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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Farmers-Herders Conflicts in Nigeria: Rethinking the Influence of Foreign Herders in North Central Region

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Abstract

The Farmers-herders conflict can be said to be as old as Nigeria's history, but has increased significant in the past decades. The migration of Fulani herders from neighbouring countries due to the porosity of the Nigeria's borders has escalated the conflict, leading to security problems in the country. This paper explores the influence of foreign herders on the farmers-herders conflicts in North Central of Nigeria. The methodology used in this study is the qualitative approach; using the semi-structured interviews in collecting primary data, and the use of journals, articles, online publications and unpublished works related to the study as sources for secondary data. The study found an exacerbation of conflict occasioned by the influx of foreign herders and recommends that improved immigration regulations to ensure that all migrant herders entering the nation are properly registered and identified by their home country in line with the ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol. It recommends further that a task force should be established to work with the previously settled Fulani herders to detect and remove migrant herders who cross borders illegally, to assist in the internal management of migrant herders.

Keywords: Conflicts, Farmers-herders, Foreign herders, Migration, Porous border

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The peaceful coexistence between the farmers and herders has long decayed due to the increase in migration and unrestricted movement of foreign herdsmen and their herds in some states in Nigeria. In other words, the practices on the mobility of herders within Nigeria are rather unstructured in the sense that transhumance movement are not constrained along the current artificial boundaries (Adiita, 2018). As a result, violent conflicts have become predominant among farmers and herders spreading across the country.

The word ‘migration’ is always referring to the movement of people or animals from one distance to another at the heart of its definitions. A sociological study of migration involves the geographic movement of people beyond a defined boundary in order to establish a new permanent or semi-permanent habitation with diverse reasons either in search for kinship, social networks, economic development or security. Herders, without a doubt are not sedentary but nomadic in nature in term of their labour; this implies that herders do migrate and/or sojourn from one place to another in search of natural survival, economic substance, and long-term livelihood, depending on the origin-to-destination equation in relation to national boundaries, the migration might be trans-local or transnational (Obiwuru, 2020). The Nigeria's migration of herders is characterized by intermittent influx of herders, particularly from the Niger-Chad corridor along the country's northern borderlines in search for water and pastures for their cattle due to the competition for scarce, population and deteriorating natural resources. Also, the continued unrest and insecurity in customary grazing grounds in the north, migratory herders are being forced further south in search of land to graze their cattle (Lenshie, et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the rate at which herders have been migrating into the Nigerian territory in recent years in search of alternative sites to pasture is rather alarming and this phenomenon has taken advantage of the country's porous borders over the years, which create a national security issues including conflicts between farmers and herders across the country (Adzande, 2019; Obiwuru, 2020). Transhumance on the other hand, is a common practice in West and Central Africa, and it is the Sahel's principal economic activity which has increase over the years with the current issuance of ECOWAS certificates and also the transhumance protocol of 1998, which gives free movement of human and goods across the sub-region and promote regional livestock seasonal movements within ECOWAS member states, as well as to build local and regional cooperation and conflict management procedures.

Farmers and herders have traditionally worked together to supplement each other's incomes. They traded goods, and when disputes arise, they were resolved through established institutions and existing dispute resolution methods. Nevertheless, a variety of circumstances have resulted in tensions between the two groups causing cross-border smuggling and criminal activities in the West African borders. Some herding communities have some traditions that honour looting and conflict which implies that herders must have means of defence for the animals under their care, and so arm themselves, resulting in the escalation of farmers-herders conflicts in the sub-region within the last few decades (Kratli, et al., 2020).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of foreign herders on the farmers-herders conflicts in north central of Nigeria with a focus on Benue state, using primary and secondary data to draw viable conclusions.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Farmers and herders used to have a close relationship based on the local trade of dairy products for grain, cereal residues, and fertilization of soil with animal dung, as well as the sale of animals on a regular basis. This has long deteriorated due to the increase of agricultural cultivation of pasturelands, climate – change induced unfavourable weather conditions such as desertification and droughts, porosity of borders and the increase in the migration of foreign herders amongst other complex ethno-religious factors which has resulted to violent conflicts Nigeria. This conflict has hindered the ability of farmers to engage in farming activities, hence exacerbating food insecurity crisis and has also increased forced migration, banditry and insecurity in the country (Adiita, 2018; Amusan, et al., 2017).

