries and uneducated nomadic herdsmen, propelled inevitably the recent resurgence, of the conflict and exacerbate insecurity in the middle belt region. To prevent these clashes, the Nigerian government, should as a matter of urgency, bring perpetrators of the conflict to justice and enact a law for herdsmen to develop ranches for their cattle in their respective states instead of resorting to the establishment of grazing routes and reserves for Fulanis' in all the states which will further exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Fulani herdsmen, local farmers, middle belt region, state fragility, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Middle-Belt of Nigeria which cuts across all the minorities in the North has become the epicenter of violent conflicts between the natives (local farmers) and nomadic Fulani herdsmen. Cattle Herdsmen operate within an expansive geography oscillating between their major base within the Savannah in the rainy season in the north of Nigeria (middle belt) and the wetter south during the dry season. In search of natural pasture, water and for marketing of their animal products... (Shettima and Tar, 2008). To be more specific, the annual herding cycle of the Fulani according to Iro (1994) and Adisa (2012) begins with southward movement of the herd and along rivers and stream valleys from October to December—marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season. January to February is the harmattan season that is characterized by longer grazing hours, herd splitting, and more frequent visits to stable water sources. These activities thus increase southward movement of the herds.

The months of March and April are usually the toughest for the herdsman and his cattle, as it is the hottest period in the grazing calendar. Indeed, he now herds his cattle only in the evenings and nights. May and June signify the end of dry season and vegetation begins to appear. This also marks the beginning of northward movement of cattle herds. From this period up till September, which is the peak of rainy season, though characterized by cattle-breeding, more milk production and shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production. Farmer-herdsmen conflict therefore becomes prevalent during this period because of the destruction of crops by the herds in most of the states of the middle belt region. These cattle destroy their farms and as the local farmers attempt to secure their crops, conflict erupts.

However, this farmers-herdsmen conflict has assumed a very dangerous dimension. Sorrows, tears, loss of lives and properties have become a part of everyday life in the region. Though the Fulani herdsmen suffer some casualties, but the bulk of the suffering has been on the middle-belt region. For instance, the *vanguard editorial* of Wednesday July 29th, 2015 titled “Halt the middle Belt killings Now!” quite clearly and distinctly captured the massive killings of the Middle-Beltans. According to the Newspaper, between May and July this year, no fewer than 140 persons were reported killed when suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked some communities in Benue State. About 70 persons lost their lives during similar attacks in Taraba State, while 30 persons were reportedly killed in another attack in Plateau State. Perhaps the most horrendous of these killings was the reported massacre of over 500 Berom people in Plateau state in 2010. There have also been claims that about 400 lives were lost at Barkin Ladi and Riyom of Plateau State in 2015 (*Vanguard*, Wednesday, July 29, 2015).

Nevertheless, in the 1970’s, 1980’s and before the aggressive introduction of Sharia law by most of the political elites of some northern states in the late 90s, these were pockets of conflicts between the pastoralists and farmers. But stakeholders (political, traditional and religious elites) rise to the challenges and make peace between both parties. But since 2000’s, there has been an escalation of the conflict which has not only claimed hundreds of lives, but has also led to destruction of thousands of properties worthy millions of naira.

In this light, this paper attempts to find out the causes of the recent resurgence of the conflict in order to bring succor to the daily surge of human loss of lives in the middle–belt region. The first and second sections discuss the introduction and conceptual clarification. The third section examines the state fragility model. The fourth and fifth sections explain overview of the conflict between Fulani herders and local farmers in the middle-belt and responses by Northern elders and Nigerian government. The sixth section unravels the causes of the recent resurgence in farmers-herdsmen conflict in the middle-belt region. The seventh section concludes.

Conceptualizing Conflict, Fulani and Middle-Belt, Nigeria

The world ‘conflict’ has been defined by many scholars based on their respective academic backgrounds. For this reason, many scholars from diverse

disciplines (Francis, 2006; Katz and Khan, 1978; McEnery, 1988; Otite and Albert, 2001; March and Simon 1993 and Obaje 2008) have defined conflict with varying inclinations, meanings and interpretations. But Phil-Eze (2009:393) insists that any definitional enterprise must take into cognizance one common denominator in conflict that is, “as the expression of disagreement over something important to two individuals, groups, states or nations when they have different views, different goals, different needs and different values and they fight over limited resources to address them”.

