

# Nigeria's Contemporary Security Challenges: Herders – Farmers Conflict and Banditry

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## Abstract

Banditry and the violent conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria have become potentially dangerous in recent time resulting in humanitarian emergencies as thousands have been killed and many more uprooted from their homes while both the Federal and State government appears clueless on how best to contain the conflicts. The spread of the conflict to southern states of the country is aggravating the fragile relations among ethnic nationalities and religious groups. President Buhari, a Muslim and Fulani, has been accused of allowing the attacks to continue, and his Vice President, Professor Osibanjo, a Christian, has been faulted for failing to speak out. At the heart of the conflicts are dispute over grazing on farmlands and cattle rustlings; expansion of agriculturist population and cultivated land at the expense, deteriorating environmental condition such as desertification; breakdown in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of land and water disputes, drug abuse, proliferation of small arms and outright criminality, all of which points to a national security failure. The loss of faith in the national security architecture which assumes the form of creation of Special Security Forces, resort to self-help by state governments and citizens' groups, anti-grazing laws against ECOWAS protocol that allows unrestricted movement of animals for grazing across the countries in the sub-region and the culture of impunity. This paper examines the fundamental issues surrounding banditry and the Herders – Farmers conflict in Nigeria with a view to highlight its implications for national security in contemporary times. It is argued here that considering the seeming intractability of these conflicts and violence, it appears that the security architecture of the country has been hijacked and the Nigerian state has ceased to be in full control and command of the national security situation especially as the safety of life and property can no longer be guaranteed. The security regime has been hijacked, undermined, and compromised by non-state actors who operate confidently with reckless abandon and little decency and respect for human life.

**Keywords:** Herders-Farmers conflict, Banditry, Ethnic nationalities, Small arms, Security challenges, and Criminality.

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## Introduction

It appears that Nigeria's security regime has been hijacked, undermined, and compromised by non-state actors who operate confidently with reckless abandon and little decency and respect for human life. It is safe to argue that there is at the moment no singular notion of national security. Rather, there exists competing notion of security advanced by the contending forces in the Nigerian state. This implies that the state itself is at issue in most conflicts. Hence national security has to be seen as distinct from state security and regime security, with each component of society competing to preserve and protect its own well-being. What emerges in such contentious environment can be better characterized as an insecurity dilemma, the obvious consequences of competition of the various forces in society being less effective security for all or for certain sectors of the population, less effective capacity of centralized state institutions to provide security of life and property and increased vulnerability of the state and its people to influence and control by non-state actors.

Although insecurity in many Northern States is a to very large extent, a consequence of Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, rural banditry and cattle rustling especially in the North West and North Central zones have assumed alarming proportions. The killings continue remorselessly and even ruthlessly unabated. It appears that Nigerians have simply become inured of these horrific killings; they seemed to have been robbed of their sense of feeling and their nationhood tragically. In fact, cases of farmers-herders have been widespread in Nigeria in recent times. Conflict emanating from cattle-grazing actually accounted for thirty-five percent (35%) of all reported cases between 1991 and 2005. Out of reported 389 incidents of herders and farmers conflict from 1997 to 2015, 371 had occurred in the Middle-Belt, otherwise known as the North-Central. The North-Central states namely Benue, the Federal Capital Territory, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara and Plateau are the most affected areas in the country (SCA, 2016).

Conflict and violence between herders and farmers has also become a common occurrence and regularity in the North-West zone in general often resulting in heavy losses of lives and destruction of property as well as the killing of livestock. Conflict between herders and farmers have also manifested as the most prominent, violent incidents, by far, in several states in the South-West. The recurrence of conflict between farmers-herders in the South-East zone, especially in Enugu state, is an affirmation of the seeming ubiquitous nature of farmers-herders'

crisis across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria (SCA, 2016). In all cases, incidents of cattle rustling have become more frequent and severe, degenerating into militarized activity with no precedence in the history of cattle rustling as it manifests itself with devastating acts of human slaughter, rape, burning of pasture and settlement structures, abductions and utmost revenge. Conflict have overwhelmed state security forces, eroded traditional conflict management mechanisms and adversely impacted on pastoral mobility and environmental resources.

Closely related with cattle rustlings is the rise of banditry activities. Banditry is largely characterized by armed criminal gangs, the waylaying of travellers, including live stocks in transit, and relieving the victims of their possessions. Banditry is common in areas associated with farmers and herders conflict, highways. The situation is so bad that the Global Terrorism Index, a comprehensive study by the Institute for Economic and Peace Analysis Impact of terrorism on 163 countries covering 99.7% of the world's population ranked Nigeria as Number 3 only after Iraq and Afghanistan, with Syria, Pakistan and Somalia performing better than Nigeria. Although Kidnapping started in Southern part of the country, it has together with banditry become an industry in the North, with villages having to pay communal ransoms (Mu'azu, 2018).