Nigeria has an estimated 20 million cattle, 41 million sheep, 73 million goats, and 280,000 camels in its massive livestock herd. Thus, Nigeria is home to about 38% of all livestock in West Africa with a trading route from Burkina Faso, the Niger, Chad and the Central African Republic into Nigeria (Leonhardt 2017). The Nigeria's migrancy of herders is characterized by intermittent influxes of herders, particularly from the Niger-Chad corridor along the country's northern borderlines. Nevertheless, the rate at which foreign herders have been migrating into the Nigerian territory in recent years in search of alternative route for pasture is rather alarming and this phenomenon has taken advantage of the country's porous borders over the years (Okoli, et al., 2018; Adzande, 2019; Obiwuru, 2020). This study intends to investigate the influence of foreign herders on the farmers-herders conflicts in north central of Nigeria and also provide possible ways to mitigate and prevent further occurrence of this conflicts.

3.0 FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

After the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has been battling with armed group conflicts in various parts of the country. Despite the fact that herder-farmer conflict is as old as Nigeria's history, the cycles of violence have escalated since 2011 and have invaded most part of the country, particularly the North Central (Lenshie, et al., 2020). The conflict is primarily a land-use dispute between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt of the country.

In recent years, the number of conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria has risen drastically. The effect of this conflict in Nigeria has caused rise in banditry, the proliferation armed weapon, which has pushed the conflict to be fatal; causing the death rate to be higher than that of West Africa merged together (UNOWAS, 2018). The conflict occurrences increased from 2011 to 2015, which is not only confined in the Northern region in states like Adamawa, which has experienced frequent conflicts between Fulani herders and Bachama farmers, after Bachama youth militias assaulted three Fulani herders' communities in Numan local government area, killing at least 55 people, including 48 children (Crisis group, 2017). The herders' reprisals were carried out in five Bachama villages, killing over 100 indigenes. Intensive police and military actions in Adamawa halted additional large attacks, while smaller-scale killings continue in the

state (Adepoju, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this conflict has moved deeper into the Southern part of the country (Aluko, 2017), like the Uzo-Uwani local government area of Enugu state in the southeast of Nigeria in 2016, when herdsmen raided nine communities resulting in the deaths of over 11 people and the destruction of millions of naira worth of property (Igata, 2016; Akerjiir, 2018; Ndubusi, 2018).

While there has been no consistency on the exact figure of death rates as a result of these conflicts, the farmers-herders conflicts in North Central Nigeria have caused the death of almost 4000 people from 2016 – 2018 (Lenshie, et al., 2020; Aljazeera, 2018). The international crisis group records that between 2011 to 2016, 2000 deaths per annum resulted directly from the farmer herders conflicts and over 14 USD billion lost in Nigeria alone (Nwakanma & Boroh, 2019; International crisis group, 2017). The Institute for Economics and Peace observed that the herder-farmer conflicts have become the fourth most dangerous terror group conflicts in the world after the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram. However, conflicts involving different ethnic and religious groups or regular users of scarce natural resources are always sever, such as cattle herders and crop farmers in Nigeria (Malowi & Adamu, 2020).

Fundamentally, desertification, unregulated migration, porous national boundaries, intrusion into grazing routes and reserves, herdsmen ignorance of grazing routes and rules, banditry/cattle rustlings, Sahel defence instability, small arms procurement, retaliation, ineffective government responses, are some of the reasons that cause herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. (Moritz, 2006; Agyemang, 2017; WENAP. 2018; Malowi et al., 2020). But some of the contemporary causes will be discussed.

3.1 Uncontrolled borders/Migration

Borders that are uncontrolled represent a general state of weak or non-existent state authority in a particular geographic area. An uncontrolled boundary is also refers to be locations where there is gap in governance or a lack of authority over a specific environment. State security becomes fragile when there is no effective state control or when there is an atmosphere of uncontrolled boundaries, sometimes known as "insurrectionary zones." There are over a thousand illicit routes used by immigrants from neighbouring countries into Nigeria and only 84 of the country's 1978 access sites are approved, while the other 1894 are unauthorized routes encircling the country which gives entrance to floods of non-Nigerians (herders) migrating illegally. The porous structure of Nigeria's borders has also led to a huge security gap which is a consequence of uncontrolled entry of immigrants via various channels and unregulated proliferations of firearms, which has resulted to all sort of insecurity issues in the country, including Boko Haram insurgency attacks in the north east, bandit and kidnapping in the north west, and the farmers-herders conflicts in the north central (Yahaya, et al., 2020).

