



## THE LINGERING PROBLEM OF HERDERS-FARMERS RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: A CRISIS OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the lingering problem of herders-farmers relations in Nigeria: a crisis of political development. Herdsmen and Farmer's clash is not a new incident in Nigeria. The paper describes the involvement of ammunitions owned and handled by the herdsmen who were initially known for handling sticks as a phenomenon that create height level of insecurity, plunging the country to the path of political decay. This has contributed to the continuous call for restructuring the country. The paper recommends that providing a lasting solution to the conflict will establish a basic step towards attaining Political Development. It is concluded that Political Development indicates Political Stability.

**KEYWORDS:** Herders-Farmers, Political Development, Crisis, Farmers, Herdsmen, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Indeed, peace is imperative for the development, stability and security of nations and individuals. Cognizant of critical centrality within the context of state-society and intergroup relations especially in a big and plural country like Nigeria, measures and processes must constantly be undertaken towards sustaining peace in the country. As a maturing democracy with huge socio-cultural and religious diversity, peace is *sine-qua-non* for democratic consolidation, effective security management and development.

However, Nigeria has had crises that affected her stability since Independence. In portraying this, Allswell (2014, p.14) identified these crises as follows: election violence, military interference, declaration of Niger Delta Republic, the Civil War, Movement for the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Northern Arewa Groups, series of religious crises, Jama'atu Ahlil Sunna Lidawati Wal Jihad (Boko Haram), Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru). Activities or crises perpetrated by these groups have given rise to Internal Displacement, thereby undermining the country's political development.

Herdsmen are found all over the country, with incessant clash with famers of the host communities. These clashes result to destruction of properties and especially loss of lives. Those who managed to escape become internally displaced. This has led to numerous IDPs camps in the country. In such situation, attainment of political development becomes only a mirage hence constant loss of life, and painful life experience to escapees. In the event of this Displacement, they become people who have no homes, food, shelter, security, even hope of survival. In some cases, many lose their families or are delinked from families and communities in the whole of their life time.



Omenihu (2016, p.12) maintains that Internally Displaced Persons live in very poor conditions; a large majority number of Nigerians are housed in overcrowded camps across the disturbed areas, and these camps which are mainly school facilities and empty government buildings with few basic amenities. This shows picture of what majority of Nigerians are passing through. These are supposed to be citizens whom through their active participation in political processes would yield attainment of political development. Any country with almost half of her citizens in such state of living has no business with attaining Political Development. Moreover, owing to the fact that Nigeria is a democratic nation, citizens' relation to public activities becomes a huge criterion and yardstick in attaining and measuring political development.

From observation, Nigeria is currently at the brick of anarchy, chaos and eventual collapse. This is owing to the fact that Herdsmen/Farmers' conflict is increasing geometrically, and no state in the country can be seen as exception. Consequently, Internal Displacement is unprecedentedly increasing day-by-day. Adding to this menace is the unconvincing manner in which Nigerian Security Agencies are handling the deterrent measures in foiling these attacks. Nigeria being a multi-ethnic and religious country, still struggling for compatibility, trust and stability should nip such menace at the bud. Every concerned Nigerian would imagine what the fallout could be should drastic measures are not taken.

It is very sad that while many countries are concerned and focused on advancing technological developments, breaking into new discoveries, Nigeria is still battling with Fulani-herdsmen and their cattle at this 21st Century. One may ask, is Nigeria the only country in the world that consumes cows? In one of the media interviews of the current Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Chief Lai Mohammed, he maintains that Fulani-herdsmen/Farmers current crisis is as the result of climate change. One may wonder if Nigeria is the only country that experiences climate change. This therefore, poses a question; can Nigeria still attain Political development?

