

# The State and the Management of Conflict between Nomadic Herdsmen and Crop Farmers in North Central Nigeria: Implications for Sustainable Development

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## **Abstract**

*North Central Nigeria in recent times has almost become synonymous with pastoralists and Crop farmers conflict zone. Series of interpretations have been provided but our objective in this paper is to illuminate the most dominant: Unique historical organic cum character of the economic relations of the pastoralist and crops farmer conflict. This paper seeks to deal with the trash, distorted facts, and half truths and even outright fabrications. By way of qualitative analysis of relevant secondary source predicated on the Marxian assumption of the Political economy; the paper posits that the bias of basic assumption of the pastoralists and Crop farmers which have permeated and distorted its analysis of economic life should be re-investigated. The paper argues that the migrant lifestyle of pastoralists has promoted a concept of transfer of aggression. The implication is they settle in one location e.g. (Nasarawa State) and carry out grazing activities in another e.g. Benue State, when atrocities are committed, they retreat to area already considered as safe heavens to avoid prosecution by relevant agencies thereby promoting transfer of aggression and spread conflict faster. It is the findings of the paper that there is an escalating higher dimension of these conflicts acquiring a distinctive character, requiring new methods of investigation into the conflicts. The implication is that the manifest recession of these conflicts are identity based and the identities are not self explanatory, they are rather determined and propelled by political economy of the state and society. The paper recommends a re-evacuation of policy adoption; implementation and a re-investigation of the pastoralists and crop farmers socio-economic cum social capital relations for sustainable development especially as it reflects the role of the state.*

**Keywords:** pastoralists, crop farmers, sustainable development, conflict

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past three years, northern central Nigeria has been experiencing a lingering conflict between pastoralists and crop farms. While the crop farms accused the pastoralist of destruction of their crops and contamination of community water points, the pastoralist accuse the crop farmers of denying them access to grazing areas and occasionally rustling their cattle. The cause for concern is the invasion of vast areas in the region by armed mercenaries under the cover of pastoralists, leading to the desolation of rural villages and displacement of rural dwellers in several areas as well as heightening insecurity. These conflict zones in North-Central Nigeria are Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Nasarawa, Southern Kaduna and Taraba States where the intensity is much felt. The attendant consequences of these clashes are better imagined than described in communities where they occurred.

Worrisome is the deliberate conscious efforts to suggest that there is no difference between pasture and crop farm and lack of supervision of the government authority and law enforcement agent with rules of engagement. Ayih (2003) and Gyuse and Ajene (2006), argue that these conflicts have become pervasive to the extent that virtually every area in North-Central has unresolved conflict at various stages of escalation or de-escalation. The paper calls for reinvestigation and establishment of the pastoralists/ crop farmers' own conflict resolution rituals. They alone know how best to foster peace from antiquity. This paper identifies remote and immediate causes of the clashes and the criminal elements operating within the context including new dimension introduced. The paper also provided recommendations and solutions to end the clashes. The paper argues that pastoralists have in several ways instituted the cousinship code of conduct, with those in Nigeria, therefore they should include peace –building devise of cultural practice to regulate peaceful coexistence as it is in Senegal. Similarly the same system for peaceful co-habitation with Gobirawa in Niger Republic, the Ewe in Togo and the Tuareg in Mali can be adopted in the North-Central Nigeria. This will create a greater objective of lasting peace between the pastoralists and crop farmer who had hitherto lived on harmony and co-existed for decades.

These are two categories of pastoralist in north central Nigeria: the resident's pastoralists and the mobile armed pastoralists, or better still the new arrival. The residents pastoralist speak the languages of the native in which they live e.g. they speak Tiv in Benue state, Angas, Birom and Taroch in Plateau state, Baju, Kutaf in Kaduna state, Eggon in Nasarawa state etc. They share biological and social ties e.g. they intermarry and the relationship is inter-woven communities. And that explains that they have nothing against each other. Their behaviour is peaceful as they do not destroy crops and are also not denied access roads.

This paper posits that the wide spreads killing or the incessant attacks is blamed on the mobile armed pastoralist (new arrival) often called Bokolo or Bururu who are militant. Some have argued that these groups of pastoralist have lost their cows in other part of world like Mali, Senegal, and Togo etc as a result of such similar conflicts. They collaborate (and in some cases force) with their host communities in these area to cause mayhem. The kind of humans and cattle seen in these areas and the accompanying quantum of destruction of live and valuable properties suggest to every sane minded person that the attackers (invader pastoralists) are terrorists disguising as pastoralists and this situation if not checked posse a greater danger to the sustainable development.