The word ‘migration’ is always referring to the movement of people or animals from one distance to another at the heart of its definitions. A sociological study of migration involves the geographic movement of people beyond a defined boundary in order to establish a new permanent or semi-permanent habitation with diverse reasons either in search for kinship, social networks, economic development or security. Herders, without a doubt are not sedentary but nomadic in nature in term of their labour; this implies that herders do migrate and/or sojourn from one site to another in search of natural survival, economic substance, and long-term

livelihood, depending on the origin-to-destination equation in relation to national boundaries, the migration might be trans-local or transnational. The Nigeria's migrancy of Fulani herders is characterized by intermittent influxes of herders, particularly from the Niger-Chad corridor along the country's northern borderlines. Nevertheless, the rate at which the Fulani herders have been migrating into the Nigerian territory in recent years in search of alternative route for pasture is rather alarming and this phenomenon has taken advantage of the country's porous borders over the years, which create a national security danger (Okoli,& Lenshie, 2018; Adzande, 2019; Obiwuru, 2020).

Although Nigeria is not the only country in West Africa plagued by desertification relating to the conflict between farmers and herders, countries like Ghana, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya, among others, have experienced significant conflict arising from competition over land and water resources but the migrant population of herders from Africa's Sahel region and the vast number of Fulani herders that moved south into the Guinea savannah in search of alternate pastures and water supplies for their cattle created a situation where the Fulani herders intruded on ethnic communities and farmlands, which is the dynamic fuelling of farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria today (Nsemba, et al., 2020). Bukari, (2015) investigating the conflict, found that herders migrating into the country in search of water and pasture do come across farms, instability, and other population centres that impede conventional grazing paths, statutory grazing reserves, water supplies and deliberately allowing animals into cultivated fields, careless cutting of trees and when confronted, reacts violently.

Furthermore, in a statement by the national chairman of the Arewa Consultative Forum and former Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbeh indicated that most of the violence in the famers-herders conflict are been carried out by Fulani herders migrating from neighbouring countries. However, concerns have been expressed by the governor of Sokoto state, Aminu Tambuwal of how foreign herders play a crucial role in the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, which has devolved into banditry in some areas. The moment foreign Fulani herders infiltrated into the country and committed crimes, they would be considered as Nigerian herders. Herders have always been a nomadic people with a sense of togetherness. Their connection alone illustrates their fundamentalist loyalty. When confronted with a stereotype threat, Fulani herders are more likely to seek the assistance of their national and transnational clan networks, even in conventional military operations and funding (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). This propensity has been demonstrated in the context of Nigeria's periodic farmer-herder clashes, in which herdsmen recruit fighters among their clans from other countries to fight for them. The enormous expanses of rangelands and forests that are geographically and functionally detached from the sphere of effective state authority have resulted in the majority of herdsmen militancy perpetrators being apprehended in various locations across the north central of the country (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Punch newspaper, 2021).

3.2 *Banditry and Cattle Rustling*

Farmers and herders' conflict in Nigeria has been identified as a significant part of banditry and cattle rustling. Cow and other valuable commodities belonging to either herders or farmers are raided in acts of cattle rustling and banditry. Killing, raping, and raiding of herders and farmers also comes along with banditry and livestock rustling activities. Both farmers and herders have become even more impoverished as a result of this and their capacities to excel favourably in their fields are also hampered by these conflicts, according to the researchers (Abdulazeez, et al.,

2018; Adekunle, et al., 2010). Cattle rustling and banditry have also become a severe threat to people's safety and lives in Nigeria's North West and North Central regions, resulting in the deaths of many people and the damage of property (Olaniyan, et al., 2016). Cattle rustling have been defined as the theft of cattle for the purpose of profit. It has also been interpreted as a criminal act of stealing a cow for economic gain, as well as a result of politicians' inability to address the threat of social and economic instabilities. On the other hand, banditry has been defined as a heist or violent crime committed in an area where the law and order has been overthrown. It typically involves coercion and threats of robbery, rape and killings (Okoli, et al., 2014; Mohammed, et al., 2015; Abdullahi, et al., 2017).