In a related analysis, Tearfund (2003) argues that conflict can be surface, latent, or open in nature. It is surface when it is shallow or has no root, may be due to misunderstanding of goals, which can be addressed by improved communication and understanding of each others 'needs and opinions'. It is latent when it is below the surface but needs to be brought out into the open before it can be effectively addressed. It is open when it is very visible and has deep roots, sometimes over several generations. Both the causes and the effects need to be addressed.

Similarly, conflict is a universal phenomenon and a part of human existence which can be positive, negative and hidden. It is positive when the contending individuals, groups, states or nations follow recognized avenues of conflicts resolution with the parties agreeing to obey the outcome. It is negative when the parties fail to follow avenues of conflicts resolution with the consequences of degenerating into violent conflict. It is hidden when the cause of the conflict has not been brought to the surface for conflict analysis and resolution.

All the above analysis captured conflict from different dimensions. This shows that conflict takes different forms and graduates from mere disagreement to violent conflicts of varying degrees. However, it is clear that violence is an inevitable social ill, but an examination of conflict will help proffer possible strategies/methods that may help put an end to the conflict.

In this paper, we predicate our analysis on the definition of Igwe (2002, p.840), who conceives conflict as "a universal and permanent attribute of nature, life and society, necessary and unavoidable when, in terms of dialectics they serve to advance the positive evolution of phenomena, and unnecessary and avoidable when irresoluble and their consequences are negative for society and man". The definitions above practically demonstrate, inter alia, that conflicts are largely the expression of opposing interests. Thus, as a noun, conflict means a state of open, prolonged fighting: belligerency, confrontation, hostility, strife, struggle, war, warfare, etc. A state of disagreement and disharmony: clash, contention, difference, dissonance, faction, friction, schism, strife, variance, etc.

The Fulani is an ethnic group of the West African Savannah. Some of them live in towns, villages and cities and engage in farming and trading. A large proportion of them are cattle herders. Through the series of events called the Fulani jihads, the Fulani conquered a greater part of the area that later became Northern Nigeria between 1804 and 1810 (Horton, 1972; Adeleye, 1971 and Last 1967). But states like Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and Kogi were not conquered by the Fulani Jihadists. However, the conquest of northern Nigeria in the first decade of the twentieth century by the British brought an end to the

Fulani expansion to the Central and Western Nigeria. This fixing of boundaries between the various ethnic groups as well as between clans and villages by the British brought an end to the practice whereby groups which were powerful enough could forcibly encroach upon the land of neighbouring groups (Udo, 1980, 24).

On the other hand, there are two broad definitions of the middle belt. The first definition defines middle-belt from the geographical perspective, as a region that consists of all political units that fall within central Nigeria- Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Nassarawa, Kogi and Kwara States. The second defines middle-belt from those areas that have the highest concentration of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria in terms of language, culture, religious beliefs, population, and ownership and territorial claims. No wonder, various governmental bodies and scholars such as (international idea 2000; Harnischfeger, 2004; Osaghae, 1998; Asake, 2013) have variously defined Middle-Belt as an aggregate, which are of course in majority than the Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria. Defining the Middle Belt, they stated thus:

In those days, the Middle Belt was perceived to be mainly the North Central that we know today, which constitutes six states. But, by and large, political exigencies compelled the Middle Belt to grow beyond geographical area of North Central. It has now both a geography and socio-cultural expression of the people and it captures all those people that are found within the areas of geographical landmarks that have similar cultural affinity with one another, which are mainly ethnic nationalities different from Hausa-Fulani Core North. These people would be found in Southern Kebbi, Southern Kaduna in the North-West zones; Southern, Borno, Southern Yobe and the entire Adamawa, Taraba, South Gombe and South Bauchi in the North-East, geo-political zone. You have all the states of Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Kogi, Niger and the FCT coming together as the Middle-Belt today.

Theorizing State Fragility in Nigeria

What accounts for the current resurgence in the farmers-herders conflict in the middle belt region of Nigeria? One is inclined to locate the motivation on state “fragility or weaknesses”.

According to Cillier and Sisk (2013), a state is fragile when it is unable to provide basic human security and/or create the public good and conditions needed for a minimum of human development. In the same vein, state fragility is used to describe the array of countries characterized by such institutional incapacity and deficiencies (Aghedo, 2014:5). In fact, state fragility defines those sovereign states that cannot politically decide for themselves, economically held hostage by few dominant class coalition through the instrument of the state, and most importantly, unable to exercise effective jurisdiction over its territory. Overall, weakness often leads to a loss of legitimacy, making a state vulnerable to protest, criminal attacks, insurgency, and sometimes war (Herbst, 2004).

