

Understanding Rural Violence in North-Central Nigeria: Experience from Nomadic Herdsmen and Rural Farmers' Conflict

¹Luke A Amadi, ²Good Hope Igwe, ³Uche Ukachikara

^{1,3} Department of Political and Administrative Studies University of Port Harcourt Nigeria
² Department of Educational Management Faculty of Education University of Port Harcourt,
Nigeria

**Corresponding Author:* Luke Amadi Department of Political & Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examines rural violence in north central Nigeria with experience from nomadic herdsmen and rural farmers' conflicts. The objective of the study is to deepen knowledge on dynamics of rural violence by identifying and analyzing prevalence of such violence, as well as its impact on rural farmers and food crop production. In particular, the study seeks to identify possible efforts by the Nigerian government to mitigate the violent attacks. The study builds on relative deprivation theory and relational content analysis (RCA) methodology for qualitative data analysis. Direct field data from six (6) Local Government Areas (LGAs) in two States of the North Central Nigeria namely Nassarawa and Benue States were collected between January 2007 and September 2018. A mapping of comparative qualitative data on staple crop production from FAO Stats was conducted to determine decline in food crop production from 2007 to 2017. Additional authoritative data were generated from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Crisis Group International 2017. Findings show that herder's attacks had taken complex and incendiary dimensions resulting in killing of rural farmers, rural livelihoods vulnerability, destruction of food crops, systemic disempowerment of the rural farmers and decline in food crop production. In the alternative, policy options and recommendations including vulnerability mitigation strategies were made.

Keywords: Rural Violence, herdsmen, livelihoods Vulnerability, Rural Development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked Nigeria the third most terrorized country in the world as a result of Boko Haram terrorism and nomadic herders attacks (GTI, 2018). The nomadic cattle herders and their attacks on rural farmers are not peculiar to Nigeria. It has been a common problem across West and Central Africa (Mikailu, 2016). In recent times in Ghana, rural communities complain of herdsmen destroying crops. A related scenario is prevalent in the Central African Republic which includes the incidence of clash between armed Fulani herdsmen and local militia stealing cattle. This results in sectarian violence (Mikailu, 2016).

In various parts of Nigeria, farmers and herdsmen conflict has been ongoing over the years. Available data suggest that the past five years, has witnessed the killing of thousands without precise account. A data by the survey of open source report suggest that fatalities may

have reached an annual average of more than 2,000 from 2011 to 2016, for some years exceeding the Boko Haram insurgency (Crisis Group, 2017).

The Global Terrorism Index (2016) reports that in 2016, more than 1,200 people lost their lives to herder's attacks. This made the Fulani herdsmen the world's fourth deadliest group (GTI, 2016; Mikailu, 2016). This point out the persistence of herdsmen and rural farmer's conflict. The core implications of the violent attacks on rural farmers and food production decline have not been given adequate scholarly attention.

Agricultural output increased by an estimated 4.1 per cent during 1993 compared to 1995 and 1996 with increases of 3.5 and 3.7 per cent, respectively. The value of agricultural production constituted 38.7 per cent of the nation's GDP. In spite of the continued satisfactory performance of the agricultural sector, it still fell short of the 5.5 per cent

growth rate stipulated in the National Rolling Plan for 1997 – 1999 (World Fact Book, 2004). Since the 2000s; food crop production has persistently declined due to perverse herders attacks on rural farmers.

The largely subsistence agricultural sector has failed to keep up with persistent killing of farmers and Nigeria once a large net exporter of food, now imports food. According to 2004 estimate, the value of agriculture production constituted 30.8%; industry, 43.8 % and services 25.4 %, of the nation's GDP, respectively. The nation's GDP real growth rate stood at 7.1% (CIA World Fact Book, 2004).

The study of herders' conflict is remarkable for interrogation of some of the fundamental questions regarding rural violence including possible causes, vulnerability, and intervention and mitigation strategies by the Nigerian state. In particular, there is need to analyze the rural farmers and herdsmen conflicts in a way, that puts the realm of rural violence transformation in the agenda of contemporary development studies.

In global contexts, this research inquiry provides compelling need to broaden the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) agenda by re-examining the critical challenges of rural violence and vulnerability of the rural farmers as a threat to the rural poor and contradictory to inclusive development.

The particular experience of the north-central Nigeria has been both critical and topical in recent decades as it is one of the most incendiary in the ongoing debates on rural violence and insecurity.

Against this backdrop, the present study makes a new contribution to both development studies and the social sciences by advancing knowledge on patterns and dynamics of rural violence in the north central Nigeria. The study is a contribution to the understanding of the ways in which rural violence namely herder's attacks had re-emerged and constitutes a clog to peaceful co-existence, economic survival and emancipation of the rural farmers in north central Nigeria.

This study argues that the problem of herders attacks require deeper reflections and a thorough analysis at the level of research and policy. To this end, the study provides on-the-ground evidence of violent attacks and killings of rural farmers in some rural communities in Benue and Nassarawa states. Both states are among the leading food producing areas in the region. The study reviews the theoretical literature and provides on-the-ground field data which at the same time helps to

provide further insights into debates on the ongoing violence.

The study argues that the ongoing attacks have been overly influenced by dispossession and deprivation of the rural farmers of their land and water for agriculture and subsistence by the herdsmen for the grazing of their cattle leading to the dialectic struggle between herdsmen and farmers for survival hence persistent violence.

This has both ethno-religious, political and cultural undertones. The problem remains contentious and has serious consequences for the underlying assumptions of relative deprivation which has causal connections with the ongoing rural violence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Divergent theoretical explanations have been provided on rural violence from various perspectives. This study builds on the relative deprivation theory which has been conceptualized from various strands. Sociologist, Robert Merton used the term 'social anomie' to describe aspect of deprivation. Merton (1938) argued that such anomie which could be a social construction leads to deprivation.

Relative deprivation has also been argued to have emerged from a feeling of dispossession by a group or individual who could trigger violence (Runciman, 1966; Townsend, 1979). According to Peter Townsend (1979) relative deprivation is the denial of access to resources for subsistence or livelihood of an individual or a group.

This theory puts in proper perspective the understanding of the fundamental trigger of the violence in the particular case of our study namely land. Walter Garrison Runciman (1966) reinforced the basis of relative deprivation as informed by material choices and quest by "A" to have possession of what "B" has. Runciman (1966) draws attention to the question of social justice as a modality to redress relative deprivation which increasingly accounts for inequality.

Deprivation accounts for a number of factors such as rebellion, wars and rise in resilient social movements (Gurr, 1970; Olson, Herman and Zanna, 1986; Walker and Smith, 2001). Relative deprivation provides useful theoretical insights which could advance knowledge on dynamics of rural violence in north central Nigeria.

The violence is linked to distortion, alienation and deprivation of the rural farmers of their land

by the herdsmen who forcefully graze on their farm resulting in destruction of their crops and subsequent violent crisis.

The relative deprivation theory explores the causes and effects of some of the fundamental problems inherent in the existential realities of the rural farmers such as poverty, vulnerability, ethnicity, subsistence, insecurity, diseases, wellbeing, distortion of livelihoods and alienation.

Most of these realities underpin the core development challenges and emancipation of the rural farmers and informs the need to advance theoretical knowledge of rural violence in the social sciences.

Such theoretical exploration linked to relative deprivation encompasses the struggle by the herdsmen to control land for the grazing of their cattle and earn a living at the expense of the rural farmers and their crops which constitute the farmer's means of livelihood. This is typified in core instances of political and socio-economic intersections, where livelihoods and survival instincts are at the center (Tonah, 2006).