Bandits in Nigeria are rural gangs that engage in criminal activities such as cattle rustling, village raiding, exploitation of local communities, and illicit trafficking. They are common throughout the country, but are prevalent in the northwest in the last decade. The banditry problem began in Zamfara because of corrupt land-titling practices that favoured Hausa nobles at the detriment of herders (Banette, et al. 2022). According to the current governor of Zamfara state, 30,000 bandits are active throughout Nigeria's Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Kaduna states. There are no less than 105 bandit camps and over 65 gangs in the country from where they plan their attacks (The Cables, 2021; Banette, 2021; Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021). Many of the bandits are Fulani herders fighting in protest of the government's persecution of herders, though there are also other ethnic groups in the gangs as well (Banette, et al. 2022, Banette, 2021). On the contrary, Bello, et al. (2021) claimed that banditries are typically perpetrated by either unsatisfied farmers or angry herders who have been refused complete ownership of the land to farm or graze on. Even though many bandits took up weapons with real frustrations against the state, they have subsequently evolved into a more criminal method of operation, attacking farmers, ordinary travellers and feuding with criminal factions rather than channelling their anger against the government (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021).

Cattle rustling have risen in magnitude and in organization over the years in numerous northern states where huge bandit groups operate. Cattle rustling is also said to be a major stream of revenue for Boko Haram in Nigeria's north east (Okoli, et al. 2014; olaniyan, et al. 2016). According to a report by the Centre for Democracy and Development, more than 64,750 cattle were stolen and at least 2,991 herders were slain in the north-central zone in 2013. Many thefts, particularly those occurring in rural towns or forests with no state security show of force, go unreported, making it difficult to determine the loss. Large-scale criminal cattle rustling enterprises is another driver of the farmer-herder conflict, according to the 27th Nigerian Economic Summit (2021).

These criminal gangs take cattle and store them in massive holding areas in the forest for later sale. As a partial diversion from their activities, cattle rustlers sometimes attack and destroy communities in the region. As a result of such atrocities, herders attack farming communities in retaliation, perpetuating a cycle of avoidable slaughter. Cattle rustlers' constant attacks on herding communities have a tendency to put them at odds with their ecological neighbours - farmers. Farmers are sometimes falsely identified by herders as the perpetrators and schemers of their cattle attacks. Some scholars, on the other hand, argue that cattle rustling are primarily a nomadic phenomenon. Their findings were based on the assumption that it is very easy for herders to graze stolen livestock from its point of origin into the forest because the herders are knowledgeable about various grazing forest routes that allow stolen livestock to easily escape.

They further claim that cattle rustling in the North Central are carried out by Fulani herders who have lost their livestock and are thus robbing the herds of the tribes whom they resent for not assisting them in their distress (Okoli. et al. 2014).

The development of armed firearms has facilitated and sophisticated cattle rustling and banditry, and many livestock have been taken as a result of these coordinated crimes (Rufai, 2018). As a result, there have been a number of retaliatory killings, raids on communities, and rapping and kidnappings of men and women. Apart from climate change or herdsman encroaching on farmers' land with their livestock, overgrazing, and insufficient water, which are some of the drivers of farmers–herdsman conflicts, reprisals is one of them, according to Oli et al. (2018). This means that both farmers and herders utilize reprisal attacks as a method of retaliation and as a means of defending their farms and cattle, respectively. A herdsman leader claimed that the mass killings of the Agatu people in Benue state were a kind of retaliation for the Agatu people's massacre of their own people (herdsman) in 2013 (*Premium Times*, 2016). The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN, also claimed the attacks in Plateau State's Riyom, Barakin Ladi, and Jos South local government areas, which killed over 100 people, are reprisal attacks for the slaughter of 300 cows owned by its members. The association accused these towns of harboring cattle rustlers and thwarting the state government's peace efforts in these areas (*Vanguard newspaper*, 2018).

