

Cattle Ranching and Peaceful Co-existence between Herders and Farmers in Nigeria: A Policy Option

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Abstract

The recurring incidences of farmers/herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria and the degree of wanton destruction of lives and property is alarmingly disturbing. Though an age long phenomenon; it has never been this destructive. This, in part, is due to the sophistication of weapons wielded by the herdsmen and the allegations that there are ethnic cum religious forces fanning the already glowing embers of the dangerously complicated and ugly incidence. Based on this ugly development, this paper assesses the recent ranching policy option of government for conflict prevention in Nigeria vis-a-vis the recently passed Open Grazing Prohibition Bill in Benue State. It pulls its weight behind prohibition of open grazing which is understandably the root of the problem. The 'Eco-violence Theory' which seeks to explain the relationship between environmental factors and violent conflicts is adopted as its analytical lens; and relies on the secondary method of data collection. It finds that the establishment of ranches - funded either by government or the occupational cattle herdsmen - is the best option from among the available options. It concludes that government should give the policy a befitting designation that does not raise eyebrows nor touch feelings. It recommends that the Federal Government should orient the herdsmen on the benefits of cattle ranching before any attempt at implementation.

Keywords: Colony, Conflict, Herders, Open Grazing, Ranching.

L'élevage de bétail et la coexistence pacifique entre éleveurs et agriculteurs au Nigeria: une option politique

Abstrait

Les incidents récurrents de conflits entre agriculteurs et éleveurs au Nigéria et le degré de destruction sans motif de vies et de biens sont alarmants. Bien qu'un phénomène de longue date; cela n'a jamais été aussi destructeur. Cela est dû en partie à la sophistication des armes utilisées par les gardiens de troupeaux et aux allégations selon lesquelles il existe des forces ethniques et religieuses qui attisent les braises déjà ardentes de cette incidence dangereusement compliquée et laide. Sur la base de cette évolution hideuse, le présent document évalue la récente option politique du gouvernement en matière d'élevage en ranch pour la prévention des conflits au Nigéria par rapport au projet de loi sur l'interdiction des pâturages en plein air récemment adopté dans l'État de Benue. Elle tire son poids de la prohibition du pâturage à ciel

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ouvert, qui est naturellement à l'origine du problème. La «théorie de l'éco-violence», qui cherche à expliquer la relation entre les facteurs environnementaux et les conflits violents, est adoptée dans son optique analytique; et s'appuie sur la méthode secondaire de collecte de données. Il conclut que la création de ranchs - financés par le gouvernement ou par les éleveurs de bétail - est la meilleure option parmi les options disponibles. Il conclut que le gouvernement devrait attribuer à la politique une désignation appropriée qui ne fait pas sourciller et ne touche pas les sentiments. Il recommande que le gouvernement fédéral oriente les gardiens de troupeaux sur les avantages de l'élevage du bétail avant toute tentative de mise en œuvre.

Mots-clés: colonie, conflit, bergers, pâturage ouvert, élevage en ranch.

Introduction

The crude violence that characterized the recent spate of killings unleashed on the farming communities in Nigerian Benue, Taraba (and other states) is a wake-up call to the Government of the Federation to address the crises before they balloon out of manageable proportion. Farmers/herdsmen conflict is as old as humanity, thus, it is not peculiar to the present age, nor is it unique to Nigeria. From the knowledge of hindsight, countries have devised different coping mechanisms in form of policy blueprints to stem the often recurring feudal tides between farmers and herdsmen. These range from creating ranches, prohibition of open grazing, delineation of grazing routes, creation of grazing reserve and cattle colonies etc. It is in view of this that the National Economic Council on the 18th January, 2018 set up a 10-member committee comprising the Vice-President, Prof. Yemi Osinbanjo, as Chairman and nine governors to facilitate the commencement of cattle colonies in interested states (Agency Report, 2018).