The suitability of the theoretical debates of relative deprivation lies within the understanding of the consequences of alienation and deprivation of the farmers which has both social, economic and political consequences which at the same time helps to understand the existential realities of the rural farmers.

Beyond the notion that the effect of poverty in the rural contexts is not enough to trigger violence, alternative emphasis and consideration is given to the challenges posed by deprivation, marginalization and violent expropriation demonstrated in the logic of herdsmen's grazing on the farmer land where the rural farmers derive their subsistence.

Bringing economic survival and deprivation at the center of rural violence reinforces the suitability of the deprivation theory.

In intergroup contexts, Tajfel and Turner (1979) observe that there is causality from the intergroup struggle for survival and disarticulation of socio-economic realities of existence leading to violent conflicts. Such conflicts and their consequences particularly the increasing disempowerment, killings and displacement of the rural farmers through violent means underscore the basis for deprivation. Mayah (2016) argues that over 40%

of the rural farmers have been displaced, and disposed of their means of livelihood as a result of attacks by herdsmen resulting in alienation from their daily subsistence. Similarly, Amadi and Anokwuru (2017) provide a data which suggest that the increasing attacks results in decrease in food production as the farmers who are vulnerable are scared of losing their lives to herdsmen attacks. Deprivation in this circumstance actually or potentially negates the social logic of productive capacity of the farmers as it is informed by the tendency of systemic dispossession of the farmers of their farmlands. Kwaja (2014) reinforces this dialectic and contends that in the region, herder's conflict has been directly linked with a central role in view of its linkage with livelihood issues that are organically tied to survival between farmers and herdsmen, which constitutes an integral part of Nigeria's political economy from the standpoint of agriculture.

This framework offers sufficient insight in exploring the dialectic relationship between the cattle herdsmen and the rural farmers. In particular, the theory reinforces the dynamics of vulnerability and struggle for survival as the rural farmers effortlessly strive for restitution. Such dialectical relationship between the contradiction or clash of economic struggle, and survival between the rural farmers and cattle herdsmen remains an ongoing concern pointing to the inevitability of an underlying policy response and intervention.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sets of qualitative and field data were used for the study. The qualitative data for the study which covers the period 2000 to 2018 derived from relational content analysis (RCA). Content analysis is a research methodology that uses replicable and valid inferences from data in the context of a research (Krippendorff, 1989).

It includes both the description and analysis of the content and in particular, the quantification of the content of the information (Lasswell, 1948) and the source of the information, the need, generation and consequences or effects of the information (Holsti, 1969). Krippendorff, (1989) argues that the major sources of data for content analysis include texts from which meanings are derived, verbal discourse, documents and visual representations. While the field data derived from questionnaire and interviews with both rural farmers and herdsmen.

Study Area

The North central Nigeria is also called Middle Belt Nigeria. It is made up of six states namely Niger, Kogi, Nassarawa, Kwara, Plateau, and Benue States (see **Fig. 1**).The study area covers six Local Government Areas (LGAs) three from each of the two purposively selected states in north-central Nigeria namely Benue and Nassarawa. The three LGAs are Adoh, Tarka and Kwande in Benue and Lafia, Nara and Buruku LGAs in Nassarawa. In particular, the people predominantly engage in rural farming including commercial and subsistent farming, hunting and trading. Benue is known as food basket of the nation. While Nassarawa rural farmers engage in production of various staple crops.

Rural farmers in these local governments have been the sites of intense violent attacks. The rural farmers inhabit much of these areas and live in rural communities. Farming has been their major source of livelihood and subsistence, they also engage in petty trading. These states are predominantly agriculturalists and among some of the most widely attacked states by the Fulani nomads (Kwaja, 2014).

They have vast land mass with preponderance of rural farmers. **Table 1** shows major cash crop production outputs. Although there are incidence of herder’s attacks in other parts of the country from the South – West to the South East and down to the South -South (Kwaja, 2014; Mayah, 2016), the intensity appears high in our area of study.

Table1. Major cash crop production outputs (1000tonnes)

Crops	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Oil palm fruit(000)	7800	7750	7750	7600	8000	8220	8500	8500	8600	8700
Palm kernel(000)	543	548	545	545	562	577	579	608	610	610
Palm oil(000)	860	776	810	845	896	899	903	908	910	910
Coacoa Beans(000)	203	323	318	370	225	338	249	340	361	366
Coffee	3090	3780	3700	3700	3750	3830	3850	3910	3320	3520
Rubber	125	130	120	120	107	107	108	112	142	142
Cotton Seed(000)	153	183	208	212	236	247	248	250	250	250
Sugar Cane(000)	589	615	675	675	682	695	705	747	739	776

Source: *FAO STATS (2005)*

On its part, the Fulani are found across West and Central Africa. From Senegal to the Central African Republic and believed to be the largest semi-nomadic group in the world (Crisis Group, 2017; Amadi & Anokwuru, 2017). The nomadic herdsman in Nigeria have two dominant settlement patterns; those who live in the cities and those in the rural areas who are

predominantly nomads (Ndukwe, 1996; Levinson, 1996).The later engage in herding their animals (including cattle, sheep and goats) across vast and distant lands. This vast movement results in the clashes with rural farmers whose farm lands are grazed resulting in destruction of food crops



Fig1. Map of North Central Nigeria

Sources: *National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), (2017), Crisis Group (2017)*

Sampling Procedure

Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. First, purposive sampling procedure which is a partial intuitive method of selection was used in

selecting the study sites (Nassarawa and Benue States).The two(2) purposively selected states are among the most attacked and more engaged with farming and food production among the states in the region as Benue as explicated is

known as the food basket of the nation(Kawaja,2014;Mayah,2016).

In the first stage of sampling, six (6) Local Government Areas(LGAs),three for each, out of Benue and Nassarawa States respectively were sampled based on the level of rural agricultural practices and incidence of herders attacks(See **table 2**). Purposive sampling provided partial intuitive understanding and selection of core violent prone areas for the study.

Table2. The six sampled Local government Areas from Nassarawa and Benue States

State	LGA
Nassarawa	Lafia, Nara and Buruku
Benue	Adoh, Kwandeand Tarka

Source: *Field, (2017)*

In the second stage, having purposively determined the specific areas of the study we conducted a simple random sampling technique to determine the sample size for the study. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula which is given as follows;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

N = Population size

n = minimum sample size

e = degree of error expected (0.05)

N = population size

The adoption of this approach was intended to establish the representativeness of the sample on an acceptable level of significance which in this study is 0.05. This represents the minimum sample size of respondents which was 800 to eliminate any form of bias. Thus, the total sample for the study was selected as follows; four hundred (400) for Nassarawa and four hundred (400) for Benue State respectively.

The sample was randomly selected among farmers and herders.In the third stage, additional data were collected from interviews with herders and rural farmers from each of the selected LGAs. The interviews were conducted in native languages and transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection

Structured questionnaires were distributed among the selected rural farmers and herders

(Appendix). A total of eight hundred (800) questionnaires were administered to elicit information on patterns and incidence of herders' attacks on rural farmers. Seven hundred and eighty nine (789) were retrieved. Rural farmers (398) herders (311). Also a five point liker scale of Very High (VH), High (H) Medium (M), Low (L), Very Low (VL) were designed to test the incidence and prevalence of Rape, Vandalization of farming materials, Killing of farmers, Displacement, Destruction of food crops. Additional data were provided from the FAO stats which aided in a comparative analysis of pre and post herder's attacks and variations in agricultural production.