4.0 FOREIGN HERDERS AND FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS IN NORTH CENTRAL OF NIGERIA

In quest of pasture and water for their flock during the dry season, a great number of migratory herders move from the Sahel to Nigeria and because foreign herders are believed to be particularly violent, the migration of these herders inside and outside the North Central region is a key contributor to farmer-herder violence in Nigeria. Given the fact that they travel with advanced weapons for their protection, allow them the freedom to hurt or even kill when they encounter resistance during their invasion of farmer's lands. (Adebayo, 2021; Centre for Democracy & Development, 2021; Kratli, et al., 2020).

The farmer-herders conflicts in North Central of Nigeria unravel in 2014, with the spike of violence in Plateau, Benue, and Nasarawa states of the geopolitical zone, which resulted in over 100 incidences of violence and more mortality rate within six-month period that have ever occurred. From September 2017 to June 2018, the violence killed around 2,800 people in this region, approximately six times the number of civilians killed by Boko Haram in the same time period (International Group Crisis, 2018).

In November 2017, the tension in Benue state skyrocketed as the state government passed a legislation restricting open grazing, effectively ending herders' long-standing habit of allowing their livestock to roam freely. The rate of killing increased as a result of an influx of herders prompted by the state of Benue's anti-grazing law. Since then, approximately 300 additional people have been killed throughout the state as a result of the attacks (international group crisis, 2018). Armed men suspected of being herders enraged by the legislation, stormed six farming villages in the Logo and Guma local government regions, killing approximately 80 people (Vanguard, 2020). The towns of Logo and Guma, which are predominantly occupied by Tiv

farmers, had the greatest mortality tolls. Nasarawa state also experienced an increase in the violence involving herders and farmer militias with over 260 people killed in a series of attacks between January and June 2018, predominantly in the local government areas of Doma, Awe, Obi, and Keana (Ogu, 2020; International crisis group, 2018). The majority of these massacres occurred as a result of the influx of herders pushed there by the state of Benue's anti-grazing law (Tade, 2020).

Despite the fact that this conflict has resulted in deaths and destruction of livelihood in various states across Nigeria, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeder Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) appears to justify their actions by claiming that in states where anti-open grazing laws have been enacted, retaliations by the herders are likely, for the killings of more than 1000 indigence of the herding clan and 2 million cattle attacks carried out by state-sponsored groups (Toromade, 2018). Some herding communities have argued that farmers have stolen the land areas and routes authorized by the government for cattle grazing, which deny them access in their grazing activities, utilizing Section 41 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended) and the ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol of 1998, the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Goods and Persons in West Africa, the ECOWAS Transhumance Regulations of 2003, to declare their freedom of movement and desire to settle in any area of Nigeria (Nwangwu et al., 2020). Farmers, on the other hand, have asserted that Fulani herders are a nomadic group with no claim to land in their communities. Allowing cattle grazing on their land and at the same time damaging their sources of livelihood is thus an issue. Their adamant positions, with both sides insisting on claiming land and opposing such claims, as well as threats to evict settlers, continue to exacerbate the conflict, posing serious obstacles to peace.

5.0 Decision A/DEC.5/10/98 Relating to the Regulations on Transhumance between ECOWAS Member States

Transhumance is a common practice in West and Central Africa, and it is the Sahel's principal economic activity. Farmers and herders have traditionally worked together to supplement each other's incomes. They traded goods, and when disputes arise, they were resolved through established institutions and existing dispute resolution methods. Nevertheless, a variety of circumstances have resulted in tensions between the two groups causing cross-border smuggling and criminal activities in the West African borders. Some herding communities have some traditions that promote looting and thereby generate conflict. This implies that herders must have means of defence for the animals under their care, and by so doing, this has resulted in the escalation of farmers-herders conflicts in the sub-region within the last few decades (Kratli, et al., 2020)

In order to mitigate and prevent further escalation the farmers-herders conflict, a Protocol on Transhumance was established in 1998 to promote regional livestock seasonal movements within ECOWAS member states, as well as to build local and regional cooperation and conflict management procedures. Article 3 of the protocol involves the allowance for seasonal migration of herds leaving their normal grazing areas in search of water and pasture as well as the right to free passage of all animals through all member States' boundaries.