The human rights watch dog, Amnesty International (AI) said it independently verified estimated figures showed that from January to June 2018; at least 1, 813 people were murdered in seventeen states. This doubles the 894 people killed in 2017 and that the death toll reflects killings as a result of farmers-herders conflict, communal clashes, Boko Haram attacks and banditry. The human rights watch dog is gravely concerned about the rising spate of killings across the country, especially the communal clashes between farmers and herders and attacks by bandits across at least seventeen states. It is the group's considered opinion that the Nigerian authorities have a responsibility to protect life and property, but they are clearly not doing enough against the backdrop that the attack on Plateau state where armed gunmen attacked eleven villages on June 23, 2018 for at least seven hours and killed at least 200 villagers without intervention from State Security forces (Jimoh, Abuh and Deka, 2018). Ahovi (2018) confirmed the incidents thus:

*"It was killing spree by unknown gunmen yesterday (June, 24, 2018) in Plateau. Unconfirmed reports put the number of people killed at more than 100. The attacks said to have started at about 11.00pm occurred in the three local government areas of Barkin Ladi, Riyom and Jos South, and are reportedly ongoing. State governor, Simon La-long, cut short his attendance of the All Progressive Congress (APC) convention in Abuja, and has imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on the areas inhabited by the Berom ethnic group." (2018:1).*

The Plateau State police spokesman Assistant Superintendent (ASP) Mathias Terna Tyopev, however stated that only eleven corpses were recovered at Gashish village in Barkin Ladi, urging the citizens to disregard the high figures reported on the social media. The spokesman of Operation Safe Haven (OPSH), Major Adam Umar, confirmed the attack but refused to disclose any casualty figures. He stated that sporadic shooting by the attackers attracted his men who mobilized quickly to the scene but that while the soldiers were busy repelling the first attack, another broke out elsewhere simultaneously (Ahovi, 2018). What is worrisome is that the violence in Plateau started after an attack, which was followed by reprisals from June 21, 2018 brought to the fore unacceptable security lapses despite the deployment of security forces, including the military in over thirty communities in the states.

Furthermore, an estimated two thousand, seven hundred and thirty-two people (2,732) were killed in thirty-three states and the Federal Capital Territory(FCT)-Abuja from violent incidents including attacks from Boko haram, Kidnapping, armed herders, various militia, and communal clashes between April and June, 2020 (Sanni, 2020). The number of fatalities across the thirty-three states and the FCT incorporating the six Geo-Political zones in the country is frightening. According to SMB intelligence analysis, one thousand (1000) people were killed between January to March 2020, while one thousand, seven hundred and thirty-two (1,732) people were killed in April, 2020. The figure includes the number of deaths among security personnel in the country. Details of the SMB report showed that 221 security personnel including 173 soldiers, 39 police officers, 3 civil defence officers, and six vigilantes were killed in three months. The security index recorded 854 deaths of "terrorists and bandits" and 502 insurgents. Borno State recorded the highest number of deaths with 941 killings. The rise in number of death of soldiers derived from increased attacks on the North-West (Sani, 2020). Government must answer the following questions: who are these attackers? Where do they come from? Where do they go after attacks? Who arms them? Why is security forces' response time very slow? Answer to these fundamental questions must be provided. Otherwise, the killings will continue and killers will continue to go unpunished because those who should hold them accountable have sentimental attachment to them (Adebowale, 2018).

### **Nature of the Problem**

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2018), over 1, 300 Nigerians have been killed in the conflict between herders and farmers in just seven months. ICG contended that the conflict has evolved from spontaneous reactions to provocations and now to deadlier planned attacks, particularly in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba States. Due to the general nature of insecurity in Nigeria in recent time, the herdsmen whose only equipment used

to be sticks and water bottles now carry sophisticated weapons as part of their work tools. Whenever they meet with confrontation as the search for grass and water they do not hesitate in employing violence. This accounts for the upsurge of violence in the North Central Region and some parts of the South West and South East. Thus it is estimated that in 2016 alone about 2500 persons were killed during the conflicts between these nomadic herders and sedentary food and cash crop farmers. Not only have people been killed in large numbers, farms have also been destroyed in the process. These clashes have been very bloody in various states including Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Katsina, Taraba, Enugu, Imo, Ondo, and Ekiti (Ekpu, 2019). A few of these cases will underscore the unpalatable nature of the problem.

Hoodlums on Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 killed three brothers in their farm at Zakka village, Safana Local Council area of Katsina State. The victims were attacked on a farmland close to one of bases of the bandits. The victims who are of the same parents were in the farm when the bandits attacked them. This incident occurred less than one month after over thirty people were slaughtered by bandits in three council areas of Danmusa, Faskari and Batsari. On Sunday, June 16, 2019 the Zamfara State Police Command confirmed the killing of 34 persons by bandits in an attack on Tungar Kafau and Gidan Wawa Communities in Shinkafi Council Area of the State. Fresh attacks were reported in the night of Monday, June, 16, 2019 in Ardo-Kola and Donga Local Government Areas of Taraba during which houses and cars were also razed during the onslaught blamed on armed herdsmen. The incessant raids by armed herdsmen and ethnic conflicts in the State prompted the state government to impose a night curfew on the state (Michael, 2019, Akpeji, 2019).

In spite of interventions by stakeholders to broker peace between the Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups in Benue and Taraba States, five persons were killed in a fresh attack on farms by Jukun on Gyenku in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State. It would be recalled that this incidence took place barely one week after a military operation code named, Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS) led by its Commander, Major General Adeyemi Yekini, held a peace and security meeting with youths, traditional rulers and other critical stakeholders in Benue and Taraba States, who signed at Kente in Taraba (Wentu, 2019). In a related development, armed men, suspected to be herdsmen invaded Koton-Karfi and Onzo communities in Kogi Local Council of Kogi State, killing unspecified number of person. The two separate attacks took place on Tuesday, June 25, 2019 between 2.00 am killing unspecified number persons. The attackers numbering over 30, fully armed with AK 47 and other dangerous weapons, invaded the communities and opened fire on the houses and the people. The armed bandits divided themselves for the coordinated attacks on the two communities. Three persons died on the spot during the attacks which lasted several hours (Obensa, 2019).