Oral interviews based on structured questions were conducted between June 2016 and November 2017.The responses were recorded both in local languages, pidgin and English and transcribed verbatim. Information about the socio-economic status of the farmer's and herdsman was obtained through the responses of both farmer's and herdsman. Such information included the age, marital status, educational status, religion and occupation. Patterns of herders' attacks, frequency of occurrence, causes of the attacks, effects on rural livelihoods and the level of government's intervention and response were examined. Substantial conceptual content review of relevant literature, simple percentages and tables were adopted for data analysis.

On the part of the herders, after direct interviews, additional qualitative data were sourced from leaders of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and influential spokesperson for the northern elite and chieftain of the Northern Elders Forum (NEF) Professor Ango Abdullahi.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

There are a number of theoretical and conceptual issues raised on the dynamics of rural violence linked to herdsman conflict. The term "rural violence" in this paper is associated with rural farmers and nomadic herders induced violence. It suggests destruction of agricultural crops and loss of human lives arising from violent attacks and conflict over the grazing of the farmer's crops by the herders.

In this particular analysis, the rural farmers are attacked by the Fulani herdsman who are armed with AK47 automatic rifles and similar weapons while the farmers are not armed and vulnerable to the attacks. This remains both problematic

and hitherto a threat to peaceful co-existence and security of the rural farmers.

The study undertakes some conceptual exploration of the most salient debates in relation to our research objective. Salamon (2003) contends that rural places are commonly thought of as peaceful and safe. Much of this debate is reinforced in the exploration of the idyllic nature of the rural areas. For instance, Pruitt (2006) argues that the rural areas provide pristine and serene settings where people get along and crime is rare. However, across the world, rural violence has taken several dimensions in recent decades.

Frier (1983) examines the legal dynamics of urban praetors and rural violence. Pointing to the divergent trends associated with rural violence. The strategies to douse similar violence in rural areas are documented (Monsey, Owen, Zierman, Lambert and Hyman, 1995).

In the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, new wars and local conflicts within borders persisted and became a common place in most societies of the global South. Rural violence re-emerged as one of such local conflicts and forms part of debates explicating the novel turn micro level insecurity had taken, challenging the legitimacy of government to provide rural security (Pathak, 1993).

Theoretical conceptualization for a broader elucidation of rural violence is reflective of debates seeking to illuminate the concept in relation to the underdeveloped societies which are largely rural, poor and vulnerable.

The salient causes and intensity of rural violence have equally been examined (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012; Solagberu, 2012; Audu, 2013; Akosile & Okoh 2016). The increasing involvement of youths in rural violence such as cattle rustling and more importantly sexual violence have been given some attention as causal factors (McGregor 2014).

A 2003 pilot study on rural violence found that rural intimate abuse were almost as likely as their urban experience to inflict physical injuries (Logan, et al; 2003).

Rural violence has also resulted in the use of weapons during the assaults (Websdale & Johnson, 1998). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) has accounted for much of the bloody attacks. It is estimated that seven to eight million small arms and light weapons are in use in West Africa today (Aning,

Atta-Asamoah, 2011: 354; Cabot, 2017). This includes the rise in illicit firearms including Ak47 and similar locally-produced and smuggled arms. This aggravates rural violence. Most authoritative studies on herder's attacks suggest that they are armed with AK47 riffle (Maya, 2016; Amadi & Anokwuru, 2017). In several instances of rural violence there are threats to kill their victims and destroy property during the event more than the urban areas (Websdale & Johnson, 1998; Amadi & Anokwuru, 2017).

Brittain (2005) reinforces this debate in his study of rural Columbia as rural violence remains pervasive. In particular, this informed the resurgence of human security debates (UN, 1994) and in particular, the "redefining security" paradigm (Ulman, 1983; Mathews, 1989; UN, 1994; Klare, 1996; Paris, 2001). The thesis on human security makes the security of individuals rather than the State a point of reference (UNDP, 1994; Amadi & Alapiki, 2018). Debates in the literature on deepening of security studies and security securitization had equally emerged and indicative of scholarly relevance of security (Buzan Waever, and de Wilde, 1998).

Osgood and Chambers (2000) recount the implications of what they term "social disorganization outside the metropolis" to analyze rural youth violence. The central thread of this analysis shows that rural violence is multi-dimensional and transcends herders and rural farmers. For instance, studies on intimate partner violence (IPV) are suggestive of the rise in such sexually induced rural violence.

As often argued, rural violence has been examined from the prism of "social ecology" involving economic agitation, livelihood, land scarcity, the structure and organizational patterns of agricultural production (Villa real, 2004; Blench, 2010; Krause, 2011; Abass, 2012; Audu, 2013; McGregor, 2014). Villarreal (2004) recounts some of the insightful interrogation of the state at alleviating rural violence in far - away rural areas in the context of land scarcity, organization of agriculture as in rural violence in Mexico.

Similarly, the recurring challenges of rural violence had attracted the attention of scholars seeking for its mitigation. Hagberg (1998) has advanced some variations on different types of conflicts in farmer-nomadic relations. This point to two broad types of disputes among

individuals and among groups, the other is conflict of interest and violent conflicts.

In most African societies, there has been evidence of herdsmen and rural conflict such as rural Kenya, Sudan, Benin, Mali etc. Others akin to herdsmen include terrorism as in the northeast Nigeria, including rape, forced migration and internal displacement extending to Jos in Plateau State, there are similar experience in Sudan, South Sudan, Kosovo, Mali, and Benin Republic etc.

In Nigeria, McGregor (2014) argues that the North Central states of Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue have been identified as the most affected areas in the country. In a qualitative and quantitative study that derived from data sets from the Nigeria Watch project situated at University of Ibadan, Nigeria, several contributors examined trends and analysis to understand dynamics and complexities of violence from different sectors including oil resource extraction, cattle breeding, radical Islam, motor accidents, land conflicts to witchcraft. They argue for further empirical investigation and the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. In the volume, Olayoku (2014) examined trends and patterns of cattle grazing and rural violence in Nigeria (2006-2014) among several other contributors.

The critical issues associated in deepening the debates on cattle rustling and rural violence with emphasis on rural banditry has been foreshadowed. For instance, writing on the particular experience of rural Katsina, Ejiofor(2016)reports that a residence of Wagini Village in Katsina alleged to have lost over 50 cattle to the rustlers who invaded his community in the night.

Ejiofor(2016)stated that findings revealed that some villages in Faskari Local Government Area had to temporarily relocate due to constant harassment by the rustlers who not only steal their prized possession, but also rape their wives and girls. This extends to other villages such as Gora community where residents allege that they have been constantly harassed by rustlers.

Aborisade (2016) identified similar growing concern on the attacks and destruction of lives and property by armed men suspected to be Fulani herdsmen. Mayah (2016) reports such perennial rural violence across the Nassarawa-Benue borderline down to Agatu resulting in internal displacement and livelihoods distortion.

Systemic rural violence (Osgood& Chambers, 2000; Kay, 2001) is conceptualized as closely related to the patterns of herder's attacks. Further dimensions of the trigger of the rural violence have been examined to include among others, the destruction of crops, contamination of stream by cattle, disregard for traditional authority, and sexual harassment of women by nomads, harassment of nomads by host youths, indiscriminate defecation by cattle on roads (Ofuoku & Isife, 2009).

Others include cattle rustling, indiscriminate bush grazing etc. Abass (2012) underscores the economic and agrarian undertone driving the conflict as it primarily centred on land.

There are violence arising from encroachment into farmlands, struggle over grazing space, and other forms of criminality and local banditry which persistently put rural communities at risk of violence and deaths (Kwaja, 2014).