It is good news that Internally Displaced persons caused by Boko Haram insurgency are gradually returning home as a result of successful war against the insurgents. This should be a sigh of relief on the issue of Internal Displacement in Nigeria, but that seem not to be the situation owing to the increment of Internal Displaced Persons as a result of incessant attacks by Herdsmen. Almost every state is beginning to establish IDPs Camps due to Herdsmen/Farmers' conflict. According to Charles (2016, p.18), Fulani-herdsmen have launched attacks in many states in the country more especially Taraba, Ekiti, Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Adamawa, Enugu, Imo and Abia among others. However, focus is placed on how Herdsmen/Farmers' conflict poses an impediment to attainment of Political Development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Herdsmen:** Herdsmen are also known as Pastoralists who are nomadic or semi-nomadic; whose primary occupation is raising livestock. Herdsmen move around with their livestock as a way of grazing them. Ayodele (2014, p.13) holds that Herdsmen engage in random movement of cattle while the semi-nomadic makes trans-human migration and return to their camps or homes. Herdsmen normally reside in bushes where they made hunts. Their movements take off from there, and after grazing their livestock they return to their hunts. Herdsmen were originally known for residing in Sahara before they arrive Savaha and down



main South. According to Steve (2002, p.4), Herdsmen are largely located in the Sahel and semi-arid parts of West Africa but due to changes in climate patterns, many have moved further South into the Savannah and Tropical forest belt of West Africa. Herdsmen are largely found in countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Benin, and Cameroon. In Nigeria, the livestock supplied by Herdsmen provide a bulk of the beef consumption.

The sale of cattle, goat, sheep and dairy products such as milk constitute the primary source of income and livelihood of the herdsman. Their wealth and riches are mainly measured by the size of the cattle being the most treasured animal. This explains why Herdsmen value their cattle a lot even to the point of sacrificing for them. Their conflict with farmers became very unbearable since the high number of influxes to the South. Abbass (2012, p.8) holds that historically, Fulani herdsman have grazed in lands around the Arid and Sahel regions of West Africa partly because of the environmental conditions that limit the amount of land for agricultural purposes leading to less intense competition for land between farmers and herdsman; but however, after recurrent droughts in the Arid and Sahel regions, the Herdsman have gradually moved Southwards to the Guonea Savanna and the tropical parts which results in competing with Farmers for grazing routes.

**Farmers:** Farmers are those who engage in agriculture, which involves raising living organisms for food or raw materials. They are known for raising either field crops, orchards, vineyards, poultry, other livestock or combination of any. According to Abbass (2012, p.12), a farmer might own the farmed land or might work as a laborer on land owned by others, but in advanced economies, a farmer is usually a farm owner, while employees of the farm are known as farm workers, or farmhands.

In major developing nations, most farmers practice meager subsistence agriculture - a simple organic farming system employing crop rotation, seed saving, slash and burn, or other techniques, aiming at maximizing efficiency and production while meeting the need of the households and communities. In developed nations however, a person using such techniques on small patches of land might be called a gardener and may be considered a hobbyist. Such practice might be as a result of poverty or, ironically - against the background of large-scale agri-business.

Just like Herdsmen, Farmers equally have unions. Frederick (2000, p.12) maintains that framers are often members of local, regional or national Farmers' Unions or Agricultural Producers' Organizations and can exert significant political influence. As a union, they promote their interest and make profit. Farmed products might be sold either to a market, in a farmer's market, or directly from a farm. In a subsistence economy, farm products might to some extent be either consumed by the farmer's family or by the community.

**Conflict:** Conflicts are commonly seen as relational disputes between two or more parties. This does not mean that for conflict to erupt there must be more than one party involved, hence one can be in conflict with himself. Here, we are concerned with the conflict that involves more than one party, which is inter-personal conflict. In this, there exists friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group or individuals when beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict however, can arise between members of the same group which is generally known as 'Intra-group conflict'. In other words, once conflict involves another



group, it is known as 'Inter-group conflict'. This is the nature of Herdsmen/ Farmers' conflict. Rahim (2010, p.7) identifies four major elements in inter-group conflict:

- i) There are recognized opposing interests between parties in zero-sum situation
- ii) There must be a belief by each side that the other one is acting or will act against them
- iii) This belief is likely to be justified by actions taken
- iv) Conflict is a process, having developed from their past interactions.

