

Ethnic Twist in Farmer-Herder Conflict: Implications For Peace And Rural Development In Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict between farmers and herders is not a recent phenomenon, rather is as old as the existence of agriculture and pastoralism. The existence of the conflict is not in question. But the gradual climax and juxtaposition of ethnicity by ethnic-chauvinists in a purely resource-based conflict has become more worrisome and a source of concern to many. However, ethnic twist in a resource-based conflict often metamorphoses into ethnic rivalry. Both farmers and herders are hitherto complementing the livelihood of each other and managing the conflict in their own traditional way for ages. The socio-economic ties are not only fast eroding but commonly characterized by ethnic divide and cleavages between Fulani who are the dominant herding groups and other ethnic farmers across Northern Nigeria. This development has unfolded an ethnic twist in the conflict in the midst of an already ethnically diverse society like Nigeria. Hence, over the last ten years, the Nigerian state is witnessing relentless violent attacks and reprisal attacks between the duo groups leading to massive loss of innocent lives and property with enormous implications on peace and rural development particularly in Northern Nigeria. The paper argued that the incessant juxtaposition of ethnicity and ethnic twist may further worsen the conflict and make resolutions cumbersome where ethnicity and its tendencies in Nigeria seems to define nation building. The paper also concludes that beating the drums of ethnic wars in farmer-herder conflict may cascade Nigeria into another crisis with great implications on peace and rural development. The paper utilized Qualitative Research method using content analysis of existing literatures on the subject matter.

Keywords: Conflict, Ethnicity, Farmer, Herder

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I. INTRODUCTION

Violence between farmers and herders is an old new conflict that has lingered hibernating for decades threatening the peace and security of most communities in Nigeria. It has over the years manifested and escalated in almost all the states particularly in Northern Nigeria. However, the existence of the conflict is not under scrutiny because is an aged-long recurring conflict associated with farming and pastoral communities over access and control of renewable resources in the mist of prevailing climate change, land degradation, desertification and other environmental problems. More often farmer-herder conflict becomes common and widespread in communities where farming and pastoralism are the economic main-stay and source of livelihood and survival of people. The Nigerian state being an agrarian state and a hub for pastoral activities have diverse ethnic and socio-cultural nationalities contrived together by the British in 1960. Since independence both ethnic and resource-based conflicts exist side by side among the diverse people of Nigeria. The frequency of farmer-herder violence characterized by ethnic profiling and self-determination by both the Fulani herders and several other ethnic farmers across the states has far reaching implications on peace and community development in Nigeria. Most importantly is the way and manner farmer-herder conflict that was purely a resource-based controversy steadily turning into an ethnic war between pastoral society dominated by Fulani ethnic group on one hand and farmers from other ethnic nationalities across Nigeria on the other hand. It is sufficiently clear that

no state in Nigeria is immune or has never experienced farmer-herder conflict in recent times. Nevertheless, the problem becomes pervasive in frontline states of Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau and Taraba in Northern Nigeria.

Though, resource-based conflicts are not peculiar to Nigeria, obviously the problem becomes knotty in countries where resource governance and administration is absent, resource distribution and utilization are poorly managed, policies on land, water, forage among others are weak and feeble combined with underlying social, economic and political factors. Furthermore, in countries where insecurity is prevalent as the case with Sahel countries conflict between crop farmers and herders becomes pervasive. The scale and frequency of these conflicts varies among nation-states in the Sahel and West Africa. For instance, the conflict in Philippines is attributed to deforestation, land degradation and high population growth and population displacement (Maxwell and Reufeny, 2000; Hawes, 1990). Bangladesh is experiencing same since 1970s, (Homer-Dixon, 1991). In the Senegal valleys, conflict over natural resources degenerated into boarder conflicts between Senegal and Mauritania in 1999, (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Schmitz, 1999). In South-west Burkina Faso, conflict between *Fulani* pastoralist and *Dagora, Birifor and Lobi* farmers has been a recurring decimal (Tonah, 2002). In Sudan, there is still conflict over natural resources in Northern and Southern *Kordofan*. Ethiopia is also grappling with farmer-herder conflict in *QuowetWareda* of *Amhara* region resulting from increase pressure on land (Daniel, 2003). This does not mean that the developed societies are not susceptible to resource conflicts. Available literatures reported among others, conflict over fishery between Canada and Spain (Maxwell and Reufeny, 2000); Border conflicts between China and its several neighbours (Gleditsch, 1998).