More than 10 people were killed in the evening of Wednesday, July, 3, 2019 by bandits who rode on motorcycles and attacked four communities in Danmusa and Kankara Local Councils of Katsina State. The bandits first attacked Ungwar Nagwade community where they killed four people, then proceeded to Unguwar Rabo where they killed nine persons and later moved on to Gidan Daji where they killed two two residents, all in Kankara Council Area. The same group of bandits stormed Danmusa Council Area where they attacked traders at a market in Maidabino community during which more than a dozen people were killed and others injured while trying to flee for safety. The attacks took place while the heads of Nigeria's security forces were meeting with President Buhari (Michael, 2019).

For most part of 2019, the South-West region of Nigeria was under a siege as a result of widespread insecurity with banditry assuming an alarming dimension, kidnappers operating untamed, while herdsmen embarked on wanton destruction of lives and property at will. In fact, the Region reeled from unprecedented incidences of killings, kidnapping and rapes and other life-threatening incidents that made the city centres and roads unsafe for residents and travellers. On June 25, 2019, a commuter bus was waylaid in Akure-Ikere Road by gunmen and all passengers on board allegedly abducted and whisked to unknown destinations. In recent times, relatives and survivors have told series of pathetic tales of attacks carried out by killer herdsmen and other yet to be identified criminal elements that have continuously been terrorising the residents of South-West Region (Adeyemi, et al, 2019).

Travellers and motorists are having a tough time doing their business. The manner in which the kidnappers launch attacks from the forests armed with sophisticated guns, shooting sporadically in the air and cart away their victims fill residents with fear every time they are about to embark on a road trip, especially in the evening. As a result, vehicular traffic thinned out in some roads in the zone. Most affected include the ever-busy Ibadan-Akure Road, Ondo-Ife Road, Osogbo-Ode Omu Road, Ado Ekiti-Akure Road, Ondo-Ife, Oshogbo-Ilesha Road, while Imeko-Abeokuta Road was almost deserted as a result of constant attacks by herdsmen. Consequently, commercial vehicles are forced to move in a convoy with escorts. Farmers in Oke-Ogun, Oyo State have taken to fleeing their farmlands at the sight of approaching herds of cattle as attacks survivors have always said their attackers and kidnappers resembled herdsmen, while some are always decked in military gear (Adeyemi, et al, 2019).

The Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore estimated that 5000 cattle herders have been killed in several states in Nigeria in an ongoing conflict between nomadic herders and local communities. The Secretary-General of the organization, Saleh Alhassan lamented that enough has not been reported about the murder of herdsmen. He claimed that cattle

herders have been brutally killed, with at least two million cows lost since the conflict started in Plateau and Taraba states, Southern Kaduna and in parts of Kogi and Niger states without any consequence for the perpetrators. Alhassan also stated that members of the group have equally been victims in Zamfara state and a few other states in the North but the incidence were hardly reported. For instance, he stated that:

*“800 of our people were killed by a militia group in Manbilla Plateau. We also suffered the killing of 97 of our people by Bachama Militia in Numan, Adamawa State. In Southern Kaduna to be specific in Kajuru we lost 103 members. So far, 5000 of our people lost their lives in the last ten years, since the crisis erupted. The most painful thing is that nobody has been put on trial. Nobody has been charged. In Southern Kaduna, for instance, in 2011, 400 of our people were murdered and nothing was done to the people who perpetrated this dastardly act. Today, the killers are walking on the streets as free citizens. Nobody was arrested or prosecuted (Boda, 2018:2.)*

### **Dynamics of the Insecurity Challenges**

An in-depth knowledge of the pastoral way of life and associated insecurity are very important for understanding the conflicts between herders and farmers because of its policy implications. Although herders are mostly Fulani, an average Fulani man cannot be labelled “pure pastoralist” because various categories of the society have different strategies to survive, varying from exploitation of people (the historical role of the elite) to the exploitation of cattle and land. Yet, the elite and pastoralists, even artisans and merchants/traders, refer to themselves as pastoralists, which they define as their occupational attribute of their identity. Only very few define themselves as cultivators, which no doubt they are, though they possess livestock in most cases. In the course history these strategies have changed completely. The boundaries between occupation strata were more rigidly observed in the past. In recent time, every one may occupy him/herself with various strategies (though with some exceptions). This situation makes it difficult to attach labels to them. In other words, should they be called pastoralists, indigenous rulers, cultivators, as they themselves do; or should their land use be analysed and labelled according to the general perception. Another problem is to investigate if their strategies to manage the environment are the best to cope with all the ecological insecurities they encounter. In fact, how are these strategies formed and continuously reformed in view of the ecological and political insecurities inherent in their environment? Some scholars and social commentators regard the accumulation of livestock, and the adaptation of herd management to the harsh environments pastoralists inhabit, as the central elements in pastoral pursuit (Aljumaa, 1995).

The problem pastoralists had to face as a result of drought had led to reassessment of the concept of pastoralism. Against this backdrop, a high degree of diversity in strategies of pastoralists include increased inequalities based on class and gender, large scale migration to adjacent regions, rural centres, and towns, unwanted cultural change and social disintegration or even refugee camps as the final resort. This doom scenario culminated in a Hobbesian world of insecurity, war, famine and drought. It is therefore not unusual for pastoralists in crisis situations (such as drought, famine or inter communal wars/conflicts) to resort to numerous adaptive strategies to cope with these hazards. The coping strategies include herd diversification, adjustment of herd-size, increase of mobility, splitting up into small groups (herds and people) - temporary ‘sedentarization’. The point being made is that instability is an inherent characteristic of pastoral way of life. Consequently, pastoralism may be perceived as an adaptation to harsh climate circumstance, of which the central element is mobility. This implies that the herds have to be moved from scarce to more abundant regions. This is however a risky affair because animals of pastoralist are threatened by predation, animal diseases, and lack of pasture (Aljumaa, 1995).