This paper intends not to apportion blame on farmers or herdsmen, but concerns its focus on the historical root of the conflicts which is traced to environmental factors. These factors are beyond the control of both farmers and herdsmen; their solutions are within the competency of government. As government made frantic efforts to mediate the conflicts, it named its policy intervention as 'cattle colony'. This was rather ill advised and was subsequently thoroughly misunderstood. In the subsequent paragraphs and headings, this paper discusses origin, semantics, and policy implications of creating cattle colony in multi-ethnic and religious competitive federation which Nigeria is. It gives some recommendations which are hopefully thought to be handy in addressing the farmers/herdsmen conundrum.

Conceptual Clarifications

Peaceful co-existence

One does not need to investigate into history to appreciate how important it is to ensure peaceful coexistence in the society. Peace is the quintessential of growth, development and progress. But the very concept of peaceful coexistence by its alleged complexity frightens certain people who have become unaccustomed to trusting their neighbors and who see a double bottom in each suitcase. People of this kind, on hearing the word "coexistence," begin to play around with it in one way and another, sizing it up and applying various yardsticks to it. Isn't it a fraud? Isn't it a trap? Does not coexistence signify the division of the world into areas separated by high fences, which do not communicate with each other? And what is going to happen behind those fences? (Khrushchev,1959). It is this paranoia- extreme irrational distrust of others- that greeted the *cattle colony* which is a policy tool designed to ensure peaceful coexistence between farmers and herdsmen.

Conflict Prevention

The attention of scholars in the field of conflict studies had been hitherto towards conflict management and resolution. The growing concern in this area of study is that the globe continuously witnesses conflicts of gargantuan proportion despite all earnest attempts to minimize them. A change of strategy towards achieving sustainable peace has actually led Kofi Annan- a former United Nations Secretary General- to advocate for a move from a “culture of reaction to a culture of prevention” (Annan, 2006). This is a culture that does not allow mutual misunderstandings to escalate to conflict by creating an atmosphere that does not allow conflict to thrive.

To further emphasize this change of strategy in addressing conflict situation, lucid clarification should be made between conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Though the two concepts aim at the same end; which is to ensure peaceful co-existence, they are far apart in approach. Resolving one conflict, however, does not prevent the next one. While resolving conflicts does not stop conflict, though its function is important in stepping its tide; conflict prevention precludes the occurrence of conflict in the first instance resolution. Its processes are analytical and problem-solving, its approach is within a theoretical framework or explanation of conflict. Its main thrust is, therefore, not merely in conflict prevention in isolating and removing the sources of conflict, but also in what Burton (1996) identified as conflict “provention”: promoting the conditions that create cooperative relationships. In this sense conflict resolution is fundamentally different exercise from any settlement process.

Cattle Colony

The term ‘cattle colony’ is rarely used in the literature. Its usage is unique to Pakistan in which one of its neighborhoods (Karachi) is the center of cattle and meat trade. The cattle colony in Karachi is the dairy products shopping and supply center which harbors many abattoirs and meat warehouses. Onyekakeyah (2018) rightly asserts that cattle colony is not a strategy for grazing cattle but a center for cattle and beef product sales; and only one cattle colony is found in the world which is in Pakistan. Though a further search reveals that more than one cattle colony exists, however, all are located in Pakistan. If Nigeria successfully creates one, she will break the Pakistani monopoly of owning cattle colony. While the former is purportedly a strategy for grazing cattle as Onyekakeyah aptly puts it, the latter remains center for cattle and beef product sales.

It has been observed that government from time to time had been in the practice of wading into rural violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria before the cattle colony policy misappropriation. Research has shown that cattle colony is not a new policy tool aimed at resolving environmental conflicts; what is new is the inappropriate usage of nomenclature in a glaringly Nigerian antagonistic, multi-ethnic, religiously diverse and tensed political climate. Policies in Nigeria are competitively interpreted from the perspectives of religion and ethnicity not from a logical and scientific standpoint. It is germane for the case of clarity to emphasize that there is no radical difference between ‘Grazing Reserves’, ‘Ranches’, ‘Cattle Colonies’, ‘Fulani Settlement Scheme’, ‘Fulani Amenities Proposal’ etc.