Moreover, pastoral communities worldwide are not homogenous base on their culture, traditions and migratory pattern. Therefore, even within the *Fulani* pastoral community tend to have competition and conflict over access and utilization of water and forage among themselves. Hence there should be balance between resources, ethnicity and violence between farming and pastoralism. The overwhelming concern is the transformation of the conflict into an ethnic expedition by both farmers and herders against each other. Eventually, the situation has become a national malady characterized by crime and criminality defined by violent attacks and reprisal attacks leading to killings of innocent citizens, destruction of property, arson, kidnapping for ransom, rape and other criminal vices against both parties. More threatening and apprehensive is the desperate attempts by individuals and interest groups to politicize and ethicize the violence rather than addressing the primarily issue of resource management.

Several studies conducted by scholars, analyst and corporate institutions have intellectually dissipated substantial efforts in trying to understand the psychological, political and socio-economic dynamics of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria and the Sahel in general (see for instance, Duke and Agbaji, 2020; Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018; Chinwokwu, 2017; Fasona et al, 2016; McGregor, 2014; Bello, 2013; Abbass, 2012; Shettima and Tar, 2008;). Despite flourishing literatures on the issue, the conflict continued to persist and expand in scale and scope hibernating in different forms including the emerging ethnic coloration. The issue dominated national discourse since the ascension of President Muhammadu Buhari to power in 2015, being a *Fulani* descendant, there were a lot of scepticism, accusations and counter accusations, blames and counter blames by other ethnic nationalities over justice, equity and fairness in providing all-inclusive solution to the age-long conflict. The ethic dynamics to the conflict seems more problematic because of the changing skills, sophistication and modus operandi use in the violent attacks and reprisal attacks. This also explains the current wave of ethnic twist and politicization of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. The objectives of this paper is to explore and trigger intellectual discourse on the dynamics and factors responsible for the ethnic twist in farmer-herder conflict, as well as its implication to the attainment of peace and community development in Northern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

In order to have a better theoretical understanding of ethnic-twist in farmer-herder conflict which forms part of the main objective of this paper, Johan Galtung's (1969 cited in Duke and Agbaji, 2020) models of conflict, violence and peace has been adopted as the theoretical foundation for the study. Nevertheless, Galtung is one of the early scholars whose researches in the field of peace and conflict studies has not only contributed in alleviating age-long paucity of academic literatures in the field, but it has also brought peace and conflict to the limelight as an academic discipline. In his analysis conflict can be regarded as a construct with the tendency to manifest and becomes visible 'behavioural' component (B) linked to invisible 'Attitude' or 'Assumption' (A) and 'contradiction' (C) components. In most circumstances we can only talk of violent conflict when the three components above are available in a particular environment. Contradictions may arise as a result of either actual or perceived 'incompatibility of goals and means of attaining those goals' between the primary parties to the conflict which Galtung described as a 'mismatch between social values and social structure' (Ogo-Oluwa, 2017 cited in Duke and Agbaji, 2020). Attitude can be negative which gradually develops stereotypes between the conflict individuals or groups characterized by emotions, bitterness, anger, hatred, and fear among others. From empirical observation by Demmers, (2012 cited in Duke and Agbaji, 2020) behaviour is more visible among the

three and always attracts more attention because of its natural characteristics which involves coercion, threats, onslaught, discrimination, mayhem and violence engaged by antagonistic groups. Conflict as a phenomenon is not static but a dynamic and dialectical process as rightly analysed by Galtung, 1969 cited in Duke and Agbaji, 2020). As conflict structures, attitudes and behaviour keeps changing, the dynamics also keeps manifesting leading to clash of interest and each group pursue and defend their interest at all cost which becomes oppressive against the other.