Specifically, fragile states are characterized by one or all of the following:

- ★ Weak, ineffective, and unstable political institutions and bad governance, conducive to loss of state autonomy; informalization; privatization of state, personal and exclusionary rule; neo-patrimonialism; and prebendal politics
- ★ Inability to exercise effective jurisdiction over its territory, leading to the recent concept of ungoverned territories.
- ★ Legitimacy crisis, occasioned by problematic national cohesion, contested citizenship, violent contestation for state power, perennial challenges to the validity and viability of the state, and massive loss and exit of citizens through internal displacement, refugee flows, separatist agitation, civil war and the likes.
- ★ Unstable and divided population, suffering from a torn social fabric, minimum social control and pervasive strife that encourage exit from rather than loyalty to the state.
- ★ Underdeveloped institutions of conflict management and resolution, including credible judicial structures, which pave the way for recourse to conflict-ridden, violent, non-systemic and extra-constitutional ways in which to articulate grievances and seek redress.
- ★ Pervasive corruption, poverty, and low levels of economic growth and development, leading to lack of fiscal capacity to discharge basic functions of statehood, including, most importantly, obligations to citizens such as protection from diseases like AIDs and guarantees of overall human security (Osaghae, 2007: 692).

The fragile state theory in all its ramifications suits the analysis of the current resurgence of herders-farmers conflict because the state is fragile and unable to enforce its legitimate policies. States, according to Susan Woodward, are instruments; they “are defined by their means, not their ends. That their defining instruments in coercion—that states are instruments of enforcement of whatever goals and policies a society (or its rulers) choose”. (Woodward, 2004:2). Nigerian government’s inability to enforce its institutions of check-and-balance has led to unprecedented conflict which today has posed a genuine threat not only to the middle belt region but also to Nigerians and the international system.

Overview of the conflict between Fulani herders and local farmers in the middle-belt, Nigeria

Fulani pastoralists’ and farmers’ clashes in the middle belt started in the late 1970’s based on two significant reasons. First, the introduction of cheap veterinary drugs that allows the pastoralist to sustain the health of the cattle. Second, to look for grazing areas to be close to the southern Nigeria which is their trading area. The above views was attested to by Fricke (1979) who noted that in the late 1970’s showed the southward movement of Fulani herders based on slaughterhouse records and trade records. In the same vein, two subsequent studies by Nigerian government (one in 1984 and another in 1992) supported Fricke’s research that the Fulanis were

moving south in large numbers (RIM 1984 and RIM 1992). The above view was as well corroborated by Blench (2003) who noted that the pastoralists farmers conflict began in earnest in the 20th century with two major changes: the introduction of affordable veterinary drugs that allowed pastoralists to increase the health of their cattle, and thereby herd size and land requirements for grazing; and increased farming due to increasing population pressure.

However, this farmers-herdsmen conflict has continued to grow from strength to strength in the 1980's, 1990's till this 2000s. The past Nigerian administrations due to politics and lack of political will have failed to address the root of this issue. This has subsequently led to loss of hundreds of lives and displacement of thousands in that part of the region from 1980's through early 1990's which was resolved. Works by scholar such as (Roger Blench, 1994; Olarewaju Ifatimehin and Marietu Tenuche, 2009 and Isah Mohammed Abbas, 2010) have dwelt extensively on the above mentioned issues.

Unfortunately, since 2010, the conflict increased in magnitude and intensity in these flashpoint states of the middle belt-Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, among others. Hundreds of deaths are recorded on weekly basis in these states as a result of the conflict between farmers and Fulani pastoralists. These middle-belt states bear the entire loss of lives, destruction of their houses and farm land. In April 2013, Ajibola Amzat in the *Guardian* Newspaper compared the menace of herdsmen in most of the Nigerian communities to that of humanitarian crisis in Darfur region of Sudan, which according to historians claimed over 200,000 lives and rendered over a million homeless. The U.S. Department of States officially captured the scenario in 2013 report thus:

Incidents of communal violence between ethnic groups in the Middle Belt, also divided along Christian-Muslim lines, resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, the displacement of thousands of persons, and widespread property destruction. Ethno-religious violence, often triggered by disputes between farmers and herders, resulted in numerous deaths and significant displacement during the year. The largest number of examples of such conflict occurred in Jos and the farmland surrounding the city. In July as many as 150 persons, including a federal senator and representative of Plateau State, died after a series of Fulani attacks on settlements in south of Jos and at a mass funeral ceremony to bury victims of a previous attack. Land disputes, ethnic differences, settler-indigene tensions, and religious affiliation all contributed to these attacks. Determining motives behind any single attack remained difficult. "Silent killings" occurred throughout the year, in which individuals disappeared and later were found dead. Reprisal attacks at night in which assailants targeted and attacked individual homes or communities occurred frequently. For example, on April 30, unknown assailants believed to be Fulani herdsmen killed as many

as 13 people and burned 30 houses in six villages around Riyom, a community south of Jos. Authorities did not convict any perpetrators of such violence during the year or those involved in attacks by Muslim Fulani herders in 2010 that left an estimated 700 persons dead (US Department report, 2013:8).

Actually, between January and July 2015, the death toll in the middle belt had been put at 761 (Osagie, 2015:17), but following the evidence before us in this research work, the death toll from February 2015 to August is put at 1908 and over 78,000 rendered homeless since January 2015. Unfortunately none of them have been prosecuted and convicted since 2010. Table 1 shows selected Fulani herdsmen massacre in the middle-belt region in 2015 and the 300 civilians killed in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State on February 26, 2016 that sparked off wide range of protest in Nigeria.

Table 1: Selected Media Headlines of Muslim-Fulani Herdsmen Massacre in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria 2015 and the Recent Agatu Killings in 2016

S/N	State	Incidents	Casualties	Year Period
1.	Plateau	Murder of Christians including a pastor	70 Christians killed	May 17, 2015
2.	Plateau	Herdsmen set fire to the church of Christ Nations (COCIN) located in Foron Town, Barkin Local Government Area	27 Christians Killed	May 2, 2015
3.	Benue	Muslim Fulani Cattle herders massacre Christians	82 Christians killed	May 24, 2015
4.	Benue	Fulani herdsmen invaded Agatu and Logo Local Government Area set ablaze burnt reds of houses and property	Over 300 villagers dead	February 13, 2015.
5.	Nasarawa	Hausa Fulani Uoosu village in Nasarawa	19 people killed	April 27 2015
6.	Taraba	Fulani herdsmen invaded karim lamido and Takun Local Government Areas of Taraba State	Over 100 people including a pastor and 3 soldiers were killed	May 5, 2015
7.	Plateau	Fulani herdsmen invaded the two villages at Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State	30 civilians killed	May 5 , 2015
8.	Benue	Fulani herdsmen invaded Egba Community in Benue Sate	94 civilians killed and valuable property and farmland destroyed	March 15, 2015
9.	Benue	Fulani herdsmen massacred Christian on Sunday in Ukura,	100 massacred	May 26, 2015

		Gafa, Per and Tse-Gusa in Ukembira Twarev ward L.G.A.		
10.	Benue	Fulani herdsmen invaded Ukura, Gafa, per and Tsegusa in logo Local Government Area of Benue State	Over 100 civilians killed	May 30, 2015
11.		Invasion of Egba village by Hausa Fulani killing women and children by State police spokesmen Austin Ezeani	Over 45 villagers killed	March 15, 2015
12.	Nasarawa	Native cult clashes with Fulani herdsmen	761 killed	August 15, 2015
13.	Benue	Fulani herdsmen attacked Egba Village in Agatu L.G.A.	80 persons and several others including women and children killed	May 16 2015
14.	Benue	Fulani herdsmen massacre in Ukura, Gafa, Per and Tse Gusa in Ukembiraghia Twarev ward in Logo Local Government Area	100 Massacred in these village	May 26, 2015
15.	Benue	Fulani Herdsmen attacked Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State	300 persons killed	February 26, 2016

Sources: Extracted by the Authors from various newspaper reports including Eyoboka,2015:5; Duru, 2015:20; Duru, 2016:5.

Responses by Northern and Nigerian Government

One of the recent proposals to address this conflict between Fulani pastoralist and local farmers was presented in the Nigerian Senate on July 3, 2012 by Senator Mrs. Zaynab Kure (Niger South). Senator Kure and other backers of the bill, legislators from Northern Nigeria, are seeking that power be granted to a federal commission to acquire lands from all the state governments in Nigeria and the minister of the federal capital territory to establish grazing routes and reserves for Fulani herders. Subject to the directives of the commission, Fulani herdsmen would have a right to such lands, despite the wishes of the owners and despite the wishes of the government of any state (Okeke, 2014:69-70). Senators from southern Nigeria and some from central Nigeria opposed the bill on the grounds that it negated the Land Use Act and the principle of federalism. They finally argued that the matter should be left to State Assemblies to decide (Odebode, Alechenu, Soriwei, 2012). Since then, nobody has heard anything of the bill. It is quite clear that opposition from southern and central Nigeria will impede the passage of the bill.