Another dimension emphasizes the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). Mayah(2016)reports how the herdsmen during the Agatu attack were armed with AK 47 rifle. There are also accounts which suggest territorial conquest especially at the aftermath of the Fulani invasion in Agatu as Mayah (2016) suggests that the herdsmen now inhabit Agatu community at post genocide. Another perspective in the literature provides causal connection with northern elite. For instance, Mayah(2016)found that most of the herders were working for some rich men who owned the cattle.

On its part, Saleh Bayeri, the interim national secretary of Gan Allah Fulani association, an umbrella body of Fulani associations in Nigeria, argued that the Agatu people started the crisis in 2013 when they killed a prominent Fulani leader in the area and no action was taken by the government (Mayah 2016).

In Zamfara the incidence of cattle rustling have been on the increase. Francis (2016) reports that Farmers in Zamfara flee their farms to escape the attacks of bandits as herdsmen. This left 250,000 hectares of farmland un-cultivated in 2016 farming season as tillers of the soil are not in sight. He recounts that the Secretary of All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) in the state, Alhaji Sa'idu Tanko Kura, explained the scenario indicating its implication for the Nigerian agri-community.

He stated that among the 600,000 farmers involved in Growth Enhancement Scheme

(GES) about 250,000 for dry season farming, that more than 200,000 had abandoned their farms and fled their communities due to hostilities meted to them by cattle rustlers.

Akowe and Kayode (2014) argue that cattle rustling have been a nightmare in the entire north. In the particular case of Kaduna they argue that JAN Birni village -a community in Birnin Gwari local government area of Kaduna State which lies on the border between Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states was described by the traditional ruler of the area the Emir of Birnin Gwari, Alhaji Zubair Maigwari, to have been completely taken over by cattle rustlers who kill, maim and rape their victims before dispossessing them of their hard-earned investments.

Some theorists claim that cattle rustling are synonymous to the BokoHaram terrorism (Macgregor, 2014) their argument rest with the claim that the persistent rural violence and conflicts between cattle herdsman and the rural farmers have taken several lives. However, in these debates, the insistence upon the meaningful and discursive nature of rural livelihood results in livelihood vulnerability, disempowerment and eventual distortion of the very survival of the rural farmers.

While there are debates that contend that herders violence is ethno-religious (Mayah, 2016), it is discernible to link this with a variety of violent implications such as rape, arson, abduction, killing, kidnapping etc (Akowe & Kayode, 2014; Macgregor, 2014).

Though harder to see their casual connections, on February 6, 2016, herdsman were reported to have raided Buruku, a town in Benue state, killing 12 people. Mayah (2016) reported the massive killings in Agatu in Benue State. There are arguments in the literature which rearticulate how rural violence is related to economic disempowerment (Kwaja, 2014). For instance, rural violence is a social construct related to incompatibility of economic goals. Poignantly, it is "a socially disoriented inclination".

Despite claims in the literature on the ongoing violence, its interface with core developmental issues that suggest effective rehabilitation of the victims and mitigation have been rarely examined. For instance, massive killings recorded between 2011 and 2016 have not been redressed, on the contrary, insecurity remains on the increase (Mayah, 2016; Amadi & Anokwuru, 2017; Crisis Group, 2017).

The implications of these recorded number of deaths and policy framings to confront the emergent challenges of rural violence remains at issue. It is less clear what mitigation measures the government has put in place. This has further exacerbated ethnic mistrust rather than douse the palpable tension associated with such rural violence. Beyond this discursive framework that examines this from both ethno-religious and political perspective, the economy generally remains negatively impacted as Benue which is the food basket of the nation provides major agricultural produce of the country such as yam, potatoes, grains, groundnut, onions etc. The nexus between human survival and the wider economy is increasingly under-valued on policy discourse.

This argument has a correlation with marginalization of the rural farmers and their existential realities including the patterns of livelihood and its sustainability beyond persistent attacks by the Fulani herdsman.

As a set of wider social problem confronting the rural farmers, collaborative efforts should be made to check the persistent violent attacks. The key argument here is that rural security policies should be put in place to check persistent attacks and exposure of the rural areas to security threats. Buzan, teal. (1998) argued that security threats include threats to freedom and this remains critical in the present scenario.

Thus such attacks by the herdsman create systemic fears and insecurity. Mayah,(2016) argues that the effect of this is that many of the rural farmers now live in perpetual fear as they are sacked from their homes as displaced persons in internally displaced persons (IDPs)camp. Thus, from this perspective—and based on similar rural insecurity debates (Nweze, 2005) the rural farmers remain central in rural security transformation debate.

The problem of nomadic violent attacks has been identified in various dimensions including the spate of killings that currently characterize the nature of rural violence. For example, Nweze (2005) stated that both farmers and herders lost their lives in such conflicts while there has been reduction in productivity for both groups. It is also argued that this is linked to the traditional spheres of Muslim religious belief and northern oligarchy (Mayah, 2016).

This suggests the multiplicity of reasons for the incompatibility of both the herdsman and the rural farmers resulting in intolerance and ethnic

mistrust. Akowe and Kayoed, (2014) provide a valuable insight in this regard. Essentially, their general call to re-examine the genesis and possible mitigation of the rural violence is less internalized. This ongoing problem remains a perennial and re-occurring threat to peace in the region.

Contrary debates such as Gefu and Gilles (1990) and others provide debates that transcend the notion of cattle grazing and herdsmen as inherently troublesome. On its part, McGregor, (2014) argued that it is hard to differentiate the mode of nomadic attacks with terrorism. While some attention is paid to the imminent threats of Fulani herdsmen, there seem to be a research gap on rehabilitating the rural communities who have been victims of the attacks and left homeless such as the Agatu community and the March 2016 genocide. Available data from the reviewed literature point out the evidence of lethargy on the part of the federal government to effectively prosecute the herdsmen or provide resettlement schemes for the internally displaced

rural farmers. This increasingly suggests humanitarian crisis and poor state response to rehabilitate the displaced rural communities. Thus, alternative mitigation strategy is sought.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using content analysis and simple percentages with tables .The aim was to provide evidence that depicts the level of violence on the rural farmers as an important variable in determining the patterns of intervention and policy response to mitigate the persistent rural violence and farmers vulnerability.

Although herdsmen attacks have been ongoing, it became incendiary in the late 2000s. **Tables 2 and 3** show the volume of production of major staple foods between 1995 to 2004 while table 3 shows decline in major staple food production from 2007 to 2017 additional data from NBS and Crisis Group International (2017) provided evidence of persistent incendiary attacks by pastoralists on rural farmers.