Building on this, Rahim therefore sees conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities. In inter-group relations and conflict, there is key player. This is a collective sentiment a person's own group (in-group) feels toward another group (out-group). These inter group emotions are usually negative, and range in intensity from feelings of discomfort when interacting with a member of a certain other group to fall on hatred for another group and its members. Fischer (2012, p22) identifies four basic emotions that could be directed toward the out-group as follows:

- i) Envy: results when the out-group is perceived to have high competence, but low warmth. Envious groups are usually jealous of other group's symbolic and tangible achievements and view that group as competition.
- ii) Contempt: The out-group is taken to be low in both competence, and warmth. This is one of the most frequent inter group emotion. In this situation, the out group is held responsible for its own failures. In-group members also believe that their conflict with the out-group can never be resolved.
- iii) Pity: out-groups that are believed by the in-group to be high in warmth but low in competence are pitied. Usually, pitied groups are lower in status than the in-groups, and are not believed to be responsible for their failures.
- iv) Admiration: this occurs when an out-group is taken to be high in both warmth and competence. However, admiration is very rare because these two conditions are seldom met. An admired out-group is thought to be completely deserving of its accomplishments. Admiration is likely to arise when a member of the in-group can take pride in the accomplishments of the out-group, and when the out-group achievement does not interfere with the in-group.

### **Political Development**

Political development is commonly considered a more elusive concept than economic development. For Williams (2008, p24), it is more controversial in normative terms and more difficult to measure in empirical and operational terms. The concept is frequently used by both normative and non-normative or existential thinkers. At this, it is accepted that political system develops as it approaches the good political order. Pye (1975, p.387) sees part of this political order as existence of political equality with absence or minimal conflicts. For him, political development revolves around the relationship between the political culture, the authoritative structure, and the general political process which must be rooted in political equality. Such system creates sense of belonging and makes the citizens stakeholders in decision making process.



In modern world today, political development is a target country wish and strive to attain. A system characterized by justice, centered on cognizance of human value and dignity, without any part or group of persons feeling grossly marginalized especially, over means of satisfying his/her basic needs. Such system minimizes conflict and promotes attainment of political development. With minimum level of conflict, there exists political order which gradually ushers in political development. A state with such system is not associated with 'political decay'. Political decay portrays the length of chaos and disorder in a political system. According to James (1924, p.43), political instability and conflict retards political development of a nation. Here, political development is seen as an increase in national unity, political participation and drastic decrease in conflict within a nation.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Human Need Theory**

The theory adopted is Human Need Theory. It holds that all humans have basic human needs which they seek to fulfill. An attempt to deny or frustrate them from achieving these needs by other groups or individuals affects them immediately or later, thereby leading to conflict. Burton (1990, p.17) holds that Basic human needs in this sense comprise physical, psychological, economic, social and spiritual needs. Therefore, to provide access to one (example, food), and deny or hinder access to another will amount to denial and could make people to resort to violence in an effort to fulfill and protect these needs.

Here, one of the groups in search of fulfilling these basic human needs are Herdsmen, the other group are Farmers. The Herdsmen through their grazing of cattle are able to provide food and earn a living. Farmers as well provide food and earn a living through their crops. Therefore, attempts to deny or hinder Herdsmen from grazing their livestock frustrate them and as a result, lead to conflict, and vice versa.

### **Farmers-Herders Relations and Nigeria's Political Development: A Historical Exploration**

According to Azarya (1996), the Fulani pastoralists of West and Central Africa trace much of their current political, religious, and socio-cultural identity from the eighteenth and nineteenth century *jihad* which sedentarized them within conquered communities. The Fulani are said to originate from Senegambia, before spreading across some 20 states in West Africa and the Sahel, up to Western Sudan and the Central African Republic (Blench 1994; Shehu and Hassan 1995; Blench 2010; McGregor 2014).

In Nigeria, they are the mainstay of the meat and milk industry, accounting for about 90% of cattle herd ownership, which makes up 3.2% of the GDP (Abass 2012; Koster and de Wolff 2012). They rear different species of cattle, such as the *Keteku*, *Muturu*, and *Kuri*, but the *Zebu* is identified as the most common (Awogbade 1987; Iro 1994). They also supply skins, bones, and horns as complementary products.