According to article 5, the livestock department must grant the ECOWAS International Transhumance Certificate to each herd, which must be initiated by the local administrative authorities in the country of origin. The details in each certificate includes the herd's status,

vaccines taken, the herd's itinerary, the border posts to be crossed, and the final destination, which will enable officials to trace the herds until they depart from the country, protect the welfare of local herds, and alert host communities of transhumant cattle arrival. Article 6 states that each certificate will be verified and stamped by the host authorities at every entry and exit. The crossing of borders can only be done at day light, under continuous guard during grazing and movement. For every fifty cattle, there must be a herder guarding them with minimum of two herders on all transhumant herds. The age of each herder must not be under 18 years with an identification and residency of the owner of the herds. The authorities of each state have the right to put restrictions, sanctions on herders and their owner or impound cattle within their jurisdiction. Each state also have the right to direct and issue the routes all transhumant herds will take at the point of entry the state and herders shall comply with those directives (Article 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15).

6.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Duncan's Theory of Migration

The Otis D. Duncan, an American sociologist, was the founder of this migration theory. According to Duncan and his followers, whatever consequences that are induced by changes in the societal fundamental characteristics, migration has the same effects. As a result, migration is an access to correct social change for achieving many fundamental goals which includes economic and technical factors as well as psychological and environmental factors. According to theorists, population, security tensions, increased knowledge, the development of transportation and communication systems in some areas and other social factors are among the social factors. The natural drivers of migration includes changes in the climate, the occurrence of diseases, floods, earthquakes, droughts, malaria, tsetse fly, seasonal variations, and soil erosion, among others. Psychological reasons for migration include, individual's health, desires to meet certain needs, feelings of alienation, perceptions of neighbours, and prejudice.

The natural factor such as climate change which infuses droughts, desertification, and other natural disasters is the situation and predicament of Fulani herders. According to Conroy (2017), desertification or encroachment in the Sahel has exacerbated poverty, jeopardized livelihoods, and escalated discontent among Fulani herders.

To demonstrate the effect of climate change in Nigeria's Sahel savannah area, desertification has affected around 580,841 km² of the country's 909,890 km² land area, accounting for 63.83 per cent of total land, with the northern part experiencing significant effect, which is hitting fifteen states at a mild to severe rate (International Crisis Group, 2018). This is threatening the availability of pastures and natural water sources in Nigeria's Sahel region, which are essential for cattle survival. Due to dryness in northern Nigeria's Sahel area, herders and livestock have been forced to migrate to the southern portions of the country in quest of grassland. This southerly shift of herders and their cattle has exacerbated herder-farmer confrontations, particularly in the north central part over two decades (McFarland, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2018; Ikazaki, 2015; Olagunju, 2015). The increase in the frequency of droughts, the lack of water supplies have also conspired to drive herders and their herds towards the north central of Nigeria; where farmers and herders alike depend on steady access to land and water to

thrive. Normally the herders graze their cattle in accordance with seasonal migrations and hunt for water and graze for their herds, often migrating national borders in order to meet these needs. More importantly, the herders are now traveling through areas they have never visited before. And with the rise of agro-pastoralism, in which farmers keep their own cattle and the extension of farms into herders' customary routes have also aggravated the issue. Owing to encroachment on farmlands, crop destruction by cattle, herd's theft, and the weakening of systems to settle these disputes occasionally escalates the conflicts between the farming and herding groups and the resulting bloodshed is on the scale with Boko Haram's insurgency in terms of number and brutality. (Kwaja et al., 2020; Negbea et al., 2019; Olawole et al., 2018; Olaniyan et al., 2015).

7.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is the qualitative method approach that uses both primary and secondary sources of data. The case study design was used in gaining a comprehensive, cross understanding on complexity of the farmers-herders conflict in North Central of Nigeria.

The study population focused on the Guma local government area of Benue state, North Central of Nigeria. The Guma local government area of Benue state, North Central of Nigeria has a population of 194,164 with a male population of 97,318 and 96,846 of females in 2006 according to the report by the National Population Commission of Nigeria (Gazettes Africa, 2009).

Method used in collecting the primary data is the semi-structured interviews. The sources for secondary data relied on journals, magazines, articles, textbooks, online publications and unpublished works related to the study. Under the semi-structured method, eleven (11) respondents was used The composition of the sample size includes: eight (4) farmers, three (3) herders, one (1) cattle owners, one (1) ECOWAS official, two (2) immigration officials.

8.0 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Do you think that the influx (migration) of herders and their movement has an influence in the farmers-herders conflicts? If yes, how?