Central to farmer-herder conflict is the issue of crop damage, destruction of forage and cattle raids which is commonly interpreted as conflict of interest between farmers and herdsman. Within the context of these contradictions and conflict of interest, this theory creates a plausible understanding of the phenomenon. In the process of peaceful coexistence resulted to change in attitude and interest which farmers and herders protects and defend at all cost which depicts the “C” component of Johan Galtung’s conflict model. The gradual transition from peaceful coexistence to conflict has manifested into incompatible goals, suspicion, stereotypic narratives and assumptions culminates into violent reactions as rightly epitomizes the “A” component of Galtung’s analysis. However, the current rising waves of ethnic-twist in the conflict between farmers and herders are a reminiscence of the incompatible interest and goals over access, utilization of renewable resources.

The Dynamics of Ethnic-Twist in Farmer-Herder Conflict

Ethnicity or ethnic group as a concept has been subjected to several discourse in the social and political arena particularly in Africa where ethnicity has become the easiest natural platform for people to express and mobilize themselves for the purpose of achieving basic social, political, economic, autonomy and other needs. The most common understanding of ethnicity or ethnic group by ethnic theorists is not limited to its existence, but the sources of common ties that create sentiments and emotions which are often expressed by individuals, groups and communities in support or against decisions and policies in their favour or not (Kelman, 2007; Thomson, 2000; Nnoli, 1978). Meanwhile, the most prominent attributes that makes people align with a particular ethnic group is the common identity features such as language, cultural uniqueness, traditional norms and values, kinship ties, ancestral origin, shared history, religious believes, descent among others rather than demographic and geographical considerations. According to Nnoli, (1978) what makes ethnicity peculiar is the demand by one group on other competing groups...’. Generally, violent conflicts including ethnic and resource-based conflicts are perceived as something abnormal, dysfunctional, destructive, retrogressive and are reprehensible in all ramifications.

Ethnicity is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, being a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society. The Nigerian post-colonial state has been witnessing a plethora of ethnic conflicts across almost all communities. Since independence, ethnicity has been one of the major issues bedevilling Nigeria. From available records, ethnicity has been attributed as one of the major factors that led to the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) and so many other major conflicts. However, the current waves of ethnic twist in farmer-herder conflict are portraits of the larger breakdown of inter-ethnic ties and social cohesion. Hence both farmers and herders belong to different ethnic and socio-cultural groups that are distinct from each other. Therefore, ethnic group-solidarity for purposes of collective action becomes a source of formidable strength for attacks and counter attacks devoid of all encumbrances as the case with farmer-pastoralists conflict in Nigeria. When conflict ensued between a farmer and a Fulani pastoralist easily turn into an ethnic war between the two groups. As a result, many innocent people who are neither farmers nor herders pay the supreme price just because of their ethnic origin and identity. More often, farmer-pastoralist conflicts in Nigeria are not just simply the outcome of resource conflict between two economic sectors as in many cases; however, it is also a reminiscent conflict between different ethnic and socio-cultural groups as obtainable elsewhere in Africa (Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018). As a result, many innocent ethnic members who are neither farmers nor herders would bear the brunt of violent attacks, killings, among others for ordinarily belonging to ethnic groups that are conflict.

The emergence of neo-Malthusian theorists since late 1960s and early 1970s, has hitherto predicted rapid population growth will lead to per capita scarcity of natural resources such as cropland, freshwater, forests, and other resources, which increases the risk of violent conflict and claims by different ethnic nationalities over ownership and utilization of these scarce resources (Ahmadu, 2018; Kahl, 2002; Tietenberg, 1996; Kaplan, 1994; Homer-Dixon, 1991). In addition, to the earlier explanations of the neo-Malthusian theorists, Ahmadu, (2018) posits that conflict might escalate when state resources are skewed by powerful elites under conditions of state exploitative tendencies coupled with taking advantage of already existing ethnic divides in order to consolidate power. In developing countries such as Nigeria the state concentrated the benefits of resource extraction to small group of elites who controls the state apparatus, because much power and discretion over a large share of state’s resources are vested on the leader. For instance, the power to allocate land and its resources in Nigeria are concentrated in the hands of the Governors and Local Government Councils through bureaucratic laws and policies of the state. Some specific case studies indicated that, strenuous struggles and competition over access to and control over natural resources arising from its decrease in quality and quantity; population