On the part of the state governments-Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau etc, the responses have been slow and systematic. Apart from these states working with their respective state security agencies, they have also sought a peace meeting with the

Association of Fulanis Herdsmen- the Miyett Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBA) of their respective states. Former Governor Gabriel Suswam of Benue State has gone to the extent of brining the Sultan of Sokoto to Benue State who spoke to the Fulani on the matter. The above view was attested to by Mac-leva (2014), who noted that “the state government (Benue) was working in concert with the security agencies to tackle the problem. Several meetings were held between the government (Benue) and his Nasarawa State counterpart and with members of the MACBA in the state, adding that Suswam had also invited the Sultan of Sokoto who visited and spoke with the Fulanis on the matter. The Governor (Benue State) was compelled to write to Mr. President and he responded by sending the DIG Operations and the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 82nd Division Enugu who visited Benue State to coordinate reinvigorated strategy”.

In another response by Nigerian government, the former President Jonathan’s administration on March 25, 2014 through the National Economic Council (NEC) meeting chaired by Vice President Namadi Sambo, resolved that the incessant clashes between nomadic Fulani cattle herders and local famers can only be settled amicably through the establishment of grazing reserves across the states of Nigeria. The NEC noted that these grazing reserves would help to check the smuggling of arms and ammunition across Nigeria borders by foreigners who come into the country disguised as cattle grazers (Adesina, 2014:2). Adesina went further to say that government has put in place short term measure including the creation of new functional grazing services, deployment of satellite imagery, remote sensing and GIS maps to track movement of animals across the country (Adesina, 2014:2).

Also, Nigerian government has, on several occasions responded to Fulani Pastoralists and local farmers conflict using military measures. The government has used soldiers e.g. the Joint Task Force (JTF) for the restoration of peace, especially in the North central and Southern Nigeria. Also, the Nigerian government has used the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). According to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Solomon Arase on September 29, 2015, the crises in Nigeria has claimed 435 men of NPF in six months- that is, from April to September 2015 (Adeyi, 2015). However, despite these NPF casualties, the Association of Middle Belt Ethnic Nationality (ASOMBEN) on September 2015 insisted that Nigerian government should go beyond sending NPF and JTF. According to ASOMBEN, “we have observed with dismay that the attacks on our communities by suspected armed Fulani men especially in Taraba, Plateau, Benue, Southern Kaduna and Nasarawa States with the federal government doing nothing to stop them, except sent in the NPF and JTF after each attack” (Binniyat, 2015:51).

The current Buhari’s administration seems to buy to the idea of establishment of grazing reserves and route nationwide to put an end to these hostilities. The above fact was attested to by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Sonny Echono, on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. According to him:

President Muhammadu Buhari has directed the ministry to consider the recommendations of studies commissioned by the

Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) and the Northern Governors Forum (NGF) on the same subject with a view to developing pragmatic strategic action plan for the development of grazing reserves and stock routes nationwide (Egba, 2015:51).

Understanding the current resurgence of farmers-herdsmen conflict in the Middle-Belt Region

Several explanations have been constructed for the extensive farmer-herdsmen conflict in the middle-belt region. Specific reasons abound, but they are imbedded in the underdeveloped institutions of conflict management and resolution. The Nigerian security agencies, the judiciary and the legislators are not strongly developed to tackle all these challenges. As such, it makes the state weak to discharge her basic functions of statehood, including, most importantly, obligations to citizen such as protection of life and property and guarantee of overall human security. That explains why the middle-belt region has recently turned to a killing spree for the nomadic Fulani herdsmen. For instance, in Agatu and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State in two years, “378 persons have lost their lives, 15,760 displaced while 1,317 homes had been destroyed. Also, 1,480 livestock have been lost, with 142 motorcycles and 17 vehicles destroyed during the incessant attacks on various Agatu communities, including Okokolo, Egba, Obagaji, Usha, Ogwule Kaduna” (Adepegba, 2015).