Falana (2018) made the same observation that the Federal Government is merely playing on words as there is no difference between ranches and cattle colonies. If there exist any differences between cattle colony and other government policies highlighted above, it is very subtle that should not call for misconstructions. But while other policies did not degenerate into mayhem, cattle colony did. This is because, in the words of Falae (2018), “it is a provocative and repugnant proposal”. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Chief Audu Obgeh) is more infatuated with having a pet project with a resounding nomenclature without considering the implications. What he actually has in mind, as Onyekakeyah (2018) explains, and to which this paper concurs, is ranching which he confuses with cattle colony. Obgeh emphasized that facilities will be provided to take care of the herdsmen and their cattle, which they (herdsmen) have said if water and grass were provided,

they would not be moving with their cattle. In the Minister's defense of the policy, as observed by Falana (2018, p.9):

The Federal Government is planning a programme called cattle colonies, not ranches but colonies, where at least 5000 hectares of land would be made available...We also want to stop cattle from roaming the streets, farms and other areas as they will henceforth be provided with water and adequate security by the rangers, adequate pasture milk collection and even security against rustlers to enable them live a normal life. This has been successful in India, Ethiopia and Brazil.

The minister however, did not realize that cattle colonies are called ranches in the aforementioned countries. And where the designation (cattle colonies) exists, for instance in Karachi, it is the dairy products shopping and supply center which harbors many abattoirs and meat warehouses.

Fulani Herdsmen

The Fulani are historically nomadic cattle herders in the *sahel* (Falola, 2009). They are primarily pastoralists who, according to oral tradition, reached northern Nigeria by the 12th century. They are called different names throughout the region. In the Senegal, the Fulani are called *Peul*, and toward the eastern edge of West Africa, they are called the *Fulfulde*. They are the second largest non-Hausa group living in northern Nigeria (Falola, 2009). In another account, Azarya (1996) narrates that 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 have originated from Senegambia and then spread across some 20 states in West Africa and the Sahel, up to Western Sudan and the Central African Republic (Shehu and Hassan 1995; Blench 2010; McGregor 2014).

Interaction of the widely dispersed Fulani with disparate other groups has produced a variety of socioeconomic patterns. The Fulanis were originally pastoral people, and their lives and organization were dominated by the needs of their herds. The pastoral Fulanis enjoy greater prestige than town and sedentary agricultural Fulanis as the most truly representative of Fulani culture. Interaction with other groups has sometimes resulted in a considerable degree of cultural absorption. This is most notably the case in northern Nigeria, where perhaps half of the Fulanis have adopted the Hausa language and culture. As a result of a series of holy wars (1804–10) purporting to purify Islam, they established an empire, instituting themselves as a ruling aristocracy (Encyclopedia Britannica 2012).

The urban Fulanis are the most ardent Muslims; pastoral Fulani are frequently lax and sometimes even non practicing Muslims. The pastoralists also exhibit a much greater variation of physical traits. They wander in nomadic groups, making temporary camps of portable huts. Some of their dairy products are exchanged at markets for cereal foods; they rarely slaughter their cattle for meat. Many sedentary Fulani, who frequently have become sedentary as a result of the depletion of their herds, also own cattle, but they rely principally on cultivation (Idowu, 2017).

Past Policies Aimed at Addressing Farmers/Fulani Herdsmen Conflict

It should be noted, of course, that ranching or formal grazing reserves in Nigeria as chronicled in the work of Iro (n.d) started accidentally in the 1950s when Hamisu Kano, working with pastoralists on livestock vaccination, foresaw the shortages of grazing land in Northern Nigeria. Supported by the government, he initiated the grazing reserve scheme from the abandoned government resettlement schemes (Fulani Settlement Scheme). The resettlement schemes collapsed because the government had neither the financial nor the

managerial ability to continue with the financially burdensome scheme, and the best alternative use of the land, the government thought, was to convert it into grazing reserves that were less financially committed. Grazing reserve hatched in 1954 after a study of the Fulani production system contained in the “Fulani Amenities Proposal.” The proposal suggested the creation of grazing reserves, the improvement of Fulani welfare, and the transformation of the herd management system. By 1964, the government had gazetted about 6.4 million hectares of the forest reserve, ninety-eight percent in the savanna. Sokoto Province had twenty-one percent of the land, followed by Kabba, Bauchi, Zaria, Ilorin, and Katsina, with 11-15 percent each (Awogbade, 1982). The Wase, Zamfara, and Udubo reserves followed in succession (Iro, n.d).