migration; weak political institutions among others are responsible for resource tension and ethnic conflicts particularly in developing countries (Shetima and Tar, 2008; Homer-Dixon, 1995, 1993, 1991).

The issue of ethnicity in resource conflict in Nigeria has been an ongoing conversation particularly with the growing clamour for restructuring and agitations for a true federalism that may probably address the fundamental issues of resource control and emerging security threats among the diverse ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Regrettably, much time and energy are dissipated on juxtaposing religious, ethnic, regional and political sentiments through apportioning blame and counter-blame, accusation and counter-accusation, threats and counter-threats against each other which may not likely change the status-quo. Despite several early warning signs and alarms raised around the globe by previous researchers and policy analysts like the ‘coming anarchy’ by (Kaplan, 1994); ‘resource scarcity and conflict’ by (Homer-Dixon, 1991); ‘tragedy of the commons’ by (Hardin, 1968) and the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) consistently raised several early warning alarms on the impact of climate change on resource conflict and livelihood crises particularly in the Sahel and West Africa. A practical example of the impacts of climate change is the receding Lake Chad which currently creates social and ethnic conflicts between farmers and pastoralists over access to wetland areas. Yet there is less or no all-inclusive and holistic mechanisms articulated by successive governments to curb the menace of farmer-herder violence including its ethnic dimension in Nigeria today. Therefore, it is plausible to envisage that the Nigerian post-colonial state seems not too serious about the anticipated violent clashes between farmers and herders talk less of its ethnic juxtaposition in the aged-long conflict.

Major Drivers of Farmer-Herder Conflict

In the last three decades several studies were conducted by academics and other concerned individuals and organizations with a view to unravel the causes and consequences of farmer-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria and the Sahel region in general (See Duke and Agbaji, 2020; Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018; Chinwokwu, 2017; Fasona et al, 2016; Baidoo, 2014; McGregor, 2014; Bello, 2013; Abbass, 2012; Shetima and Tar, 2008; Coe and Foley, 2001;). In their different analysis they attributed some of the major causes of the conflict between farmers and herdsman includes but not limited to climate change and environmental issues, poor resource governance and administration by states, politicization of the conflict by the elites, juxtaposition of ethnic and religious identities, pastoral migration, proliferation of illegal weapons in the hands of non-state actors, the role group solidarity as a means of collective action. In view of that, it is sufficiently discernible that there is no one single factor that is solely responsible for the conflict between farmers and herdsman rather it is interplay of several factors. Despite the growing literature on farmer-herder conflicts in the last two decades, there exists increasing ethnicization of the conflict between Fulani herdsman and other ethnic farmers across most parts of Northern Nigeria.

Ethnicity has been juxtaposed by conflict ‘entrepreneurs’ through identity politics in order to create disaffection and hate between farmers and herdsman in the mist of scarcity of renewable resources which both parties depend on, is likely to culminate into ethnic wars between not only farmers and pastoralists, but by extension have the tendency to involve other ethnic nationalities as a matter of group solidarity. This development is an appendage to the already existing multi-faceted dimensions of the conflict. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria where ethnicity and religious divide became prominent in nation-building requires an intellectual discourse to unravel the role of ethnicity in pure resource conflict between farmers and herdsman. Against this background this paper seeks to fill the existing gap by triggering discourse on the ethnic twist in farmer-herder conflict for further interrogation by other interested researchers on the issue.