Table3. Production statistics of some major staple foods (MT)

Staples	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Maize(000)	6 931	5667	5254	5127	5476	4167	4620	4934	5150	6150
Millet(000)	5563	5881	5902	5956	5960	6 105	5 530	6 100	6100	6100
Sorghum(000)	6997	7064	7297	7516	7520	7711	7061	7704	8100	8100
Rice(000)	2920	3122	3268	3275	3277	3296	2 752	3 192	4952	4952
Wheat(000)	44	47	66	98	101	73	51	77	73	73
Cassava(000)	31404	31 418	32 050	32 695	32 697	32 010	32566	34476	33379	33379
Yam(000)	22818	23201	23972	24768	25873	26201	26374	26 849	27000	27000
Coocoyam(000)	1182	1195	1832	3 823	3 835	3886	3910	3929	3500	35000
Sweet Potato(000)	1168	1478	1493	1560	2451	2468	2473	2503	2150	2150
Potatoes	95	99	103	107	573	599	599	629	600	600
Plantain(000)	1632	1687	1744	1803	1902	1969	1999	2058	2110	2110
Groundnut(000)	1579	2278	2531	2534	2894	2901	2683	2699	2700	2700
Soybeans(000)	287	322	361	403	410	429	436	437	484	484
Melon(000)	287	317	330	330	338	345	348	347	347	347
Tomatoes	569	569100	650	810	879	879	879	889	889	889
Chili paper	612	633	745	709	715	715	715	720	720	720
Onions	500	550				600	600	600	615	615
pineapple	800	800	830	857	881	881	881	889	889	889
Mangoes	631	656	689	731	729	730	730	730	730	730
Papaya(000)	648	662	675	751	748	748	748	755	755	755
Okra(000)	630	650	612	638	719	719	719	730	730	730
Green Corn(000)	575	575	575	575	575	575	575	576	576	576
Carrots(000)	198	203	210	225	231	231	231	235	235	235
Coconut(000)	149	151	152	152	154	160	161	161	161	161
Kolanut	95	85	82	82	82	82	82	85	85	85
Cashew Nut	95	110	125	152	176	184	185	186	186	186
Tobbaco Leaves	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200	9 200

Table 4.Decline in Major Staple Foods Production in North central Nigeria 2007 to 2017(MT)

Staples	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Maize(000)	7170	6510	5250	5140	4560	4200	3800	2400	2000	1987
Millet(0000)	9100	8900	7600	6900	5700	5700	4800	4200	3400	2900

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Sorghum(000)	9900	8700,	7700	6900	5800	4900	3700	3600	2900	2200
Rice(000)	5980	5600	4970	4401	3980	3600	2901	2300	1909	1,800
Wheat(000)	100	98	91	89	70	69	61	59	50	46
Cassava(000)	77980	76980	75800	74600	74500	72600	71800	70800	69900	68700
Yam(000)	29000	28812	27,900	26800	25950	25800	24700	23981	22 780	21800
Cocoyam(000)	38000	37300	36000	35100	34000	34300	33000	32900	31000	29000
Sweet Potato(000)	5150	4300	4210	4,000	3900	2800	2300	2100	1990	1369
Potato(000)	900	900	890	800	799	700	689	598	510	498
Plantain(000)	5110	4987	4221	4000	3986	3234	2911	2812	1789	1672
Groundnut(000)	7,200	6897	6201	5920	5615	5501	4921	4871	3991	3115
Soybeans(000)	784	681	500	491	350	311	287	221	200	194
Melon(000)	547	544	530	510	498	482	473	460	452	406
Tomatoes(000)	998	991	870	869	855	841	838	827	810	800
Chill/Peppers(000)	985	983	980	972	960	951	942	920	910	899
Onions(000)	915	920	930	942	956	968	971	983	992	1119
Pineapples(000)	942	921	900	889	871	865	863	860	830	800
Mangoes(000)	900	880	789	,779	710	699	659	500	488	420
Papaya(000)	900	880	770	660	600	572	500	489	400	383
Okra(000)	780	600	553	400	380	258	210	200	189	100
Green Corn(000)	590	580	575	570	568	559	480	461	350	300
Carrots(000)	280	276	268	260	250	240	235	230	230	200
Coconut(000)	168	161	159	151	151	148	40	139	130	129
Kolanut(000)	186	190	210	250	250	250	261	268	270	275
Cashewnuts(000)	200	190	180	179	160	150	140	137	120	100
TobaccoLeaves(000)	600	500	480	400	388	350	300	280	200	200

Source: FAO Stats (2005) modification by authors

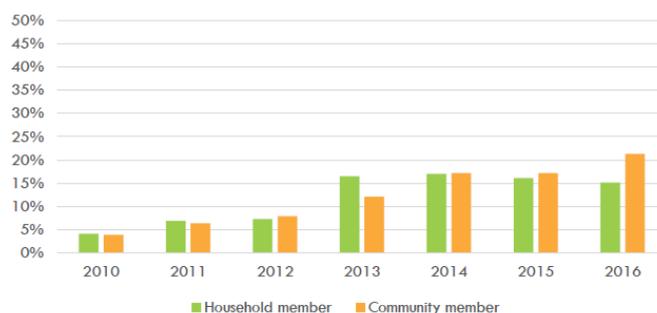


Fig 3. Conflict Events in North Central Nigeria Overtime 2010-2017

Sources: Azad A, Crawford, Kaila H (2018), The World Bank,(2018),National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria,(2018)



Fig. 4 Distribution of Fatality Overtime from three Data Sources

Sources: Azad A, Crawford ,E, Kaila H (2018),

Table 8. Dimensions of herders conflicts in north central Nigeria 2010 to 2017

2010	Violence increases preceding presidential elections
2011	Insurgents begin suicide bombings
2012	Cattle-rustling increases; estimated 60,000 cattle stolen this year

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2013	Increased herder attacks lead to ethnic-based counter-herder movements, which engage in broader political violence
2014	International Crisis Group estimates 2,500 deaths in herder-farmer conflicts this year
2015	Conflict persisted
2016	International Crisis Group estimates 2,500 deaths in herder-farmer conflicts this year
2017	Herder-famer conflicts continue, are increasingly reported in National Media.

Source: Azad A, Crawford, E, Kaila, H (2018) with modifications by authors

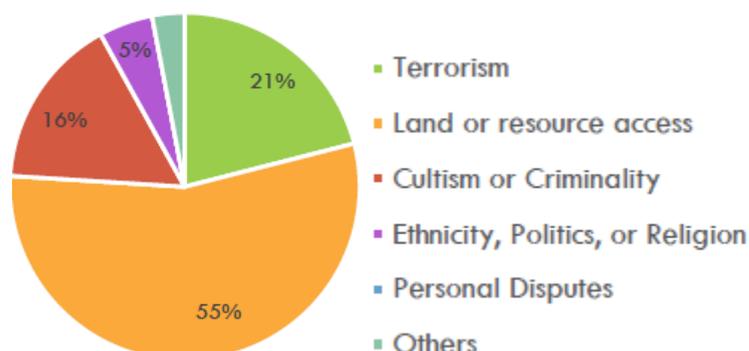


Fig.5 Cause of most recent conflict events reported in North central Nigeri 2010-2017

Source: Azad A, Crawford, E, Kaila, H. (2018)

Table 9. Percentage Scale of Rural Violence by herders on Farmers in North central Nigeria

Causes /effects	Rating and Weight Value						
	VH (5)	H (4)	M (3)	L (2)	VL (1)	SWV	MI
Killing of farmers	60 37.5%	59 36.88%	20 12.5%	9 5.63%	12 7.5%	626	3.92
Vandalization of food crops	58 36.25%	57 35.63%	26 16.15%	10 6.25%	9 5.63%	625	3.90
rape	59 36.88%	58 36.25%	19 11.88%	8 5.00%	9 5.63%	609	3.80
Outmigration	57 35.63%	56 35.00%	19 11.88%	8 5.00%	20 12.5%	602	3.76
Displacement	56 35%	56 35%	20 12.5%	20 12.5%	8 5%	612	3.83