In its simplest sense, a grazing reserve is a piece of land that the government acquires, develops, and releases to the pastoral Fulani (Iro, n.d). Grazing reserves are area of land demarcated, set aside and reserved for exclusive or semi-exclusive use by pastoralists. They were located in the pre-colonial Nigeria near farmlands, around cities and towns and utilized for the purposes of grazing such as to obviate damage to crops (Muhammad-Baba & Tukur, 2015: 199). The grazing reserve concept/project involves gazetting, demarcation and development of gazing reserves by the provision of basic needs for herdsmen such as pasture, feed supplement, water resources (boreholes and dams), marketing outlets and other infrastructure. It was envisaged that livestock improvement efforts- like stock upgrading, cross-breeding and restocking- would be enhanced. The objective was to utilize the area to demonstrate to the pastoralists that a sustained high level of development can be achieved (Olajide, 2016). Grazing reserves are established to achieve some objectives. These objectives are listed by Laven (1991), Ademosun (1976) to include:

1. Getting and protecting pasture-space for the national herds.
2. Removing discord between agronomists and pastoralists living in the same geographic area.
3. Fostering peaceful coexistence between them by making the grazing reserve a zone of no-conflict.
4. Improving land use and herd management,
5. Providing social welfare amenities to the Fulanis.
6. Increasing national income.
7. Easing seasonal migration,
8. Improving the quality of herds,
9. Multiplying outlet for bovine product,
10. Enhancing access to extension and social services.
11. Encouraging the uniform deployment of the cattle.

Open Grazing Prohibition Law

This is the law passed in February 2017 by the Benue State Government to halt what it termed ‘herdsmen encroachment on farm lands’ with their cattle. There are avalanche of complaints and allegations against nomadic pastoralists on trespassing cultivated lands and destroying farm produce which serve as the only means of livelihood to subsistence farmers. This has led to conflict with resultant loss of lives and property. Farmers/herders conflict is not a novelty, it is as old as pre-history human existence. However, the sophisticated nature of the clashes characterized by wielding of dangerous weapons and gargantuan loss of lives involved propelled the drafting of anti-open grazing law. For instance, Charles (2017) reported Ortom to have said that herdsmen killed 1,878 Benue people in three years. This law which was enacted and approved by the Benue State Assembly in February was not implemented until the 1st of November of the same year; purposely meant to put an end to, and prohibit open grazing in the state for all kinds of livestock. Ranching was proposed to be a veritable alternative to

open grazing which the Governor (Samuel Ortom) humbly claimed to have set a good example by ranching his own cattle. According to him, ‘ranching’ is “a win-win situation for both farmers and herdsmen. The farmers can sell their wastes to herdsmen; the herdsmen can sell their cattle to farmers” (Adebiyi & Uwugiaren, 2018).

Contrary to the peaceful co-existence which the law is expected to achieve in Benue State, the open grazing law’s implementation has wrecked an untold hardship on its citizens and denizens. Both farmers and herdsmen have counted a huge loss in the recent widespread mayhem which is widely believed to be a consequence of the anti open grazing law that does not go well with the herdsmen. The gory sight of maiming and killings of human beings only brings to mind the Hobbesian state of nature where all men were against all other men; making life solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Open grazing is arguably unsuitable in the 21st Century because it is out of tune with modern society. Most advanced countries with larger cattle population than Nigeria do not have records of herder/farmer sanguinary conflicts. This is because, as explained by Kperogi (2018), open grazing does not exist in those countries. What is more is its offensiveness in a territorial space that is plagued with deforestation, desertification and population explosion which the Nigerian State perfectly typifies. Kperogi (2018, p.19) lamented that “there is no question that nomadic pastoralism is an anachronism. It does not belong to the 21st Century, and is a burden both on its practitioners and on everyday peasant farmers who are its victims”.