Factors Responsible the for Ethnic Twist in Farmer-Herder Conflict

- 1) Age-long existing ethnic divisions and cleavages – Nigeria is made of different ethnic groups put together by the British in 1960. Because colonialism has failed to conceptualize any deliberate program or policy that will bring the diverse ethnic and socio-cultural groups together during independence, resulted in citizens gradually becoming ethnic-men and women rather than state-men and women. This laid the foundation for competition and contestations for control of power and resources among the diverse Nigerian people. The current vista of ethnic twist in farmer-herder conflict is part of the larger Nigerian age-long ethnic crisis. In a plural society like Nigeria, ethnic group solidarity is more routinely use in violent clashes between farmers and herdsman. For instance, historically, many Fulani pastoralists participated in the Jihad of Usman Danfodio in 1804 which led to the establishment of Caliphates across Northern Nigeria. Most of these caliphates have subjected and enslaved non-Muslims populations believed to be sedentarized farmers from non-Fulani pastoral communities. They consider all non-Fulani as “Habe” (pagan) and are subject to raid, attack and harassment irrespective of their religion, position, or social status (Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018). They further argued that, today, the resentment between war and slavery among these groups’ remains strong, divisive and routinely use to orchestrate communities when conflict over crop damage

ensued (Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018). Conflict over resources, faith, and politics can easily be transformed into an ethnic war as was rightly described by Akinyetun (2016) as ‘the change in occupational tactics--- staff to gun’.

- 2) Traditional claims over ancestral land and other renewable resources – as land, water, and forage are fast dwindling due to the combine impacts of both human and natural factors, led to increasing ancestral claims over these resources. Farmers by virtue of their ancestral origin claims right over these resources within their various communities. They see the migratory herdsmen as landless, strangers, unfamiliar with the culture of their host community and therefore regarded as strangers trespassing over their farmlands. While pastoralists believed that land and resources over it belongs to God, therefore naturally every human being is entitling to its usage. The most plausible interpretation of land particularly among trans-humane pastoralist is that ‘land is a free and common property of all, because God owns the land while everybody is just a temporary tenant. Therefore, access to land and its resource should also be free for all’.
- 3) Ethnic self-determination – the increasing acquisition of illegal arms and light weapons by both Fulani herdsmen and ethnic farmers alike has metamorphosed into an ethnic self-determination with both sides displaying their combat readiness and violent prowess by killings, destruction, and arson among others to the extent challenging and attacking constituted authorities or state actors that are heavily protected by armed-security convoys. For instance, in 2015 the Governor Gabriel Suswan of Benue state, was ensnared and attacked by herdsmen on his way from Tse-Akanyi village in Guma Local Government where he went for an assessment of the violence that ensued between farmers and Fulani Herdsmen (Ubelejit, 2016; SBMI, 2015). This self-determination is accompanied with them negative consequences if not properly manage may lead to the spread and escalation of Tiv and Fulani herdsmen holocaust in Benue as well as between Berom and Fulani herdsmen in Plateau state (Oravee, 2015).
- 4) The role of ethnic solidarity – Fulani herdsmen are well known for their ethnic solidarity which is embedded as one of their cultural attributes. Developing prowess and aggressive tendencies is traditional and cultural requirement of herdsmen against any threat such as cattle theft and raids. These attributes are easily operationalized against farmers when conflict ensued. It also serves as a bond of unity among herders, threat against one becomes a threat against all. When is conflict collective action is been used against the other leading to ethnic clashes between them resulting into killings and destructions of live and property including that of those who are neither farmers nor herdsmen also bear the brunt?