In addition, there is high culture of impunity which pervades the Nigeria society. This impunity has escalated the conflict and exacerbates insecurity in the middle belt region. In fact, it is unbelievable that despite the thousands of people killed and thousands of displaced residents camped at six locations in Makurdi, the capital of Benue State, one of the affected states, yet no arrest have been made and nobody has been convicted to serve as a deterrent. This made the people of most of these affected states to think that the government in power has abdicated her responsibility and solicited for global attention and intervention. For instance, Human Rights Watch analyzed the pattern of violence that has engulfed two states in central Nigeria since 2010. The report documented how the lack of accountability for communal violence and mass murder led to preventable cycles of violence and reprisal killings in those states (Human Right Watch, 2014:2). The above view was corroborated by *Daily Sun* Editorial of October 15, 2015 which observed that “the failure to prosecute those responsible for such killings is prima facie evidence in the international community that the victims can no longer count on Nigeria’s judicial system to protect them, and would therefore need concerted international protection. In other words, the paper noted, the mindless killings qualify to attract international intervention, including investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC)” (*Daily Sun*, October 15, 2015:17).

Closely related to the above, is the unchecked foreign incursion of herders across Nigeria borders. Though, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Trans-Humans paragraph 2, 1986, does not forbid cross border movement of pastoralists because it is considered temporal migration and it is

seasonal; that it contributes to expansion of sub-regional productivity and capacity and no documentation is needed, yet that does not mean that Nigerian internal security will not do their work of subjecting those herders to search. Empirical evidence available to this paper suggested that all the herders' attack in most of the affected communities point to the use of sophisticated weapons ostensibly smuggled through the borders. In fact, Nigeria borders are extensive and porous fuelling influx of different weapons into the country. For instance, in the northern region, the country has 1,690 kilometers border with Cameroon in the east; 1,497 kilometers with Benin Republic in the West; and 87 kilometers with Chad in the northwest (Onuoha, 2013). Also, Nigeria's former Minister of Interior, Abba Moro, disclosed recently that the country has more than 1499 illegal and 84 legal entry routes. These porous borders are poorly policed and they enable the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs).

Aside from herders from neighbouring countries exacerbating insecurity in the middle belt region, there is an obvious empirical fact of a gradual Hausa-Fulani expansion towards the middle belt region especially in those Christian populated states such as Benue, Taraba, Plateau etc. In other words, the conflict wears the tag of a farmers-herders conflict, whereas it has a jihadist connotation. If not, how can one describe a situation where these Hausa Fulani herders will set hundreds of houses ablaze, kill several people and settle there when the storm is over, claiming to be indigenes. No wonder, Okeke (2014:71) noted that "the conflict between herders and farmers is co-extensive with the conflicts over indigeneship in the state, especially between the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani, on the one hand, and the predominantly Christian Berom in the area around the state capital, Jos. The later claim ownership of the land".

Finally, this nomadic Hausa-Fulani herders have no formal education except some form of quaranic lessons. These make them easily susceptible to extreme indoctrination. As such, they become an easy tool to manipulation by conflict entrepreneurs who capitalize on their deprivations. The above fact was attested to by a prominent northern leader- Alhaji Rabi'u Musa Kwakwanso. According to him:

If these Fulani's can be educated, things won't be the same again. I am one of them, I am a Fulani and I hope you know that my parents settled over the years. My parents sent me to school and my children are going to school, I don't think if I get some cattle, I will go into forest to rear them. That is education for you (Ajayi, 2015:11).

That explains why the farmers-herders conflict continues to increase in intensity and magnitude and defy every possible solution(s).

Conclusion

This article has assessed the sudden resurgence of the Fulani-herders-local farmers' conflict in the middle belt region predicated on the weak security institution

that has not been able to protect human lives and property, and above all, safeguard her territorial integrity. This has given leverage to heavily armed Fulani herdsmen who normally attack at midnight at these middle belt villages/towns and leaves before the day breaks. Suppression of information on this conflict by the security agencies and government officials without adequate remedial measures makes the matter worst.

Therefore, to resolve this Fulani herders-local farmers' conflict, urgent steps need to be taken. First, Nigerian government should enact a law setting up ranches in the states of the pastoralists and to stop the itinerant herdsmen from moving from one state to another. Second, adequate security presence should always be at those volatile states of the middle-belt to protect lives and property. Also those responsible for mass killings, including security forces should be promptly investigated, arrested and prosecuted. Finally, Fulani herders should be subjected compulsorily to some form of orientation on the respect for human lives and the danger of jihad in this twenty first century. If these suggested measures are not taken seriously, the Fulani herders'-local farmers' conflict will continue to escalate, with its negative implications on food security and unity of Nigeria.

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