Deliberate and conscious efforts must be put in place so that socio economic activities can prosper and the sinister agenda of occupation of one's land can be abandoned totally with government avoiding taking side in the primitive motive of forceful acquisition of other citizen's land via re-launching of JIHAD or BokoO Haram using pathological enemies of those communities.

## **2. Research problem/ research questions**

There are inadequacy surrounding the conflict and escalating it every year into high dimensions. These inadequacies are in the organic composition of the character and basic claims of the conflict groups. The pastoralist group have a biological and religious tie which Durkheim presents as functional; Weber sees it as essentially concerned with the problem of meaning, human detesting. The contain element of dominating the minority groups according to Kukah (1993; Ibrahim, 2000). The most discussed is the idea of Hausa-pastoralists hegemony (Kukah 1993; Takaya and Tyoden 1987; Turaki, 1993; Tyden 1993). Other called it ‘Kaduna Mafia’ (Takaya and Tyden 1987). From Marxists approach, this problem is a historical movement that is interpreted in terms of economic and social contradictions. Religious coloration has also been introduced as an identity and solidarity and setting of boundaries between those who are considered to be believers and those that are not into the pastoralists/crops farmer conflicts, and by extension, the role of the state in North-Central Nigeria on which most of the governors are Muslims sharing the same faith with the pastoralist. Unfortunately these problems are not properly rooted in the cause of the conflict but have generated the following questions.

- a. Is the current crisis remotely connected to plans by the pastoralist to expand annex people land as a way of dealing with the population increase?
- b. Could the conflict be effective tool by the flag bearers of Uthman Dan Fodio in continuing the unfinished conquest of the Jihadist?
- c. Can we establish conspiracy of some neighbouring ethnic nationalities associated in an attempt to revive the Kwarafa Kingdom?
- d. Is the unsustainability of 1965 grazing reserves, corridors and stock routes in North Central Nigeria for the pastoral nomads foisting it way.

These issues need to be properly investigated to in order to come to terms with pastoralist/ crop farmer conflicts.

## **3. Justification for the study**

This study has become necessary in view of the persistent clashes between crop farmers and the pastoralists in North Central Nigeria which has left scores of innocent citizen dead, with numerous of valuable properties destroyed by the ravaging war. More importantly is the new dimension in which pastoralists and their cohorts masquerade as nomads and join forces with Boko Haramist elements. Another justification is that if peaceful settlement with pastoralists in Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Ghana and Niger is possible, why is the Nigerian situation different? Another justification is there is the need to conserve the energy and reduce the maltreatment of the animal via a launch there by preventing the transmission of animal's diseases from community to community. The need for lasting solution for the crisis is of the essence vis-a-vis sustainable development hence the study. The frequency at which this conflict has continued to manifest calls for its proper reinvestigation.

### **3.1 Methodology**

For the purpose of this paper, the data were predominantly sourced from secondary sources. This included journals, periodicals, newspaper, government publications, research publications various reports, memoranda and commissions. Our analysis follows textual, logical sequence of argument relating to the objectives of research.

#### 4. Analysing the problem

**4.1 Security agents and rich urban pastoralist:** Most at times the security agents either consciously or unconsciously do not know the dynamics that exist between pastoralists and crop farmers and while dealing with such cases, their action and inaction complicate matters. Our findings revealed that government and traditional rulers often times give tacit approval for the concentration of militants to terrorists masquerading as pastoralists. For example, Nasarawa state allows passage routes in Awe, Keana, Obi, and Doma as safe havens for attackers of Benue state communities at the border outlets. Bauchi does same for attacks of Plateau in the North West, Taraba in the North West. A good example in Benue is Ole-Alegu. The Ole-Alegu is an island settlement co-joined with Alegu. From a standpoint at Gbaji, one can watch downward towards Ocholonya settlement within a distance of 3 to 5 kms and sights the co-joined habitat(s) of these terrorist called pastoralist at Otalú and Ole-Alegu location in large number.

**4.2 Border delineation/settlement pattern:** A lot of the recent crisis do not have border coloration; however, there are indices to show that lack of border delineation most particular in North-Central Nigeria has oiled crisis in Tiv settlement pattern, Berom settlement pattern etc. These crop farmers are not encouraged to live in clustered or compact village (settlements). If this is done, will further attract government patronage infrastructural and other vital social amenities such as good roads, health services, portable water, post posts and other economic activities will come with the provision of security.