Federal Government’s Policy Summersault

Since colonial days up to independence and the post-independence era, grazing reserves and cattle routes has been the main strategy that was used to avoid or mitigate the aged-long violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen. For instance, few years after independence the Nigerian Government had allocated about 6.4 million hectares of land in 144 locations across Northern Nigeria including 3 from southern states of Ogun and Oyo (Duke and Agbaji, 2020). However, all these grazing reserves were either overtime abandon by the herdsmen themselves due to their migratory lifestyle or eventually suffered encroachment from farmers. Policies regarding grazing reserves and cattle routes also suffered some set-backs. In 2016 a bill was proposed by president Buhari’s government titled ‘A Bill for an Act to Establish Grazing Reserves in each of the 36 states of Nigeria to improve agriculture yield from livestock farming and curb incessant conflicts between cattle herders and crop farmers in Nigeria’. The bill was greeted with criticisms particularly by legislators from southern Nigeria. The bill was later turned-down by the 8th National Assembly because there were allegations that the bill seeks to favour pastoralism as a profession mainly practiced by Fulani in Northern part of Nigeria. In July 2019 another policy titled ‘Rural Grazing Area’ (RUGA) some call it ‘cattle colony’ was introduced and funds appropriated in the 2019 budget for the purpose of acquiring land in various states in order to tackle the incessant farmers-herdsmen clashes. The policy was vehemently rejected by sub-national governments on the basis that they don’t have land to allocate for open grazing. As a result, the policy became death on arrival because some states are already facing land scarcity therefore, they have no land to allocate to herdsmen. Within the same year, another new policy plan named National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) was launched in 2019 at Gongoshi Grazing Reserve in Adamawa state as a pilot scheme to be implemented in seven states of Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nassarawa, Taraba and Zamfara. The new initiative was to discourage open grazing and promote ranching as a global best practice. The program was to be test-run from 2019-2028 in collaboration between National Economic Council and the State Governments.

Meanwhile, considering the veracity and magnitude of deteriorating security situation and dangers open grazing may trigger in the near future, the 17 southern state Governors met on Tuesday May 11, 2021 in Asaba the Delta state capital and resolved to establish ranching and ban all forms of open grazing (Premium Times, May 11, 2021). This resolution was part of the 12-points communiqué issued by the southern Governors

forum through their Chairman, Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu of Ondo state. Today almost all the states in southern Nigeria have either ban or is in the process of banning open grazing in them through legislation by their various Houses of Assembly. The ban on open grazing is not only in southern states, prior to their resolution Benue and Taraba states in central Nigeria has already ban open grazing by laws of their states. The overwhelming attrition over farmer-herdsmen violence is not on the number of policies rolled-out but how efficacious it is in providing a paradigm shift from open grazing to ranching system as a global best practice in order to end pastoral mobility especially among the Fulani who are the largest pastoral group in the world, and possibly stop the vicious circle of killings and destruction to lives and property between farmers and herders.

Implications on Peace and Community Development

The rising wave of farmer-herder conflict particularly the ethnic-twist associated with the conflict has far reaching implications on peace and community development. Based on 2006 Nigerian population census, majority of Nigerians reside in rural areas and eke their livelihood within same environment. Since Nigerian's return to democratic rule in 1999, successive governments are striving to improve its rural communities while the increasing spread and escalation of violence between farmers and herders as well as other rural-based crimes continued to threaten and ravage rural communities making peace and community development near impossible. As a rural-based violence, socio-economic activities are hampered on daily basis, community development activities are steadily becoming impossible and the livelihood of the rural populace has been in jeopardy as a result of the violent conflict. For instance, Ajibefun, (2018) pointed out some major implications of the farmer-herdsmen menace to include reduction in output and income of both farmers and herders, loss of produce in storage, displacement of farmers, scarcity of agricultural products, loss of houses and property as well as massive infrastructural damages. While frontline states of Benue, Nassarawa and Plateau in Central Nigeria has been losing on the average 47% of their internally generated revenues annually as a result of the violence (Mercy Corps, 2015 cited in ICG, 2017). Currently, those in the villages are afraid of going to their farms in remote areas for fear of attack (Isola, 2018). The implication of the security situation is already becoming practical and visible based on the reported decrease in food production and increase in the prices of commodities in the affected states.