The second inherent source of instability of the pastoral way of life is political and military control over water and pasture for which contact with or control over the outside world is essential. Often times, water and feed are in short supply in the arid zone inhabited by pastoralists, and cultivators may seek to settle near these source of water blocking access to herds. The access of pastoralists to small arms and light weapons may partly derive from infiltration of fleeing Boko Haram terrorists whose capacity have been degraded by military offensive. Conflict between herders and farmers in over natural resources, especially competition for land has a long history in sub-Saharan Africa in which herders and children were killed over competition for land has a long history in Sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout the Western Sahel, due to expansion of agriculturalist population and cultivated land at the expense of pasturelands; deteriorating environmental conditions, desertification and soil degradation; breakdown in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of land and water disputes; and proliferation of small arms and crimes in rural areas have been implicated in the conflicts (Foreign Affairs, 2015). In agreement with this view, Akinwotu (2018) submits that the population increases at an astronomical rate and the available land shrunk, farmers have settled on land that herders have used over the years as grazing routes to move their cattle seasonally. This issue in contemporary time have polarized Nigeria, especially the Middle Belt, the agrarian bread basket that stretches across the country. Herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria usually involve disputes over land and and/or cattle between herders (in particular the Fulani and Hausa) and farmers (especially the Tiv or Tarok).

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The Nigerian economy is shifting toward free-market principles, thus successive governments have undertaken painful transformations –from massive privatizations, to righting severer balance-of-payments problem to bringing massive fiscal deficits in checks. As difficult as this process has been, the country's efforts in institutionalization of this market-oriented process and harnessing it to consolidate its fledging democratic institutions have even more challenging. An obvious consequence of cultivating and sustain these set of values is the stranglehold of poverty on majority of citizens. It cannot be denied that Nigeria suffers from deep-rooted human security crisis, as is evident in the distributional inequalities and massive social and physical infrastructure deficits that stand out clearly as the weak links in Nigeria's political economy. The country is an important country of origin, transit and destination country for migrants in West African region. Consequently, migration scenarios such as regular labour migration, irregular or undocumented migration, human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, internally displaced persons, and refugees have been associated with the country. There are more people emigrating from, than immigrating to the country resulting in persistent loss of potential agents of development as a result of emigration of highly skilled professionals abroad and death of thousands of youth who perish annually in their bid to illegally enter European countries. The fundamental drivers of migration include conflict, poverty and insecurity which demand comprehensive policy attention. It is also important that the report address newly-emerging migration trends and dynamics, including migration and terrorism, trade, climate change and disability (CISLAC, 2016).

The country's human development index when compared with other countries is quite low. Curiously, as poverty and unemployment are increasing Nigeria continues to record impressive GDP growth rate. The United

Nations Global Multidimensional Poverty index published in 2015 has the following figures for Nigeria on poverty: “South-West-19.3%, South-East-25.2%, South-South-27.3%, North-Central-45.7%, North-East-76.8%, North-West-80.9%. A sample from some States, Plateau-51.6%, Katsina-82.2%, Zamfara-91.1%, Ekiti-12.9%, Yobe-90.2%, Lagos-8.5%, Anambra-11.2% and Edo-19.1%. The 2017 Oxford University Human Development Initiative Multidimensional Poverty index is basically the same as the United Nation’s. Zamfara is 92%. Now take a look at samples of literacy levels. Lagos, Imo, and Ekiti are 96%, Zamfara-19%, Sokoto-15%, Katsina-10% and Yobe-7%. According to the 2006 national population figures, Ekiti State’s population was 2,398,957, while Yobe was 2,321,399. Ekiti State’s average monthly Federal Allocation Account Committee (FAAC) is N3.7 billion. Yobe State’s average monthly FAAC is N4billion, and in 2017 the net annual allocation to Yobe state was N39.5 billion, while the net allocation to Ekiti was N25.6 billion. Annual internally generated revenue to Ekiti is N4.97 billion, while Yobe is N3.5 billion. When you consider the fact that the 2017 FAAC allocation to Akwa Ibom State was N143 billion, Rivers State-N119 billion, and both Ekiti and Yobe States are essentially poor rural agrarian states with the same population. However, take a look at the following 2015 figures. Number of primary school classroom-Yobe-533, Ekiti-7086. Percentage of teachers qualified to teach, Yobe-22%, Ekiti-90%. Multidimensional Poverty Index for Ekiti is 12.9%, Yobe is 90.2, while the literacy rate for Ekiti is 96%, and Yobe is 7%; you can then see that the parts of the country that have the worst incidents of insurgency, banditry, terrorism and kidnapping are also the parts that have the worst and pervasive extreme poverty and low literacy level (Mu’azu, 2019:18).

Again, it was recently reported that:

*For 2019 Unity schools applications, of the 75,000 children that applied to sit for the Common Examination, 25,000 from Lagos State, while just 59 applied from Zamfara State. According to the 2006 population figures, Lagos was 9,113,604 while Zamfara was 3,278,873 thus Zamfara is more than one-third of the population of Lagos. If only 59 children applied out of a population of 3.2 million people, obviously there is a problem (Mu’azu, 2019:18).*

Mu’azu explained that the consequence of the above situation in the following words:

*Among the thousands of those unfortunate children who did not or were not able to apply are those with brains of professors, doctors, multi-billionaire industrialists, computer scientists and IT professionals. But when they are uneducated, unskilled, and poor, they have no opportunities and cannot create opportunities; they are thus potential bandits, kidnappers and terrorists (2019: 18).*

Collectively, the impact of these socio-economic inadequacies is strong enough to push the citizens to the brink. The manifestations of violent conflicts such as farmers- herders’ conflict and banditry are epiphenomenal. In fact, they are results of the yawning deficit of human security, hence should be urgently addressed because socio-economic prosperity can also help to assure peace.