Mr Igbakwa, who is a farmer, stated that:

Yes it has influenced the conflicts. Look at it in this way; ever before when it rains, you will see like only four to five herders coming into our communities but in recent times, they come in thousands and as they are coming in that great number, they are destroying all the farm crops along the way and as they destroy these farmlands, the farmer will ask 'why' and naturally this becomes a crisis.

Another farmer, Mr. Nyamve Paul stated that:

The influx of herders influences and increases the conflicts because it looks like a planned situation. This started in the time of our great grandparent repelling them from taking our land or attacking us and this was about the 18th centuries when we were told that their great grandfather, Usman Danfodio was killed when he came to invade the Tivs' lands, and for this reason the herders kept coming back to see if they can take over the land of our people, of course, we also map out planned resistance.

Mr Steven Moga, another farmer also stated that:

Yes, the more they are coming, the more they occupy our space and the more trouble for everyone. Before this time, they were not coming in large numbers the way they do now. Some of the Fulani herders we know are saying that the people attacking farmers are Fulani herders from the borders because the Fulani herders we are used to before this time were cordial in their relationship with our people. While I was growing up, we lived in harmony and even feast with them when they had any celebration or festival, but now the ones that are coming are very aggressive and fully armed.

Mr. Adamu Toro, a cattle owner stated that:

Yes, the influx of migrant herders has influenced the conflict because these migrants are from different cultural background. They do not understand our way of life, and since they are from countries like Chad and Niger where there are armed conflicts going on, they see everyone as potential enemies who must be attacked. These migrant herders are used to conflicts and they go about with small arms in order to protect themselves and attack innocent farmers and villagers. We must also note that these are people who move in the forest most of the time and they move with all their wealth and families.

A herder respondent stated that, the more the herders come in the communities, the more it increases the conflict because of population and land deficit. Another herder respondent reported that they have to move to places where there are green pastures, without which their cattle would die. Yet another herder also stated that “the land is dry and our cattle will die, making us to move to greener pastures and since the farmers do not remove the crops on our pathways, the cattles eat the crops”.

Similarly, other respondents confirmed that the influx (migration) of herders and their movement has an influence in the farmers-herders conflicts due to the land deficit and increase in population.

The respondents from Nigeria immigration office stated that the influx and migration of herders have influenced the farmers-herders conflict. The Nigerian immigration respondents affirmed that the herders come in through the bushes and not through the legal borders. This makes it had for the officers to fish out foreign herders who are believe to be the perpetrators of the conflicts. The herders have also been issues cards and papers which gives them the right to graze and move around in the country.

The Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development, ECOWAS Commission stated that: The proliferated of small arms in Niger and Chad due to the civil war in Libya, population and scarcity of natural resources have made the farmers-herders conflict to be uncontrolled in Nigeria. In Nigeria, they have not domesticated transhumance protocols very well. For example, they have not started issuing out the ECOWAS certificate to herders leaving the country to other countries. The summary of the findings shows that the influx (migration) of Foreign Fulani herders and their movement has tremendous influence on the farmers-herders conflicts in North Central of Nigeria.

9.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are to the effect that the migration of foreign Fulani herders contributes significantly to the exacerbation of the farmers-herders conflicts in North Central of Nigeria. This finding aligns with the findings of Adekunle et al, (2010) who found that that the migration and movement of herders and their cattle often leads to conflict as they struggle to take over the farmlands for grazing purposes. The findings of Nwangwu et al. (2020) corroborates the findings of this study which shows that the movement of herder into farmlands stirs up complicit among the duo and this caused series of death, bloodshed and loss of properties. A new twist to the conflicts among farmers-herders is that existing mechanism for conflict resolution have broken down almost irretrievably because the foreign herders have no means to subject themselves to existing conflict resolution mechanisms identified by local farmers who said they have no long time rapport or relationship with the stranger herders.