Source: Field Data (2017)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative and primary data for the study provided robust findings which suggest the persistence of violent killings and attacks by the herdsman. According to a key informant, “I was a victim of direct shooting by the herdsman resulting in the death of my two younger brothers. I managed to escape the attacks”¹. “In our community (Agatu) houses were burnt down ,several men and women were killed, others internally displaced”²..Although the attacks have been a perennial problem which dates several decades of post-colonial Nigeria, Azad, Crawford and Kaila, (2018)in their findings suggest that the intensity doubled since the late 2000s.This is consistent with the findings of this study.The findings suggest that the herdsman deny responsibility for the killings. Both

responses from interviews and questionnaire point to this direction. The herdsman rather claim legitimacy of ownership of what they called ‘grazing routes’. Leader of the Miyatti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) argued that Muslim does not preach violence, the herdsman have right to the grazing routes and as such should be accorded some level of access”³A former Vice Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University and spokesperson of the Northern Elders Forum, (NEF), Professor. Ango Abdullahi justified the killings by the herdsman. He said that; “the herdsman are killing members of their host communities in order to defend themselves, that the herders were free to take the cattle to any part of the country the same way an Igbo man does his business”⁴ Asked if herdsman are not the ones committing the murders, he added, “The truth is,

if you want to kill me and I have a chance first, I will kill you, or you do want people to be killed and not defend themselves?⁵ Abdullahi asked, “What about the impunity of the people killing herdsmen? The herdsmen in Nigeria are reacting to the injustice meted out daily to them⁶? He claimed that the British provided the routes for the herdsmen, “Herdsmen operate in these places you mentioned because the country has denied them the traditional routes which the British created for them in 1914 when they occupied this country because they realized that, like cars require tracks, herdsmen also require tracks they can use to graze and drink water⁷. “The British provided it for them and gazetted it but people have denied them these routes. So, where do you expect the animals to follow? They have to follow somewhere and the easy road is the one other people are using⁸.”

A herdsman responded that “farmers are often hostile to them and do not allow them to freely graze their cattle hence conflicts⁹” A rural farmer said; “the only question is; who armed the herdsmen with AK47 automatic rifle? ¹⁰. A group of herdsmen said that; “they carry guns to protect themselves and their cattle against armed rustlers and criminal groups who attack their cattle”. ¹¹A related study revealed that the violent attacks had persisted with several adverse effects such as displacement, disempowerment, forced migration, killings etc in addition to the destruction of several crops grown in the rural north central Nigeria as the nomads graze their cattle (Crisis Group, 2017).The finding is consistent with recent qualitative data.In the month of March 2016, the Agatu community of Benue State, north central, Nigeria witnessed one of the most recent and incendiary attacks by Fulani herdsmen armed with AK-47 rifles as they invaded several villages and farm settlements in a broad daylight, shot down children, women, men and the elderly(Mayah,2016).

About 300 villagers were reportedly massacred in communities in several communities including Agila, Okokolo, Akwu, Adagbo, Odugbehon and Odejo. Extending to Obagaji, Akwu and Odejo. Houses, churches and police posts were burned down. Human corpses were littered in most places in these communities (Mayah, 2016; Amadi and Anokwuru, 2017).Our findings point out that several communities have been attacked. Not long after the February, 2016 attacks in Agatu, the Enugu State incident in South Eastern Nigeria ensued with more than 40 persons killed. This caused outrage across Nigeria. The loss of lives and destruction of property forced many people to flee their homes resulting in internal displacement.In Yagba East Local Government Area of Kogi State, North Central Nigeria, Olobatoke and Omowumi (2017) recount the effects of Fulani herders’ intrusion on the economic livelihood of crop farmers in the area. They argued that the vortex of attacks and intrusion resulted in reduction in crop yield and income of farmers/nomads, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and loss of products in storage.

Similarly, several years ago some other communities in Nassarawa State notably Tom-Anyiin, Tom-Ataan, Mbaya and Tombu in Buruku Local Government Area of the state have fallen to the Fulani attacks (Mayah,2016).The 2015 herders attacks and killings in Kompany community, Lafia LGA, in Nassarawa State is equally instructive. **Table 5.** Shows incidence of violence associated with pastoralists while **Table 6.** Shows trends in herders’ conflict in North Central Nigeria. Data from both tables are corroborated with **Figure 2.** Map of Nigeria which shows that states with high incidence of herder-farmer conflicts are predominantly in the north central.

Table 5. Violence associated with pastoralists 2016

Date	Casualties/Deaths	Location
January 4, 2016	between 12 and 38 dead	Udeni Ruwa, Nasarawa State.
January 10, 2016	About 45 dead	Agatu, Benue State
January 17, 2016	3 herdsmen dead, killed by cattle rustlers	Gareji village, Wukari LGA, Taraba State.
January 23, 2016	30 to 60 people killed, including a police DPO	Demsare, Wunamokoh, Dikajam and Taboungo, in Adamawa State
February 2, 2016	7 dead in Agatu	Benue State
February 7, 2016	10 dead	Tom Anyiin, Benue State.
February 11, 2016	2 killed in Abbi,	Enugu State.
February 24, 2016	between 300 and 500 killed in Agatu	BenueState.
February 28, 2016	9 killed in Agatu,	Benue State.

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March 7, 2016	8 killed in Logo	Benue State
March 8, 2016	12 killed in Mbaya-Tombo	Buruku, Benue State.
March 13, 2016	2 killed in Mbaya-Tombo	Buruku, Benue State.
March 17, 2016	15 killed in Tombo,	Buruku LGA, Benue State.
March 29, 2016	between 7 and 16 killed in Ohali-Elu, Ogba- Egbema-Ndoni LGA,	Rivers State.
April 3 & 4, 2016	APC chieftain killed in Tarka	Benue State, leading to mass protest
April 9, 2016	Former SGF, Olu Falae's farm attacked, security Guard killed.	Ilado, Ondo State.
April 10, 2016	between 15 and 44 killed in Angai,	Dashole, Dori and Mesuma villages, Gashaka LGA, Taraba State.
April 13, 2016	Herdsmen killed in reprisal attack	Ilara-Mokin Ifedore LGA, Ondo State
April 18, 2016	18 killed in Moor,	Kwande LGA, Benue State
April 25, 2016	at least 20 killed in Ukpabi Nimbo	Uzo-Uwani LGA, Enugu State.
April 26, 2016	8 people missing in Obiaruku,	Ndokwa, DeltaState.

Sources: Crisis Group (2017), NBS (2018) with Authors' modification

Table 6. Trends in herders' Conflict in North Central Nigeria

Conflict and violence events in North Central Nigeria remained steady from 2013 to 2016
25% of household experienced any type of conflict event from 2010 to 2017
More than half of all reported conflict events (55%) were caused by disputes over access to land or resources
33% of conflict-affected households had at least one member displaced as a result
34% of the events of conflict in North Central Nigeria were never reported to any authorities

Sources: Azad A, Crawford, E, Kaila H (2018), The World Bank,(2018),National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria,(2018)



Fig.2 Map of Nigeria showing states with high incidence of herder-farmer conflicts

Source: Crisis Group, (2017)

There are other communities in Benue other than Agatu that have been previously attacked. **Table 7.** Provides percent of household affected by conflict events targeting members of their households and members of their community in

North central Nigeria between 2010 to 2017. Similarly Mayah (2016) reports that between 2011 and 2014, herdsman attacked dozens of communities in the four local government areas of Guma, Gwer-East, Buruku and Gwer-West, some more than once.