Proliferation of small arms has for a long time been a difficult nut for state security forces to crack. The revelation by one-time Minister of Interior retired Lt. General Abdulrahman Dambazau about 350 million arms are in wrong hands in the country underscores the enormity of the problem (Onani, 2018). Nigeria is categorized as an origin, destination and transit point of arms business. Nigeria was regarded as a transit point for small arms shipments to Angola, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leon, when these countries were in conflict. With the end of conflicts in these countries, there was mass movement of weapons from West African countries, still using Nigeria as a transit point, to the central African countries. Nigeria is also a producer of craft guns like revolvers and short guns, which are categorized as SALW. Comparatively, they are inexpensive and easy to acquire, unlike the more expensive and sophisticated models of factory-made small arms. These locally produced guns are mainly used for hunting, community policing and self- defence. Local production of arms is associated with some towns in Delta, Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Oyo states, while fabrications are done in Plateau, Niger and Edo states (Modi, 2013).

A great majority of the SALW in circulation in the country are those imported illegally from countries with loose weapons control systems such as countries in the former Eastern Europe and the defunct USSR (Union of Socialist Republics) reputed to have been the world’s largest exporter of arms to the Third World. The situation degenerated by the reported links between Bokoram and the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, AQIM, a branch of the international terrorists’ network based in Mali and Algeria. Over the years, the porous nature of Nigerian borders has dominated national discourse unfortunately not enough seem to have been done. The country’s borders cover about 5,000 kilometres (both land and littoral), with many designated entry points (Onani, 2018). In agreement with this view, Modi (2013) opines that Nigeria’s borders are massive with hundreds of footpaths crisscrossing to neighbouring countries. According to him, out of 27 local government areas in Borno State, nine share a common border with neighbouring countries. He stated that from villages in southern part of the state such as those in Gwoza Local Government, it is easier to access towns and cities across the border in Cameroon for business and leisure than Maiduguri, the capital of the state. In fact, because the weapons are small, light and collapsible makes it easy to be concealed and moved from one point to another.

The problem of Hard Drug use and trafficking has in recent time emerged as one of the serious challenges of the Nigerian state. Drug trafficking and consumptions had fuelled vicious wars in Latin America, Asia and in some African countries. It had caused a lot of personal anguish and serious insecurity in many countries. Consequently, Nigeria cannot afford to ignore it because drug abuse is no longer limited to its cities. Rural towns and villages are being immersed in this social pathology as well. Recent media reports about the spate of drug consumption in the country is frightening. No one is left out. In fact, men, women, youths and teenagers are increasingly involved in various degrees of intensity, from one State to another (Abdulraheem, 2018).

Illicit drug trade did not assume a threatening dimension in Nigeria until the 1980s when some young and adventurous Nigerians discovered its lucrative nature in the developed countries. Faced with increasing drug trade volume, the Federal Government established the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) by Decree No. 48 of January, 1990. Its mandates include, “eliminating the growing, processing, manufacturing, selling, exporting and trafficking of hard drug”. While the agency has recorded tremendous success in its assigned role, it continues to face huge challenges because the sale, cultivation and use of hard drugs, especially cannabis, continues to thrive with more sophistication. By the time the NDLEA was established, Nigeria had become a popular transit point between the Far East or Latin America and Europe. Nigeria was also known to produce high volume of cannabis (Indian hemp). Internationally, the country began to record negative image due to its drug connection. The point of fact is that in time past, the consumption of Indian hemp thrived in many parts of the country. Due to its very low price, it was within the reach of several young people. Sniffing of adhesive glues and some other materials that negatively alter the body functions were also in use. Although certain groups such as motor park touts, commercial sex workers, and jobless youths were known to indulge in illicit drug, the situation has changed such that other segments of society have joined the bang-wagon. Indian hemp is just one of the numerous destructive drugs that more and more people now consume. The Nigerian brand of politics in which youths are employed as thugs by politicians increases the indiscriminate and excessive use of hard drugs to make them heartless when they indulge in destructive activities.

For Sunday and Salau, (2020), the Nigerian State is yet to show enough capacity in the fight against banditry because its kinetic approach has remained faulty due to lack of capacity on the part of the security agencies. Of note, is the absence of vital logistics equipment such as multi-modular mobility assets, all season and all-terrain transport assets, helicopters, motor cycles, and effective communication gadgets which could make access to bandits in farming forests a huge task. Furthermore, the State’s seeming inability to adequately deploy men in strength to vulnerable communities in far flung parts of the country remains a huge set back in the fight against banditry and farmer-herders conflict. Consequently, notwithstanding the fact that the epic centre of banditry is North-West, states bordering Rugu forest including Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi and Niger have also witnessed deadly attacks up to Sokoto. Against this backdrop, it is problematic to conceive the problem as a regional rather than national as it goes beyond the North-West region. In fact, some bandits even come down South to kidnap their victims.