However, while we acknowledged the ethnic-twist to the conflict, compared to other urban violence, farmer-herdsmen clashes are grossly under reported by both local and international media (Ahmadu and Ayuba, 2018; SBMI, 2015). This can be attributed to the remote nature of where this conflict occurs and manifest. The juxtaposition of ethnic –twist in the violent attacks and counter-attacks by both ethnic farmers and herdsmen led to several loss of lives and property from both sides including those who are neither farmers nor herdsmen. In Central Nigeria for instance, from January to March, 2014 communal conflicts orchestrated by Fulani herdsmen in Benue State claimed the lives of more than 5000 victims (Abdulbarkindo and Alupsen, 2017; Ubelejit, 2016). In February 2018, herdsmen/farmers clashes left more than 40 people killed and sacked nearly 100 rural villages and communities in Benue state, forcing more than 2000 people to flee as internally displaced persons in camps located at Makurdi the state capital (Aliyu, et al 2018). In the same vein Fulani herdsmen claimed to have lost 214 people in addition to 3200 cows (Aliyu, et al 2018). While the grievance of the loses is still fresh, angry youths from the affected community cited three Fulani men along the road, were killed and beheaded as reprisal (Ndubuisi, 2018). However, the crisis between farmers and herdsmen in Zagon-kataf in Kaduna state has snow-balled into a communal conflict between Hausa-Fulani and Atyp ethnic group.

The crisis has spilled-over to the southern part of Nigeria particularly southeast and southwestern Nigeria. For instance, on the April 25, 2016 suspected armed herdsmen attacked Ukpabi Nimbo town in Enugu state, over 40 indigenes were killed and maimed (Akintayo, 2018). This generated tension and brouhaha from the Ibo ethnic society including the first ethnic threats of reprisal from the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) now proscribed by President Buhari led Federal Government, who vociferously vow for reprisal attack against the Fulani herdsmen if the mayhem continues (Umoru, 2018). The separatist group was well known for its agitation for the actualization of Biafra Republic. There are similar cases in southwest where farmer-herdsmen violence is easily interpreted as ethnic crisis between Fulani herdsmen and Yoruba indigenous farmers. For instance, the veracity of the violent mayhem by the herdsmen led some state governments in the southwest particularly Ondo and Oyo states to issue vacation notice to Fulani herdsmen to leave their ancestral land. Subsequently, all the Southwest Governors met on January 25, 2021 and ban all forms of open grazing in their respective states. Their decision was not only greeted with criticisms but has caused states that share borders with the western region to bear the brunt of an unprecedented influx of herdsmen with consequences of another conflict with their new host communities. The ban on open grazing saga has generated arguments between the state governments, MiyettiAllah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and Federal Government of Nigeria over constitutional legality of the action. The continued ethnicization and politicization of farmer-herdsmen conflict has the potentials of triggering other age-long existing ethnic wounds that is yet to be healed. Inability to identify and separate criminals from peace-loving herdsmen remains a big

challenge. However, all ethnic societies are bound to have criminal elements in their midst. Therefore, there is the need to intensify and harness intelligence from all ramifications in order to separate the ‘grains’ from the ‘chaff’.

II. CONCLUSION

Farmer-herder conflict has assumed to be a major security issue which continued threatened peace and unity of the Nigerian state. Today farmer-herder conflict gradually metamorphoses into several divides particularly ethnic, religious and geographical divides among the diverse people of Nigeria. The resentments over North-South, Muslims-Christians, Fulani-other ethnic groups remain strong and divisive in a resource base conflict. Despite the clamour for ranching as the new global system for cattle rearing, against open grazing which is regarded as traditional and obsolete in the 21st Century world, government under President Muhammadu Buhari in August, 2021 signed an order to recover all cattle routes and grazing reserves across the nation for pastoral mobility. In order to mitigate the age-long clashes between farmers and herdsman with tendencies of snow-balling into an ethnic conflict, there is the need to invest in ranching has been done in most parts of the world. Ranching has the potentials to not only mitigate the increasing violent clashes but can also open up several vistas of investments in cattle rearing business by all ethnic nationalities who are willing to invest rather than seeing it as an ordinary traditional occupation of the Fulani's. In the modern world cattle ranching or dairy business has long value chain for investors to harness and huge revenues can be generated by the state. Therefore, the Nigerian state should learn from the global world of ranching in order to have sustainable peace and community development in the 21st Century global world.

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