The Eco-violence Theory

This paper adopts Ecoviolence theory as its analytical framework. Ecoviolence theory is an emerging theoretical construct that seeks to elucidate the relationship between environmental factors and violent conflicts. Developed by Homer-Dixon (1999), the theory postulates that a decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and resource access acts singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population groups, of cropland, water, forests, and fish. It highlights how environmental scarcity and its social effects can cause both rural and urban violence (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Supply-induced, demand-induced, and structural scarcities act singly or in interaction to boost local and regional scarcities of cropland, water, forests, and fish. These increased scarcities can reduce or constrain economic productivity to the detriment of both local communities and larger regional and national economies. The affected people, who are usually already economically and ecologically marginal, may migrate or be expelled to other rural lands or cities. These migrants often trigger group-identity (usually inter-ethnic) conflicts when they move to new areas, and local decreases in wealth can cause insurgencies and rebellion. Migrations, productivity losses, and the rent-seeking of elites produce social segmentation that deepens group-identity conflict. They also weaken local and national institutions, which decreases central control over ethnic rivalries and increases opportunities for insurgents and elites challenging state authority.

Homer-Dixon and Blitt (1998) contend that most of the post-Cold War violent conflict may be explained as “eco-violence,” where people fight for survival as a result of environmental pressure stemming from a denuded resource base. Soysa (2002) elegantly captures this scenario which he describes as a “shrinking resource pie” supposedly fueling violent civil conflict by aggravating strained social relations. This can reduce economic productivity both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. In effect, ecological scarcity raises the competitive stakes and the premium that the various societal groups may place on available ecological resources. This condition tends to precipitate violent conflicts.

From this perspective, the eco-violence theory offers insights into the nature and dynamics of the farmers/herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria. In this regard, explains Adeoye (2017), it is to be observed that the conflicts have been driven by the desperation of the affected groups to protect and advance their livelihood interests in the context of an ever shrinking ecological space, characterized by resource-scarcity, a livelihood crisis, population explosion, and resource competition. The crux of eco-violence theory is that the desperate quest for survival by groups in a competitive and resource-scarce ecological sphere (eco-survivalism) is likely to precipitate violent conflict (Adeoye, 2017).

Causes of Violent Killing in Benue State: Farmers Perspective

A fact finding mission embarked upon by the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) in Makurdi was quite revealing. Ibrahim (2018) captures the narrative of the fact finding which was conducted barely three weeks after the New Year killings in January. Acknowledging the ecological dimension of the crisis, many speakers explain that climate change and over-population in the country forced Fulani pastoralists to move southwards with their herds and emphatically argued that there was no land available for pastoralism in Benue State. They averred that the only solution is the ranching proposed in the Open Grazing Prohibition Law. It was also alleged that the Federal Government, under the leadership of President Buhari, aims at colonization as is glaringly noticed in Audu Ogbah's insistence on the establishment of cattle colonies. They contended that government should have nothing to do with funding pastoralism which should be a private business. The Benue State branch of NBA, as quoted by Ibrahim (2018) lamented that:

It was a ruse to say that the violence that had been on-going in the state was due to the anti open graze law passed by the government last May... before the said law was enacted; there had been 49 attacks on Benue communities by Fulani terrorists engaged on a genocide mission that is coordinated by the Miyetti Allah and its leader, President Muhammadu Buhari.

Causes of Violent Killing in Benue State: Herdsmen Perspective

Sequel to the meeting held by the NBA with farmers in Benue State, it, on the 27th of January, had a parallel consultation with the Benue State branch of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) in its Abuja Headquarters. The delegation of the cattle breeders claims, among others, that the Nigerian State has abandoned them for decades. Farming, they revealed, has expanded a lot in Nigeria reducing the space available for pastoralists. They pointed out that even the 30 meters on each side of trunk roads, where the law has banned farming are mostly farmed which make access to pasture extremely restricted. They also lamented that government has shirked in its responsibility of maintaining and sustaining the 415 grazing reserves which it created that would have provided sufficient forage for pastoralists. They added that they suffer extortion from the police and other security agencies on daily basis; also that the Fulani pastoralists are the most regularly kidnapped people in Nigeria and victims of cattle rustling (Ibrahim, 2018).