It would be recalled that President Buhari in May 2018 directed the military to wipe out all bandits from Nigeria. Over two years after, the order is yet to be fulfilled. Unless the Nigerian government moves swiftly and takes timer action against criminal elements perpetrating insecurity and holding the country to ransom, “bedlam” may ensue as citizens may resort to self since the government cannot guarantee safety of lives and property (Sunday and Salau, 2020). The point worthy of note is that Miyetii Allah Kautal hore, led by Bello Abdu-Ilahi, ordinarily cattle breeders’ association has morphed into the equivalent of a terrorist organization operating without let or hindrance in the public space. Unfortunately, the organization’s sense of self-importance has grown in provocative proportions since the Buhari administration took over the governance of the country in 2015. The organization apart from threatening other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, in a rather vexatious manner, its leaders not long ago declared that “Nigeria belongs to Fulani” and that the “Fulani will rule forever”. He also alerted the Nation that his organization has concluded arrangements to set up its own security outfit of five thousand men and more to be deployed in all the states of the country. The Guardian Editorial explained the security implications of Bello Abdu-Ilahi’s unguarded utterance in the following words:

*“Such an asinine view would not have deserved a second read but for the implicit complicity of the federal authorities with the antics of these arrogant merchants of violence and mischief. There has been no reprimand from the presidency. Also, the security agencies have conveniently sealed their ears and looked the other way while words capable of inflaming passions are being thrown into the airwaves. Added to this is the entrenchment of settlements of herders inside bushes across the country from where they unleash violence on innocent citizens in communities and highways. Whereas Federal Government had asked all citizens to surrender their weapons, the order does not affect these murderous herdsmen. They can be seen carrying AK-47 freely while tending their cattle in certain parts of the country... The impression is that the president is willy-nilly promoting the sectarian interest of his kinsmen above and over the national interest. This is dangerous and a threat to the much-needed*

*national cohesion* “(The Guardian Editorial, 2020).

Unless the Federal Government moves swiftly and takes firmer actions against criminal elements perpetrating insecurity and holding the Nigerian State to ransom, bedlam may ensue as the citizens may resort to self-help since government cannot guarantee safety of lives and property. More so, with the high command of the military authorities appear to be at their wits-end and the present crop of service chiefs in the saddle continues to exhibit ineffectiveness even if a change in tactics is affected.

### **Federal and State Governments’ response to the Conflicts**

I contend that one of the core justifications for the existence of the Nigerian state, is the provision and sustenance of condition that ensure the security of lives and property of the citizens, so that they are free to express their free will in pursuits of self-fulfilment. Put differently, the irreducible function of the state is to continually secure itself against internal insurrection and external aggression by providing the security of lives and property of citizens. Ideological differences notwithstanding, this is the state’s most critical defining function. The “monopoly of the legitimate” use of force by which the state is defined- to defend itself against possible external aggression- and to secure its citizens against competing users of instrument of force speaks precisely to this point. This is only way the state harvests in return the loyalty of its citizens, which translates into high degree of legitimacy and the ready inclination to obey its laws.

The Federal Government’s response had been largely through deployment of state security forces. Consequently, “Operation Safe Haven” was created for the North-Central and stationed in Plateau State with areas of operation extending to Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa and Kwara states to quell to quell ethno-religious conflicts and other criminal activities are cardinal evidence in this regard. Other government’s response includes constitution of Commissions of inquiry and humanitarian assistance to persons displaced by the conflict. In addition, some State governments in the zone drawing inspiration from the Niger Delta situation have also initiated amnesty programmes - Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) - as forms of pardon for repentant warlords, yet conflicts and insecurity continue to impact on inhabitants of the zone.

For the North-West, “Operation Sharan Daji/Operation Harbin Kunama 11 was established to battle armed bandits, cattle rustlers and robbers operating particularly in Zamfara, Kaduna and fringes of Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina and Kano States, yet the conflicts continue. Government’s review of the escalation of insecurity in the zone resulted in the launching of a new operation on Thursday, June 4, 2020 codenamed “Operation Accord” was launched on Thursday, June 4, 2020 to wipe out banditry, Kidnapping and other criminality from the North-West and North-Central part of Nigeria. The operation was promptly planned by the military high command of the armed forces of Nigeria to tackle banditry and other violent crimes in the area. The troops through land and air offensives successfully neutralized 392 bandits and other criminal elements since the commencement of the operation in the two zones (Killte, 2020).

Similarly, the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Turkur Yusufu Buratai flagged off Operation SAHEL SANITY on the 6 July, 2020 as part of activities of the Nigerian Army Day celebration, 2020 during which the Nigerian Army Super Camp IV Faskari in Katsina State was established. The aim of the operation is to support Operation HADRIN DAJI in stemming the tides of the activities of armed bandits, cattle rustlers, kidnappers, incessant killings in the North-West zone of the country. These acts of criminality orchestrated by the bandits had before now crippled the agricultural, social and economic activities of the people of this zone. The people of the North-West zone felt the immediate impact of the operation with the tremendous success achieved within the short period of time. Eighty bandits were killed, 33 suspects arrested, 943 cows, 633 sheep/ram recovered and 7 AK47 rifles, one GPMG, 16 Dane guns were captured in the onslaught against bandits in Katsina State by troops of Operation Sahel Sanity. 17 kidnap victims were also rescued, while 14 bandits’ informants and collaborators were arrested. In addition, several bandits’ camps including the notorious Dangote Triangle and their logistics bases were destroyed within the first month of the ant-bandit operation codenamed Operation Sahel Sanity (Ndidi, 2020). Prior to the creation of the above Special Security Forces, “Operation Mesa” had been operating as a nationwide security taskforce. It is called “Operation Yaki” in Kaduna State and “Operation Zenda” in Benue State.

It appears that the Federal government’s high security “operations” have not achieved desired results, hence affected states and citizens’ decision to take their destiny in “their own hands” by devising measures to confront the insecurity challenge. Consequently, not a few Governors had set up security and vigilante groups to assist the police in their operations. In fact, the vigilante system has been invaluable in the North-East as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) have been acknowledged to have contributed immensely to the success recorded by the army in the fight against terrorism in that region. In fact, it is claimed that 23 states across the country currently have similar local security outfits. For instance, in Kaduna State, the state government in 2018 established a security outfit known as “Kaduna State Vigilance Service” to assist security agencies in to tackle criminality. Its function was to compliment the work of the police and other security agencies in intelligence gathering and crime prevention (Ojo, 2020).