The pastoralist system involves young men who tend the herd while the women cook and sell animal products in the market. The elders, in their own stead, are in charge of developing and managing resources at the levels of the community and domestic units (Awogbade, 1987; Iro 1994). Despite the development and the centralisation of the state dating back to the colonial era, these informal governing mechanisms have been key to understanding the challenges the pastoralists face with farmers, explaining their social stratification and their seemingly egalitarian nature (Dyson-Hudson 1990; Bradburd 1996; Okello et al. 2014).





From a historical point of view, certain scholars refer to the fact that conflicts resulting from cattle grazing have existed for as long as the practice of agriculture (Blench 2010; Abbass 2012). In the Nigerian context, however, colonization, together with the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate and the introduction of *jangali* (cattle tax), marginalized the Fulani and dispersed them further towards the South (Azarya 1996; Okello et al. 2014).

According to Ofuoku and Isife (2009), the advancement of farming through irrigation and the increased decimation of pasture across the savannah also extended the scope of conflicts, through transhumance, to the coastal zones which were more ecologically viable (Blench 2010). This evolution was complemented with the provision of affordable trypanocides, which provided a coping means for the herders in the tsetse-infested humid regions of southern Nigeria. Thus, the period from May to September, during the rainy season, has been identified as the intense period of clashes between pastoralists and farmers over arable land, when the Fulani return northwards with their cattle as the vegetation begins to appear. These clashes result from the invasion of the arable land by the cattle during this peak season of crop production (Adekunle and Adisa 2010; Abass 2012).

The failure of the government in mediating such conflicts and setting up judicial commissions cannot be underestimated because it pushes communities to take the law into their own hands. After the initiation of the first national livestock development project (NLDP) and the enactment of a grazing law by the Northern Nigeria Legislative Assembly in 1965, the authorities tried to provide grazing lands in order to make the nomadic Fulani sedentary (Awogbade 1987).

In collaboration with organisations such as the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the objective was to enhance productivity and to demarcate 4,125 grazing lands across Nigeria, covering about 4.3 million hectares, some of the lands being equipped with boreholes, fences, fire breaks, veterinary services, access roads, and dams (Awogbade 1987; Abass 2012; Koster and de Wolff 2012). The predominant types of ranches were to be individually owned by farmers with large investments; there were few options for cooperatives and a collective management of the herds. Since 2009, grazing routes have also been marked out through Nasarawa, Benue, Plateau, Kastina, Bauchi, Abuja, Sokoto, and Adamawa. According to Abass (2012), however, only 270 of these official grazing lands are functional.

### **The Impacts of Herdsmen/Farmers' Relations on Nigeria's Political Development**

Herdsmen and Farmer's clash is not a new incident in Nigeria. But the incessancy is what every concerned Nigerian is worried about. The conflict has engulfed almost every state of the federation. Currently, every clash ends up in claiming many lives and properties. This indicates involvement of ammunitions owned and handled by the herdsmen who were initially known for handling sticks. This phenomenon has created high level of insecurity, plunging the country to the path of political decay. This has contributed to the continuous call for restructuring the country.

The attacks are commonly blamed on Fulani-herdsmen. This could be owing to the fact that, they are widely known for rearing cattle. As a result, there exist suspicion and accusations of attempts by the Fulani extract to dominate and Islamize the country. In such a system that is characterized by conflict and suspicion impedes political development. According to Naziru



(2014, p.4), clashes between different groups of Fulani herders and Farmers have killed thousands of people in Nigeria for the past two decades, which has seriously threatened the survival of the country.

In 2014, more than 1,200 people lost their lives according to Global Terrorism Index 2015, this made Fulani armed Herdsmen the world's fourth deadliest militant group (cited in Mikailu, 2016, p.2). One of the most recent deadliest conflict was the February massacre of about 300 people in Agatu, Benue State, and Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani in Enugu State where over 50 people were killed. Villages and communities were sacked, properties worth millions were destroyed. Children became orphans, women became widows. IDPs Camps were hurriedly created and people languishing in pains, trauma, hunger and diseases, children witnessing and growing in pains and bitterness.