Table 7. Percent of Household affected by conflict events targeting members of their households and members of their community, north central Nigeria 2010-2017

	North Central	
	Households (%)	Community Member (%)
Percentage experiencing any conflict event	25%	47%

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Type of conflict event experienced by households/community members since 2010		
Killed	2.5%	15.0%
Physically Attacked	2.8%	12.0%
Injured	1.5%	14.0%
Suffered Sexual Violence		
Forced to work	0.0%	3.0%
Abducted	0.6%	8.0%
Robbed	6.0%	17.0%
Displaced	8.1%	7.0%
Dwelling Robbed	5.5%	14.0%
Dwelling Damaged	6.2%	9.7%
Land Occupied	4.8%	9.1%
Assets Damaged	7.9%	10.0%
School Access Blocked	6.0%	7.2%
Health Service Access Blocked	0.9%	1.4%

Source: Azad A, Crawford, Kaila, H (2018).NBS, (2018)

Importantly, **Table 8** shows a chronology of dimensions of herders' conflicts in North Central Nigeria from 2010 to 2017. The hometown of the late Tor Tiv IV, (traditional monarch of Tiv ethnic nationality) Alfred Akawe Torkula, in Guma was razed. Similarly, houses, food barns and farmlands were burnt and scores killed in communities like Tse-Aderogo, Tse-Akenyi, Umenger, Angyom, Aondona, Anyiase,

Adaka, Gbajimba, Tyoughtee, Gbaange, Chembe, Abeda, Mbachoon, Tongov and Mbapuu. **Figure 3.** Further shows conflict events in North Central Nigeria overtime between 2010 to 2017, **Figure 4.** Is a distribution of fatality overtime in the North Central from three authoritative sources, while Figure 5. presents the cause of most recent conflict events reported in North central Nigeri between 2010 and 2017.

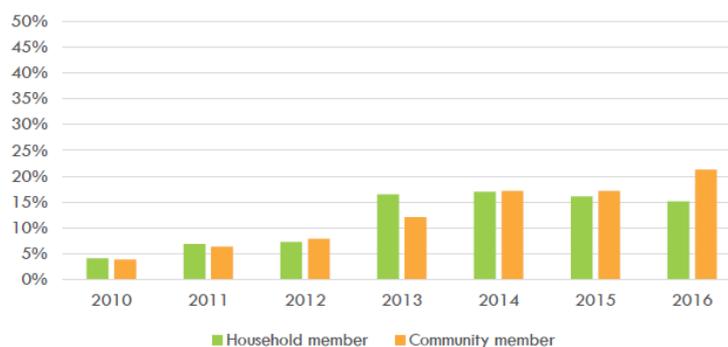


Fig 3. Conflict Events in North Central Nigeria Overtime 2010-2017

Sources: Azad A, Crawford, Kaila H (2018), The World Bank, (2018), National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria, (2018)

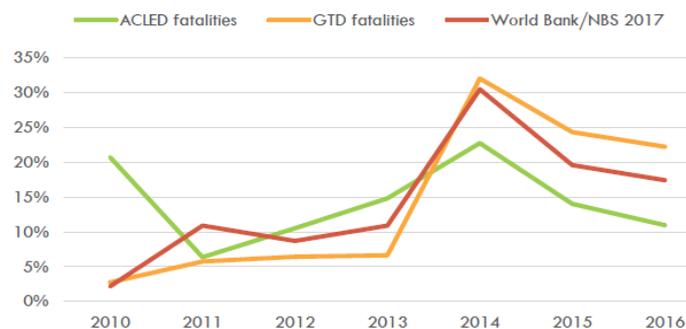


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Source: Azad A, Crawford, E, Kaila, H (2018) with modifications by authors

Findings from the study identified two types of rural farmers notably subsistent and semi-subsistent (peripheral commercial) farmers and some of their crops are listed in **Table 11**. In the cause of the attacks major food crops cultivated by the rural farmers which are staple crops such as yam, millet, sorghum, cowpea, vegetables, tomatoes, onions, groundnut, sesame etc had a continuous production decline as comparative data provided in **tables 3 and 4** showed. There was a progression in the total volume of food crops produced in the areas of study between 1994 to 2004.

The ten decade span of progression experienced a corresponding decline from 2007 to 2017. This was contrary to the rise in volume of production of major staple foods from 1995 to 2004 provided by the FAO stats (2005). This has serious consequences for both food production, GDP growth rate of Nigeria and subsistence of the rural farmers. **Table 9** shows field data on percentage scale of rural violence by herders on farmers in North Central Nigeria.

Mayah, (2016) reports that in May 2015, over 100 farmers and family members were massacred in villages and refugees camps located at Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa in Logo Local Government Area of the state. In July 2015, suspected herdsmen attacked Adeke, on the outskirts of Makurdi (Mayah, 2016).

December, 2015, six persons were killed at Idele village in Oju Local Government Area. A reprisal attack by youths in the community saw three Fulani herdsmen killed and beheaded.

The Oju killings were followed by an attack at Ucha Nyiev village, near the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi (Mayah, 2016).

This is attributed to herders' killings and attacks on rural farmers resulting in displacement of the farmers as most of them who are vulnerable are scared to visit their farms others migrated. This equally had implications for disempowerment and impoverishment. Benue State is known as

the food basket of the nation due largely to its massive food crop production. **Table 10**. Shows the demographic characteristics of the rural farmers while **Table 11**. Shows rural farmers and some of their crops the attacks have reduced food production potentials as our data and statistics show.

Our findings suggest that the herdsmen deny responsibility for the killings. The nomadic or pastoralists are predominantly of Fulani extraction.

Table 12. Provides the demographic characteristics of herdsmen. Most of the crops affected as a result of grazing as our findings suggest, include melon (*Citrullus lanatus*), beans, maize, cassava millet, potatoes vegetables, carrots etc which are sources of food and income for the farmers.

Some of the crops are planted during early or late planting seasons. The food crops have diverse flavor and provide important vitamins and minerals necessary for healthy growth. Some have medicinal value and are seen largely as medicinal plants.

There are equally a number of wild foods which come from several plants and crops including trees, shrubs and various herbaceous plants. These plants have high nutritional value and add value to human lives.

They serve as source of food for livestock such as fodder the destruction of these trees creates tension and violent conflicts between farmers and herdsmen. These foods are equally useful in times of food shortages.

More worrisome have been the inability of the federal government to intervene meaningfully and prosecute the nomadic killers. This finding is consistent with a number of studies (Adu, 2013; Akowe and Kayode, 2014; Crisis Group, 2017; Mayah, 2016; Amadi and Anokwuru, 2017). The attacks and poor government intervention or mitigation measures accounted

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for increasing vulnerability of the rural farmers. In particular, it has affected the lives of the farmers, their basic necessities and the level of food crops cultivated.

Demographic analysis below provides the characteristics of both the rural farmers and herdsmen.

Table10. Demographic Characteristics of Rural Farmers

Demographic Characteristics		Percentage
Sex	<i>Female</i>	100.0
Age (years)	Below 20	4.5
	21-30	21.8
	31-40	28.2
	41-50	20.9
	51 and above	24.5
	Total	100.0
Marital status	Married	55.5
	Single	17.3
	Divorced	5.5
	Widow	21.8
	Total	100.0
Educational qualifications	Nil	31.8
	Primary	34.0
	Secondary	29.2
Religion Christianity	Total	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table11. Rural Farmers and some of their crops

Crops(Botanical Names)		Economic Value
<i>Yam</i> (Dioscorea spp.)		Source of subsistence and income
Melon (<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>)		Subsistence and Income
<i>Beans</i> (Carrot, edible) (<i>Daucus carota</i> ssp. sativa)		Subsistence and Income
Sorghum (<i>Sorghum bicolor</i>) Sesame (<i>Sesamum indicum</i>) Potato, sweet (<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>) Vegetables(Pumpkin, edible Cucurbita spp)		Subsistence and Income
millet(<i>Sorghum bicolor</i>) <i>Onion</i> (<i>Allium cepa</i>)		Subsistence and Income
,cowpea(<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>)		Subsistence & Income
,tomatoes(<i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i>) groundnut (<i>Arachis hypogaea</i>)		Subsistence & Income
<i>maize</i> (<i>Zea mays</i>)		Subsistence & Income

Source:FieldSurvey,2016

Pastoralists own approximately 90 per cent of the national herd(Crisis Group,2017).With increasing drought and desertification, pastures are degraded as many natural water sources across Nigeria's far-northern Sahelian belt are dried up and force large numbers of herdsmen to migrate south in search of grassland and water for their herds (Crisis Group,2017).