Sokoto State government also established a local security outfit called “Yan Banga”, which operates in all



most all villages in the state. “Yan Banga” tracks criminals and hands them over to security agencies for prosecution. Also in the state, the Governor Aminu Tambuwal’s administration retained Sokoto Corps Marshal established by the previous administration with offices in the 23 Local Councils of the state. The Marshals are posted to the state tertiary institutions and traffic joints in the state capital to compliment internal security of the areas. However, unlike the Corps Marshals which does not bear arms, the vigilantes are allowed to carry small arms such as single-barrel and pump action rifles which are registered with the police. In Zamfara State, the administration of Abulaziz Yari, had established arm-bearing “Yan Kansai” Local Vigilantes but the current government scrapped it and empowered the local vigilantes to carry out security functions without bearing arms. Vigilante committee were also set up in each of the 44 Local Councils of Kano State. A Local Chief called Mai Unguwa or any other prominent personality chairs each committee. The committee employ youths who provide security to such quarters where they are formed and they are paid allowance. Their jobs include checking movement of people at night, arresting thieves, and checking the activities of thugs and other criminal elements within the community they serve. The bear locally made guns and fire shots (Ojo, 2020).

In Borno state, many local security outfits were created by the state government but for our purpose, the local hunters and vigilante groups, which have been working even before insurgency will suffice. Recently, the present state government employed the services of hunters across the North and neighbouring countries to boost the efforts at fighting insurgency and other forms of crimes. The groups carry light arms, locally made guns and pump action guns. The Ebony state, government established Neighbourhood Watch Group with members drawn from the 13 Local Councils to compliment to compliment the efforts of state security forces in crime control and other security challenges in the state. The group carry handcuffs only to arrest criminals. In May 2016, the Government of Abia State revived a local vigilante outfit popularly known as the “Bakassi Boys” and directed all community chiefs to nominate ten youths for a two-week intensive training before deployment to rural communities. Furthermore, in July 2016, Cross River State Government announced plans to constitute a three thousand- member “Homeland Security Service”. Although member of this group do not bear arms, the outfit carry out activities such as providing intelligence on herders’ movement and activities (Afolalu & Audi, 2018). Similarly, the Enugu State Government engaged the services of 1,700 men in 2019 to serve as forest guards, its own model of vigilante. The members were drawn from the 17 local councils in the state. Its approach is consistent with community-based approach to securing lives of citizens. The Anambra State Government established Anambra Vigilant Services (AVS) and it operates in the 189 communities. The State government coordinates the activities of AVS through an appointed coordinator. In Taraba, the State government created the Taraba Marshalls in 2018 to tackle insecurity and other violent crimes few of the members carry locally made guns, while a few others armed cutlasses and horsehip.

Against the background of widespread insecurity, with banditry taking an alarming turn, kidnappers operating untamed, criminals masquerading as herdsmen embarking on wanton destruction of lives and property at will, incidents and associated public outcry, South-West Governors, namely Dr. Kayode Fayemi (Ekiti State), Arakunrin Rotimi Akeredolu (Ondo State), Engr. Seyi Makinde (Oyo State), Prince Dapo Abiodun (Ogun State), Chief Adegboyega Oyetola (Osun State), and Mr. Babajide Sanwoolu (Lagos State) met in June 2019 at Ibadan and resolved to put aside their political differences to curb rising insecurity in the region and took far-reaching decisions to tackle the menace. One of those decisions included the formation of a joint Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN). To actualize their dream of bringing forth a regional security outfit, the governors sought and secured of the National Security Adviser, Retired Gen. Babagana Monguno after which they moved to design a structure for the outfit, providing infrastructure, including patrol vans, high capacity motorbikes and motorcycles, communication gadgets as well as recruitment of personnel, with Ibadan designated as the coordinating centre. The outfit which is codenamed Operation Amotekun was launched in January 9, 2020 (Adeyemi, 2020; Ojo, 2020).

The regional security outfit which will work in collaboration with existing security organizations in the country, especially the police will have a central control command under the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) Commission. However, every state will have its own offices and operate based on its peculiarity. With respect to funding, each state will fund its own branch of Operation Amotekun with support from their security trust funds. The Commissioner of Police in each state will oversee Amotekun. The operation will comprise personnel from groups like Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), local hunters and Nigeria Peace Corps, among others. Apart from the vigilante groups operating within each state, Amotekun will draw its membership from security experts and statutory security agencies such as the police and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. With each state operating from a given base, there will be Local Council organs which will coordinate Amotekun activities in each Local Council. The six South-West states’ commands will relate with the regional command to which each has contributed vehicles equipped with security and communication gadgets. The regional command will operate from the control centre in Ibadan, and will work closely with the DAWN Commission which provides administrative supervision to the project (Ojo, 2020).

Since the recruits of Amotekun are largely from unconventional security personnel, the top echelon of the police in the region have been mandated with the technical aspects to avoid inter-agency rivalry and clashes among members during patrol and other activities. In addition, to providing security clearance on those recruited as

members, the police would also exercise the legal power of arrest and prosecution and provide technical training and backup for Amotekun. The security outfit is designed to gather information about crimes and suspicious activities for interpretation and proper action, including prevention, management or counteraction. Amotekun will also undertake routine patrols in parts of highways in the region which the police are unable to cover day and night. Working with traditional rulers, its activities will also permeate local communities to keep an eye on suspicious residents, visitors and non-residents coming for business or related activities. The outfit is expected to deploy technology in its operations, including drones. By gathering intelligence and sharing it with the police and other statutory agencies, it is believed that these measures will go a long way in improving community peace and security across the South-West region (Ojo, 2020).