The conflict has led to anti-herdsmen sentiments in many parts of the country. State governments are under pressure by their people to enact anti-grazing laws. Under intense pressure, the President, Muhammadu Buhari (a Fulani extract) has ordered Security Forces to crack down on Cattle raiders. However, the issue is much more than this. Apart from clashes with farmers, there are reports that armed herdsmen are equally involved in armed robbery, rape and communal violence especially in North-Central part of the country. This saw ethnic, political, economic and religious overlap and the consequences are still seen with deep distrust, Farmers and community members seeing herdsmen as invaders who are at a mission to claim their lands.

There is no doubt to the fact that these conflicts are rooted in disagreement over the use and control of essential resources such as farm lands, grazing areas and water between Herdsmen and local Farmers. Herdsmen travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture. Against what they are known for, they often move around with fire-arms with the excuse of defending their cattle. Under such situation, they are already prepared for conflict. Any conflict at this point becomes colossal, having direct negative impact on Political development of the country.

The recent and most deadly attacks by Herdsmen on Agatu and Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani Communities threatened the unity of the country. Security breaches which led to the successful invasion of Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu state created large number of Internally Displaced persons (IDPs) which consequentially has political implications. This poses a threat against Nigerian Federation. This is owing to the fact that the threats it poses are not limited to Nimbo community alone but contagiously affect wider Nigerian community.

Political uncertainty and failure breeds division and mutiny in the security sector. Every personnel in all the security agencies have root and belong to a particular ethnic extract. The natural tendency to sympathize and even empathize with his people or ethnic nation is very obvious. This is a worst situation every country should avoid to experience. Security agencies, more especially the Military have been widely seen as an intervening agency. Conflict or division may ensue in any sector of the country and it is arrested by the intervention of the military, but when such ensued within the security sector, then the Carmel's back is broken. Such situation could be attributed to what led to the collapse of the First Republic of Nigeria which subsequently led to the Civil War. According to Shola (2009, p.21), Chukwuma Nzogwu was not happy with the attempt of domination and subjugation



exhibited by Sir, Ahmadu Bello and other Northern Political Chieftain which he perceived as impeding the development of the Nation, considering the level of their education, had to put a stop to that through the first military coup of 1966. There is therefore need to be conscious of the fact that these political implications occur chronologically, in other words, one leads to another.

It is therefore pertinent to nip these political implications at the bud, otherwise may result to colossal damage. This could start by preventing and avoiding the resurgence and reoccurrence of internal displacement caused by deliberately attacking the herdsmen or herdmen attacking farmers. It will help to heal the old wounds. In attempt to achieve this, the Federal Government under President Muhammadu Buhari should not hesitate in condemning such attacks, thereby, not giving room for any form of allegation, linking him of ignoring the attacks just because he is of Fulani extraction. Such effort will gradually restore feeling of protection by every ethnic group both majority and minority.

## CONCLUSION

Political Development indicates political stability. This is a priority to what countries strive to attain. The fragile and heterogeneous nature of Nigeria makes Political Development primary in her existence. But this is far from being realized, owing to incessant Herdsmen/Farmers conflict. The Federal and State governments should make a concerted effort towards legalizing the Grazing Reserve Policy. Clothing the policy with a legal framework will ensure certainty to its implementation across board. Though there has been controversy surrounding the adoption of this policy. It is therefore recommended that providing a lasting solution to this conflict will establish a basic step towards attaining Political Development. In resolving this conflict, the following steps should be observed:

- i) Allow for grazing routes fort for the herdsmen to avoid clashes with farmers.
- ii) Formalizing grazing activities in Nigeria. Here, government is expected to establish a system that regulates and has ability to give statistics of how many individuals or groups graze flocks, and where they are grazed in the country.
- iii) In conjunction with State governments, the Federal Government should establish Ranches in all the federating states.
- iv) Government should create social amenities (including accessible roads) within the Ranches
- v) There should be intensive enlightenment/awareness programs to educate the masses and parties involved. To allay protest that may erupt from other business sectors; the government should collect revenue in form of taxation from the Ranches, (this is similar to Motor Parks established by States and Local Governments where individual motorists conduct their businesses and pay remuneration to the government). This approach will undoubtedly assuage the controversy that may surround the policy.
- vi) Government should establish special markets for the products which provide an interface for primary buying and selling activities.





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