The media, they claim, does not paint a good picture of herdsmen but habitually shrouds the truth of their plight from the public view. A lot of stories on "killers herdsmen" are false, according to them, people see herdsmen as criminals seeking to massacre people at any time. They also lamented that ranching is not necessarily a solution; in Gembu- Taraba State- many of them had bought land where their cattle were grazing only to be farmed by those who sold it to them and when they complained they were attacked and 723 Fulani, mostly women and children were killed. They also made reference to the callous killings in Numan where pastoralists had settled for over one century and they were expected to pay traditional rulers an

annual access fee for access to a stream. They had paid, they argued, yet access to the stream was denied. When they complained, 104 community members, six of whom were adult males and all the others- women and children- were killed. They revealed that there are many similar incidents which confirm that they are the most vulnerable community in Nigeria. Furthermore, they commented on the recent law in Ekiti State which they said is acceptable by them as the law is focused on preventing night grazing which poses the risk of destruction of crops. They however consider the Benue law as narrated by Ibrahim (2018) as:

Punitive, first, they were not consulted when the law was being processed and were not invited to public hearing; they only heard about it in the news. The law prevents them crossing the state to grazing areas in the south, which is unfair. The law also required them to buy land to establish ranches but unfortunately, all their attempts to buy land has been frustrated by communities who have collectively taken the decision not to sell land to them.

The Two Narratives: A Juxtaposition

The root cause of pastoralists and farmers' conflicts is laid bare in the above narrations. An objective analysis of the grievances as shown in the two accounts espouses the submission that the conflicts are neither ethnic nor religious. Olayoku struggles to add the ethno-religious mix to the recurring conflicts when he asserts that the ethno-religious identity of the actors engaged in cattle conflicts is quite significant. He asserts that northern Nigeria records more fatal incidents especially in Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Kogi, Niger, and Nasarawa. These locations are mainly populated by the 'Middle Beltans', whose religious identity is often contrasted with that of Fulani Muslims (Olayoku, 2014). In opposition to emphasizing the religious identity of the Fulani herdsmen, Kperogi (2018) sets the record straight by arguing that most of the herders who clash with farming community are not, in fact, Muslims. They are not Christians either. Their whole religion is their cattle. And they clash with settled Fulani, too. According to Conroy (2014), in Benue and Taraba states, the Tiv are also at conflict with the Jukun, another farming group. This dispute arises from differing concepts of land use and farming; the Tiv practice a shifting cultivation pattern wherein they move from plot to plot each season, while the Jukun remain in the same farm plots year after year. When the Tiv encroach upon Jukun land, conflict ensues. This is in spite of the fact that the Tiv and the Jukun are majorly Christians.

However, analyzing the genesis and violent dimension of the conflict through the eco-violence theoretical lens leads to a conflicting conclusion. It is logical, empirical and more scientific to assert that population explosion, desertification, deforestation and other related environmental and climatic - contrary to ethnic or religious- factors shrink the occupational territorial space of both farmers and herdsmen. Thus, the belligerent behaviors of the two conflicting occupational groups are intrinsically not a manifestation of mutual hatred; it is a genuine struggle for survival that led to mutual hatred and consequent killings. If the issues at stake are addressed, at best by the government, the mutual hatred and killings will hopefully be a historical thing.

Government's Intervention

The Federal Government is the best arbiter that can proffer lasting solution to the perennial conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in north central geo-political region and Nigeria at large. Any attempt by state government to prohibit free grazing would be seen as punitive and interpreted as an expression of ethno-phobic tendency. This is obviously displayed in the altercation between the two conflicting occupational groups in Benue State after the January, 2018 killings that claimed over 80 lives (Godwin, 2018). While the farmers alleged the destruction of farmlands and cultivated crops by the herders, the latter reciprocated the

allegation by emphasizing on the deliberate attempt by the State Government to deprive them of their occupational practice which to them, is both a means of livelihood and cultural heritage.

Nonetheless, the Federal Government's proposed policy of cattle colony was misconstrued and exacerbated the hostilities. The policy is understood or misunderstood as an orchestrated plan by the Federal Government under the leadership of President Buhari (coincidentally a Fulani) to colonize the rest of Nigeria and fortify Fulani hegemonic control which started with the Usman Dan Fodio Jihad of early 19th Century. To this school of thought, the policy of cattle colony is the continuation of the suspended Jihad which established the Sokoto Caliphate. The central problem, explains Amadi (2018); is land, who controls it controls the chiefdom associated with land ownership. Falae (2018) regarded this as a form of internal colonization of the whole country and a grand plot to exploit the local farmers on their own land on behalf of the Fulanis. In other words, it is intended to be used to Islamize Nigeria; this does not go well with some governors in the Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria (Onyekakeyah, 2018).