Despite the lofty objectives of Amotekun it appears the establishment of the security outfit did not receive the approval of the Federal government. Abubakar Malami, Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice argued that no State government, whether singly or in a group has a legal right and competence to establish any form of organization or agency for the defence of Nigeria or any of its constituent part. Malami appears to be worried that the South-West governors intend to usurp the constitutional right of the federal government to exclusively do what the constitution has exclusively empowered it to do (Agbese, 2020). Those opposed to the Justice Minister submitted that the issue of Amotekun is an issue of public safety and protection property, therefore is absolutely constitutional and legal. This school of thought argued forcefully that there is no law in Nigeria which prevents citizens from being able to secure their life and property. In fact, the Nigerian Police does not enjoy exclusive jurisdiction when it comes to the protection of life and property. As a matter of fact, we have shown somewhere earlier in this paper that in many parts of the Nigeria various outfits have been performing the duty of protecting life and property. In context of the provisions of the country's Criminal Code in Section 272-275, the right of citizens to arrest any person for committing an offence is legal and may be exercised individually or communally. While the debate rages, the protection of the life and property of the citizens await urgent action.

To check the activities to check the escalating conflicts between herders and farmers, Benue State government in November 2017 implemented the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law that outlawed open grazing in the state. Ekiti and Taraba States took similar actions. The State laws required cattle owners to get their own ranches to cater for their herds and stop stomping over farmlands. Miyetti Allah Kautai Hore (a Fulani socio-cultural group) claimed that the law was discriminatory and unfair to herdsmen. Unfortunately, then Minister of Defence, Mansur Dan-Ali twice publicly blamed the Anti-Open Grazing Law for the conflicts and called for its suspension as implemented in Benue, Ekiti and Taraba States. Edo State government planned to create fenced grazing areas with watering facilities, requiring herdsmen to feed their cattle there and pay for the services. Herders, who consider these restrictive, often fail to comply as they still roam their cattle widely (Afolalu & Audi, 2018). The Federal government unwilling to back the anti-open grazing law, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development floated the idea of creating colonies for herdsmen in January 2018. The cattle colonies are a combination of several ranches. According the government, ranching and colonies are similar in many respects except that a colony is bigger than a ranch. In a colony, 20 to 30 ranches can share the same colony, a ranch is usually owned by an individual or company with few numbers of cows, in a cattle colony one could find 100; 200, 300 cows owned by different individuals. Furthermore, the maintenance of ranches is so costly that rural subsistence low-earning herders would find it difficult to survive without colonies (Toroiyiade, 2018).

The National Economic Council (NEC) presented the National Livestock Transformation Plan (2018-2027) as its new initiative to put an end to the herders-farmers conflict and massively improve the livestock industry. The initiative insists that is the way forward for cattle rearing in Nigeria. Under the new plan, cattle herders are expected to be registered and recognized with cooperatives for the purpose of the ranching scheme. These cooperatives will then be able to get rental agreement for land from state governments and also benefit from ranch resources in several terms including loans, grants, and subsidies. The funding of the plan from the federal and state governments is expected to last for the first three years in the pilot phase for a total of N70 billion while private sector interests and investment between the third and tenth year is expected to be in excess of N100 billion. The proposed ranch size models according to the plan, is a cluster of 30, 60, 150, and 300 cows ranches in a location within the donated reserves. Ten pilot states: Adamawa, Benue, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba, and Zamfara have been selected for the plan with 94 ranches to be established and operational in clusters of 4 ranches in 24 locations. While Miyetti Allah group approve the Federal Government's plan, some of the pilot states: Benue and Ebonyi states are reluctant to implement the plan (Toroiyiade, 2018).

## Conclusion

Herders-farmers conflict and banditry in Nigeria have escalated in recent years spreading southward, threatening the country's security and stability. The root of the conflicts can be attributed to climate induced environmental degradation of pastures in the far North, cattle rustling and clashes over grazing on farmland which often times pitch the farmers in violent conflict with herders. Herders accuse natives along grazing roots of stealing their cows

which result in clashes over land and/or cattle between herders and farmers. Also implicated in the conflicts are desertification, breakdown in indigenous conflict resolution mechanism of land and water disputes, proliferation of small arms, drug addiction and crime especially, banditry; militia attacks, poor government response to distress calls/report of attacks. However, as and Erondu and Nwakanma (2018) had noted, irrespective of its sources and variations, these conflicts are impacting dangerously on sustainable development in the country.

In general terms, it appears that security of life and property can no longer be guaranteed as Government ceased to be in full control and command of the national security situation, especially as it affects common citizens. The security regime has been hijacked, undermined, and compromised by non-state actors who operate confidently with reckless abandon and little decency and respect for human life. The Federal and State governments have proposed, adopted and implemented a number of policies such as creation of Special Security Forces, new laws banning open grazing especially in Benue and Taraba states, National Livestock Transformation Plan which include ranching, cattle colonies to address the lingering conflict, yet, the conflict remain unabated. The inability of government to restore law and order, have led to creation of self-defence forces and ethnic militias and vigilantes which aggravated violence.

The size of the Nigeria Police Force is also grossly inadequate to the population of the country in terms of security and crime management; hence, the urgent need to increase the size of the force. To stem the tide of attacks on residents of rural communities, government should deploy more state security forces to vulnerable areas and ensure perpetrators of attacks are arrested and prosecuted.

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