#### **4.3 Institutionalization of conflict resolution management/ Rules of enhancing relationship:**

Absence of conflict resolution mechanism put in place to handle disputes involving the crop farmers and pastoralist at the formative stage with membership drawn from traditional rulers, community leaders, the local farmers, with security agent is lacking. This situation promotes damages before intervention is made. Closely associated is the lack of awareness campaigns, seminars and sensitization programmes.

**4.4 Major socio-economic consequences of the conflict on sustainable development:** We were able to find out the following problem created by the conflict developed:

- Acute shortage of food due to inability to farm
- Food security
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Population migration
- Overstressed social facilities in township
- Increase in crime rate
- Failure of Agricultural Transformation programme

**4.5 Obliterating historicity of the conflict:** Conflicts between pastoralists and crop farmers in North-Central Nigeria have come a long way since 1980, escalating every year into higher dimensions, acquiring a distinctive character, requiring new methods of investigation into the crisis there are bias basic assumptions from both side that permeated and distorted the hitherto existing social relation.

One of the basic assumptions by the pastoralists is that they should enjoy unlimited access to forests and pastures for grazing their animals anywhere in the region. These cattle or animals remain their only means of livelihood that should survive at the expense of other things, including the farmers' crops. This basic assumption is not an accident as far as the pastoralists are concerned but their inability to define it in this clear term to the crop farmers is the hidden facts.

On the other hand, the crop farmers consider their croplands as their main asset and are always eager to increase sizes by appropriating any available land irrespective of how the pastoralists survive. This paper argues that both the pastoralist and the crop farmer lack the vocabulary or have failed to address methods of analysis capable of illuminating the historically unique character of the social pastoral/crop farmer relationship. The paper rejects analytical reduction of the conflict and admits the Examination of the origin and development of the historically specific forms of socio-economic formation with the immediate identity of this undefined organic composition. It dismisses the claim that the conflict between pastoralists and crop farmers emerges through accidents or its origin is left unexplained as untrue.

The obliterating historicity of the conflict is ideologically biased concealed in its reality and conflicting demands. It is our argument in this paper that the conflict between the pastoralists and the crop farmers are voluntary and independent. To them the conflicts represent the final product, the *non plus ultra* of history; for the pastoralist there has been history of his land but there is no longer any. And for the crop farmer the story is basically the same, therefore any attempt to remove these basic assumptions will de-historicize the present and arrest history. These papers feel strongly that they are non-partisan about those positions which outcome is conflict.

#### **4.6 Anatomizing basic assumptions**

To appreciate the dynamics of the argument canvassed in explaining the organic composition of the conflicts; we have decided to open up basic assumptions by both sides. The crop farmers in most of the recent conflict 1980 to date; feel very strongly that, the crisis has a long gestation period within which they, the farmers were sleeping while the pastoralists were busy planning and plotting to encircle and strangulate them in the name of economy. They feel that they are oblivious of the nature of their predicament. They feel that their collective resolve stated in the historicity is compromised and undermined.

One of their basic assumptions is that the pastoralists seek their ancestral lands to graze livestock with money, political savvy and guns; they are in a thick conspiracy with agents of government at the federal and state levels in Northern Nigeria to take ultimate control of their land and its resources. They feel that their conspirators also include ranking Traditional rulers and businessmen in the North. The aim according to them is to impose grazing reserves as a solution to the conflict, have a foot hood on their ancestral lands and begin to stake other claims. These basic assumptions include the understanding that other nationalists in central Nigeria are targeted and there is a murderous strategy to ensure the whole of central Nigeria succumbs to giving up part of the land as grazing reserves to satisfy the pastoralist inordinate thirst for land and by extension Islamized the region.

The pastoralist on the other hand have these Basic assumption that their grazing pathway or grazing reserves that allows them free movement and good feeding for their cattle are taken over by the crop farmers who practices shifting cultivation as a method of farming, thereby appropriating any available land. They argue that at no time is the land free from traditional ownership. Even when it is under fallow, it is still under the control of its owners as if it were cropped.

The shifting cultivation method where impoverished land lasts 2 – 3 years compared to 5 – 10 years in the past has not help matters either. The outcome of all of these is frustration on both sides. Berkowitz, (1989); Anderson & Dill, (1995), capture the situation more clearly when they said such frustration is seen as an interference blocking someone from obtaining a goal. This often leads to aggression which is behaviour in response to frustration intended to harm the person blocking the goal. 'Frustrated needs lead to aggressive behaviour and were the underlying sources of all conflict and violence'. Aiyide (2006), while stressing frustration as a causal factor for conflict generation, Best (2009:49), said: "while expectation does

not need attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions. In this case, the pastoralists hold the crop farmer accountable.