It is remarkable to mention that 'cattle colony' as a policy is a misnomer; whatever similarities it has with ranches which is, of course, accepted and popularized as the international best practice, it only fans the ember of inter-ethnic and religious suspicions. It will not resolve the conflict. Not because of its inherent flaws, but because of its nomenclature-the vehicular language through which it was expressed. What is more is that it is emanating from a government of a federation headed by a president whose ethnic identity further buttresses these insinuations (colonization and Islamization). It is not out of place for the Federal Government to commit a special fund to the establishment of ranches across the country. This will serve the following purposes: it will help in subsidizing cost of breeding cattle by the herdsman, keep them into the business, and encourage others to join. It will protect the environment from pollution and overuse. It will put a stop to cattle straying into cultivated lands which is undoubtedly the major cause of the crises.

However, some commentators opine that the government does not have statutory obligation nor has it moral justification to fund ranches on behalf of herdsman across the country. They decry investment of government funding into pastoralism on the grounds that keeping cattle is a private business (Ibrahim, 2018). This argument is groundless in the face of the complexity of the crises at hand. The primary responsibility of any governments of the modern states is to ensure the safety of those within its fold. If committing the nation's common wealth to establishing ranches will bring to a halt the unresolved farmers/herdsman conflict and catapult the practice of pastoralism in Nigeria from atavism to modernity, so, why not? That will be a good precedent. And it is not a first of its kind, the Federal Government had, before now, set the good precedent by *prying* into private businesses. Farmers in Nigeria had been and continue to be beneficiaries of government largess (intervention) through fertilizer and other farm inputs subsidization. President Buhari's Administration has shown this generosity even more to the farmers through its Anchor Borrower's Programme. A huge amount of money has been earmarked and invested into this programme, evidently to help small holder farmers (SHFs) of the required key agricultural commodities like cereals, cotton, tomato, sugar etc. (see Anchor Borrowers' Programme Guidelines, 2016).

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it is apt to re-emphasize that ethnicity/religion cannot be said to be the root cause of farmers/herdsman conflicts in Nigeria. Neither are the pastoralists nor the farmers intrinsically belligerent. They are both of good nature, though with some bad eggs among them. These characteristics are indeed the common denominators of every ethnic cum professional group across the globe. The whys and wherefores of the seeming happy

trigger attitudinal dispositions of either of the duo could be best visualized and understood through the shrinking of their occupational territorial space which consequently made the struggle for survival as that of the fittest. It is the submission of this paper that ethno-religious explanations of farmers/herdsmen's conflict terribly missed the point. The position of this paper is that violent conflicts arise between farmers and herdsmen due to ecological factors. Thus, conflicts of this nature can best be resolved by the government. It is against this line of thought that this paper concludes that government's intervention in terms of investing in ranches is in order; as farmers and herdsmen's contributions to Nigeria's economy cannot be dismissed.

Recommendations

1. It is imperative that major stakeholders be consulted and, of course, incorporated when such legal intervention like Open Grazing Prohibition Law are made.
2. Policies emanating from government should be made to be understood as being corrective and progressive, not punitive and retributive.
3. Government should avoid provocative nomenclatures when policies are made and implemented. 'Cattle colony' as a policy engenders unhealthy insinuations in a multi ethnic federation like Nigeria.
4. Government should sufficiently and effectively orient the herdsmen on the benefits of cattle ranching before any attempt at implementation.
5. The Federal Government should intervene into farmers/herdsmen crises with a view to easing tension, calming nerves and facilitating occupational undertakings for both farmers and herdsmen.
6. The media should be professional in their reportage; there should not be *Fulani herdsmen* when atrocities are committed by herdsmen. There are other tribes that also herd cattle; just as it will be wrong to say Yoruba, Calabar, Kanuri or Hausa kidnapers.

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