Findings also reveal that there are illicit routes used by foreign Fulani herders from neighbouring countries into Nigeria. This also aligned with Bukar, (2016) who revealed that Fulani herders migrating into the country in search of water and pasture do come across farms, instability, and other population centres that impede conventional grazing paths, statutory grazing reserves, water supplies and deliberately allowing animals into cultivated fields, careless cutting of trees and when confronted, reacts violently. This findings also confirmed the statement of the national chairman of the Arewa Consultative Forum and former Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbah who indicated that most of the violence in the famers-herders conflict are been carried out by herders migrating from neighbouring countries. Furthermore, this finding is in line with the concern expressed by the governor of Sokoto state, Aminu Tambuwal of how foreign herders play a crucial role in the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, which has devolved into banditry in some areas. The moment foreign herders infiltrated into the country and committed crimes, they would be considered as Nigerian herders. Herders have always been a nomadic people with a sense of togetherness. Their connection alone illustrates their fundamentalist loyalty. When confronted with a stereotype threat, herders are more likely to seek the assistance of their national and transnational clan networks, even in conventional military operations and funding (Okoli, 2018). The findings of porous structure of Nigeria's borders has also led to a huge security gap which is a consequence of uncontrolled entry of immigrants via various channels and unregulated proliferations of firearms, which has resulted to all sort of insecurity issues in the country, including Boko Haram insurgency attacks in the north east, bandit and kidnapping in the north west, and the farmers-herders conflicts in the north central (Yahaya, et al., 2020).

The findings of herders from the borders of Nigeria are people from hostile environment show their confrontations with stereotype resistance or threat because they are believed to be violent in nature, and given the fact that they travel with advanced weapons for their protection, allow them the freedom to hurt or even kill when they encounter resistance during their invasion of famer's lands (Adebayo, 1991; Centre for Democracy & Development, 2021; Kratli & Toulmin, 2020). Herders are more likely to seek the assistance of their national and transnational clan networks, even in conventional military operations and funding (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). This propensity has been demonstrated in the context of Nigeria's periodic farmer-herder clashes, in which herdsmen recruit fighters among their clans in the exile to fight for them. The enormous expanses of rangelands and forests that are geographically and functionally detached from the sphere of effective state authority have resulted in the majority of herdsmen militancy perpetrators being apprehended in various locations across the north central of the country

10. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the Fulani herders' migration from the neighbouring countries and pattern of movement contributed to the conflict between the farmers and the herders. These conflicts have attracted so much killings and unrest in these areas causing significant reduction in economic activities, farm product output, goods delivery and overall livelihood of farmers and herders. This has resulted in scarcity of farm products and damages done to social infrastructures. It has also increased cases of death, sexual harassment, rape, deterioration of social capital network, and support between the two warring groups. In general, the conflict has affected farming, as most farmers cannot farm anymore because of fear of being killed, likewise the livestock business has been negatively impacted with increased cases of cattle rustling. Thus, a herder can be rich in the morning and poor in the evening because of the increase in cattle rustling and banditry. Also, the study concludes that other drivers of the conflict between herders and farmers include insufficient grazing lands, political issues of identity and ethnic hatred, herders' destruction of farmlands and increase in population.

As a result, it is therefore recommended that immigration controls be enhanced to ensure that all migrant herders who enter the country are properly registered and identified by their country, including all necessary information such as location, employer, and so on. They should also be restricted to a specific place and only be allowed to stay for a limited time before returning to their home countries. Apart from that, there should be organized task force that will work with settled Fulani herders to identify and remove or isolate migrant herders who cross the borders illegally. This is required in order to help manage immigrant herders domestically and ensure the social integration of those who have followed due process.

The national government should fully implement the ECOWAS regulation on Transhumance between ECOWAS member states of 2003, which aims to manage herd movements and ensure that they take place within the member states' designated corridors. Also, governments of West African states should consider a review of transhuman pastoralism (an outdated practice of livestock farming) which is globally out of fashion and a direct source of perennial conflict. The promotion of vigorous agro-pastoral and ranching programs to become self-sufficient in meat production is one sure way to avoid the attendant crisis. The Nigerian governments should not only enact regulatory policies that will mitigate the farmer-herders conflict, but also implement and enforce these policies. These policies should not contradict that of the existing sub-region regulatory frameworks in order to avoid confusion and stir up agitations. The states governments should be aware and duly informed of any new regulatory framework and should be quick to execute the newly initiated regulations. ECOWAS should establish a more realistic method for monitoring and evaluating how states and institutional entities apply the regulatory framework. National government should put the right infrastructures in place to implement and enforce the transhumance protocol effectively to avoid excuse of porous borders, lack of funds and control behaviour of herdsmen.

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