### **5. Remote causes of pastoralists/Crop farmers conflict**

Our understanding of remote causes of pastoralists and crop farmers' conflict in this paper refers to factors which in a general way, have contributed momentum which has made the crisis more likely to occur. Our paper is based on our investigation on the conflict down from the discussions with stakeholders and synthesis of the output of the discussions.

**5.1 Increase pressure on land:** Annexation and expansionism by pastoralists occasion by inadequacy of grazing area has promoted an increase in destruction of crops. More importantly is that it is viewed as an attempt to build inroads into central Nigeria, stake claims on other lands for possible migration from the core north into such lands or areas for effective occupation rather than grazing.

**5.2 Crop damage:** This is widely identified as major cause of conflict between farmers and pastoralists. Farmers perceive this to be highest cause of conflicts while the pastoralists perceive it as insignificant in causing conflicts since they pay huge sums of money for any crop damaged and cattle enjoy crops better than grasses.

**5.3 The unfinished business of the Sokoto Caliphate?** There are some nationalities in Central Nigeria that are not subdued by the Jihad of Usman Danfodio in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and are not under the direct beck and call of the Sokoto Caliphate. This is an irksome point for which the Sultanate has elected to confront through a series of actions many of which are subterranean. The pastoralists who are Muslims and have biological and social with Hausa in the North levied war against these nations leading to the killing of thousands for land grabbing and occupation of ancestral lands in an attempt by the Caliphate to peddle its influence. This is often referred to as the Northern agenda as an internal imperialist movement in the region.

**5.4 Lack of formal institutions or fora for effective dialogue:** The lack of institutions for proper communication was identified as major barriers between the pastoralists and crop farmers to work together to resolve issues of concern that can lead to conflict in open and fair manner. At present, very few formal institutions exist to allow such discussion to take place. This contributes significantly to the misunderstanding that exists between the two groups. The rebuilding of Conflict Management resolution Committees have been found to be very beneficial especially where the traditional customs and local government are supporting the initiatives.

**5.5 Extortion and excessive payment of compensation:** There are three perspectives to the issue of extortion and excessive payment of compensation in promoting conflict between the pastoralists and crop farmers.

**5.1 Extortion by community Leaders:** - Community leaders extort money from pastoralists so as to permit them access to grazing area. They very area which the pastoralists believe are God given and nobody can and should claim ownership. To now pay such money will build internal controversies within the pastoralists awaiting for creation at what he call appropriate day. In some case such extortion is up to ₦200,000.00 per year. These amounts are continuously paid since other community leader will demand for some when the pastoralists move to a new area.

**5.5.2 Compensation for Crop damages:** - The traditional pastoralists would normally settle with the crop farmer but over the years non actors or middle men would come as so between the pastoralists and crop farmer increasing the cost of settlement to excessive and unfair amount. Her again the pastoralists are short-changed, the crop farmer is cheated and both await a later date to conflict because the money paid has been damaged by the Fulani Pastoralists livestock.

**5.5.3 Gratification to law enforcement agencies:** - The old tradition is that only the pastoralists and the crop farmers settle their disputes or damages done to each other voluntary without legal argument. The settlement was based on moral issues and Consideration; but a law enforcement agencies comes in and demand for huge gratification so that he can feed from the wrong; very little sets to the farmer; very high get out of the pastoralist who is not happy with the situation. His dissatisfaction result eventually into conflict at a later date.

**5.6 Changing Cultural Practices:** There are cultural pastoral practices that are changing and these changes are no adequately recognized and appreciated by the crop farmers for example, the modern pastoralists settle in different places, but their animals continue to migrate from one place to another. As a result, it is the younger herdsmen and boys that now take control of cattle rather than the practice where the pastoralists migrate with the entire household. This new cultural change is being interpreted by the crop farmers as a deliberate act on the part of the pastoralists to destroy their crops and escape from the land and areas.

**5.7 Lack of development of grazing reserves:** To help address the problems of inadequate access to land, water, infrastructure and services and promote intensification of livestock production and avoid conflicts the problem of Grazing Reserves, inadequacy of water, soil compaction, the roles of law enforcement agencies and vigilante groups have contributed greatly in the remote causes of conflict between the pastoralists and crop farmers.

When law enforcement take side in emerging conflict between the farmer/pastoralist relationship suffers. In the same way when youth carry out indiscriminate arrest of pastoralists cattle unwarranted violent emerge. Water is usually a problem during the dry season, depending on the ponds and small stream; when animals are watered in these ponds and streams, they pollute the water, a practice that is viewed offensive by the crop farmers. Where not properly managed, such have resulted into violent confrontation.

**5.8 Soil Compaction as remote cause of conflict:** The problem of Cattle “Mashing” the ground was identified as a problem related to grazing of cattle on farmlands. This was of particular concern in areas of clay and clay/loam soils such as those found in the Fadama or Swampy areas. These fertile areas are the most productive soils for rice cultivation and other crops most adapted to soils with high moisture content. Fadama soils remain wet and soft until February and grasses also remain green, therefore attracting cattle into the area. Farmer expressed their belief that allowing cattle onto Fadamas while the soil is soft exacerbates soil compaction and makes the soil very hard to cultivate. Thus, today, pastoralists in central Nigeria are deliberately prevented from grazing animals in many areas containing fresh grasses because if this belief. Not surprising, the pastoralists see this as a deliberate act to prevent their animals from feeding fat on the lush pasture. The outcome is usually conflict.

## **6. The role of the state in conflict management and resolution**

The state has the monopoly of violence and the capacity to implore cohesion or diplomacy in resolving conflicts as especially as they relates to pastoralists and crop farmers who have hitherto co-existed and share

historical antecedents as major beneficiaries of their natural environments - land. Good governance help to de-escalate conflicts, diffuse tensions, and remove problems as they evolve through taken right decisions as at when due (Best, 2006). Fundamental to the above assertion by (Best, 2006) is a huge possibility of locating an argument through actions and inaction of government in the escalating conflict which has created a new paradigm and has become a huge movement in north-central Nigeria. March and Simon (1958), in contributing to the role of the state in conflict management and resolution said: it is a breakdown in standard mechanisms of decision-making.

In the words of (Burton, 1990), this may include, conflict precaution. According to (Stan, 2004:3), contemporary intra-state conflicts cannot be prevented, resolved or managed exclusively through retentive diplomacy political negotiations, peace-making, peace-keeping, and the use of force. Most contemporary wars are intra-state conflicts, which often have far-reaching regional as well as internal dimensions and ramifications (Stan, 2004:1).

Our argument in this paper is that, the account of the pastoralists locating and relocating from one state to another and launching an attack on yet another establishing saved heaven and unsaved heaven creating a dark spot on the organic character of the state in which such development occurs has provided more questions than answers on the character of the state in conflict management and resolution between the pastoralists and the crop farmers.

Our argument in this paper is that the state in this situation has refused to separate itself from religion- which is an invented tradition that seeks to elucidate the dynamic of the formation of pastoralist crop farmers' conflict. Hobbsbawn (1983), persuasively and significantly shows that North central is based on invented traditions that are either forced by the intellectuals or development within the ambits social construction.

In the light of this discussion, one would like to agree with Chinua Achebe's comment in his critically acclaimed book, 'Things fall Apart', where he attempted to show sense of what has become evident in North Central by noting the negative impact of the invented tradition and quoting W.B years: Turing and turning in the widening gyre. The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world (Achebe, 1958). This passage succinctly describes pastoralist/crop farmer's conflict- the fundamental rupture of state falling in its role in the pastoralist/crop farmers' conflicts.

## **7. Recommendations**

Government should play active role by way of legislation to restrict movement of pastoralists /domestic animals and prevent these animals from causing destruction to food crops. Through such legislations animal's diseases like rinderpest, viruses can be prevented. This will also reduces the chance of endangering these animals by human thereby reducing conflict zones in the process. Government cannot run away from generating revenue from these measures if they handle it actively, it can do this building and promoting the construction of Ranches which will be fenced or demarcated and reserved for raising cattle, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, pigs (even though most of the pastoralists are usually associated with Islamic beliefs that forbid pigs association).

Government can also work on desert encroachment as a phenomenon that has pose serious threat in the core north thereby forcing most pastoralists to move to central Nigeria. This situation has been made worse by Global warming. Government should promote effective method of exposing the danger of pastoralism particularly in view of the following:



1. Pastoralism promotes diseases transmission freely
2. It promotes land trespass and conflict creation and soil compaction that leads to low yield production.
3. It exposes the pastoralists and their animals to hazards
4. It is an effective way of losing energy both for the pastoralists and the animals through moving about that promote haggard instead of plumpness
5. Most important children of pastoralists are denied access to formal education due to frequently being on the move; this creates unsustainable development.

We make these recommendations because pastoralism of livestock is evil and must be stopped because of its negative consequences. The grazing reserve Act of 1965 has evidently failed and it is obsolete in terms of best practices across the world that restricts animals to well fenced ranches where such animals are provided with animal feed and medications.

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