Over 90 per cent of pastoralists reportedly are Fulani, a large ethnic group that inhabits parts of West and Central African countries. Similar data

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL FARMERS

The instrument was designed to elicit some information on some characteristics of the herdsmen and farmers beyond age and marital status.

provided by FAO (2017) and Crisis Group,(2017)point out that livestock represents between 20 and 30 per cent of total agricultural production and about 6 to 8 per cent of overall Gross Domestic Production (GDP).

About 30 per cent of live animals slaughtered in Nigeria are brought in by pastoralists from other countries(FAO,2017;Crisis Group,2017).Table 13. Shows pastoralists and estimated number of herds.

Table12.Demographic Characteristics of Herdsmen

Demographic Characteristics		Percentage
Sex	<i>Male</i>	<i>100</i>
Age (years)	Below 20	7.5
	21-30	28.8
	31-40	34.2
	41-50	18.9
	51 and above	12.5
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Marital status	Married	54.5
	Single	18.3
	Divorced	3.5
	Widow	23.8
		<i>Total</i>
Educational qualifications	Nil	00
	Primary	00
	Secondary	00
Religion	Muslim	<i>Total</i>
		<i>00</i>

Source: Field Data, (2017)

Table13.Pastoralists and Estimated Number of Herds

Herds	Quantity
Cattle	19.5 millions
Donkey	975,000
Caramels	28,000
Goats	72.5million
Sheep	41.3 million

Sources: Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, National Agricultural Sample Survey (2011). Crisis Group, (201)

CONCLUSION

A number of issues regarding herders and farmers conflict have not been resolved. These are opened to further research. What strategic policy measures have been taken by the federal government to sustainably bring herders/farmers conflict to an end? The data gleaned from both the theoretical literature and interviews revealed that there is persistence of rural violence in the north-central Nigeria necessitated by the logic of cattle grazing by Fulani herdsmen.

Monsey, Owen, Zierman,, Lambert and ,Hyman (1995)have examined ‘what works in preventing rural violence with emphasis on strategies, risk factors, and assessment tools’.

To return to the need for rural violence mitigation, the present research demonstrates that the survival of both the rural farmers, nomadic herdsmen and wider development of Nigeria is critical. At stake is the multiplicity of implications of rural violence. Thus, the problem of herder’s conflict has not been resolved by the government both at the federal,

state and local levels. A typical pointer is the persistent security threats posed by the herdsmen and poor counter terrorist and security mitigation policies and strategies by the government. Most recent and incendiary include the Agatu killings of 2017 in Benue and the 2018 massive killings in Tiv community in Benue, the 2015 massacre in Kompany community in Lafia, the capital of Nassarawa where over 40 houses were destroyed and hundreds displaced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study partly aims to provide some strategies at redressing problems of herder’s attacks on the rural farmers which have posed security threats to both the rural farmers and wider socio-economic development of Nigeria. Herders and farmers conflict has taken several dimensions. Transforming such rural conflict is the basis of the present research agenda as transformation strides could be framed around several strategies.

The argument is that cattle grazing has ethno-religious, cultural and economic undertone, making for resilience and persistence of the conflict and undermining efforts to mitigate the problem.

Thus, strategies in rural violence resolution can proceed with broader questions regarding the causes of the violence. The opinion and views of both parties regarding the violent conflict, through such inclusive dialogue, strategies to resolve the problem could be proffered. In this case ethno-religious configuration of the dissident groups and the changing patterns of such construct is one.

Such ethnic differences where farmers are predominantly Christians and herders predominantly Muslims could be a remote cause of the conflict. Thus, there is need for radical value re-orientation and re-articulation of mode of social interaction and the psychology of both parties.

It is critical to check the incursion of the rural communities by herders by refusing to subsume the rural economy to the ambits of the Fulani nomads. This has given rise to relative deprivation which is a central theoretical debate of this study. There is need to redirect the perverse in-roads of herders into un-allotted locations for their grazing.

The ongoing analysis in this study suggests that there is a gap between government policies at mitigation of rural violence. Beyond this, the literature reviewed and data from the study show the multi-dimensional effects of herders' attacks on rural farmers. This suggests the need for strategies to mitigate the conflict.

To return to the question that this study raise intermittently—how can rural violence linked to herders attacks on rural farmers be mitigated? The paper among others suggests that collective action by all stakeholders including the dissident parties and the government is critical. A novel anti-illegal grazing policy should be put into force which should clearly demarcate the key areas for the herder's geographical areas of access and actions pertaining to modes of grazing that could be legally binding.

This model moves us beyond the problematic frameworks that position some northern elites as capitalist agents behind the nomads. Rather there is need to rehabilitate the nomads by providing and maintaining clearly mapped out grazing reserves. This will check invasion of the farmlands which results in deprivation of the rural farmers of their farm lands which is their source of subsistence.

Policy discourse and more attention by the state and federal governments are urgently drawn to the cattle grazing problems. Beyond grazing reserves, grazing routes could be created for the nomads. Alternatively nomads could buy ranches. This strategy could be strengthened to include possible creation of inter contextual legislation on protection of the environment including food crops and plants.

There should be a review of policy between rural farmers and armed herders both in the

north central and entire Nigeria. Although the study re-established that the major contending groups in the rural violence include rural farmers and Fulani herders, the main trigger of the violence is found to be largely economic encompassing grazing of farm lands by the cattle of the herders for their survival and the corresponding effects on the crops of the rural farmers on which the cattle is grazed.

However a group of northern Nigeria elite who own the cattle provides arms for the nomads rather than a more sustainable strategy to resolve the conflicts.

The study identified government policy inertia to address rural violence and calls for adequate security reform to meet the need for the vulnerable rural farmers. A novel theoretical and policy contribution of this study stems from the proposition of rural violent mitigation strategies and quest for sustainable peace. This could be achieved through the establishment of rural mobile security networks as an intermediary to guide both the rural farmers and the nomads (Amadi & Anokwuru, 2017).

The rural areas are seemingly marginalized in policy issues in Nigeria. Aside from the fact that these areas are excluded by design or default by the government, there are repeated threats to peace in the rural areas. Cattle grazing is only but one of such rural violent triggers. Experts in participatory methodologies (Chambers, 2010) and rural peace building had provided a number of strategies. Chambers (2010) suggests that there is a number of issues associated with the issues of "adaptive and participatory pluralism". This makes it integral to inclusive peace building and effective integration of contending parties. Chambers (2010:45) argues "that there are ideas that form and transform mindsets and ways of seeing things". He extends the idea espoused in the views of Van Mele and Braun (2005) on innovation in agricultural extension, which provides diverse methodological tools and in particular 'an enabling condition for creativity'. Such extension services should provide effective synergy and novel re-orientation among the rural farmers and Fulani nomads. Chambers (2010) advances a step further to suggest that the strategy of negotiation which he termed "negotiated learning", where participatory approaches are applied through negotiation with communities (Guijt 2007) is essential. Recent debates on peace building have provided plausible insights on the effectiveness of

negotiating for peace among dissident groups (Amadi & Agena, 2014).

The rural areas suffer from lack of awareness and conflict mitigation strategies, they are poor and vulnerable, they lack political will, education, exposure and self-confidence, and they are not involved in policy issues (Narayan, ET al.2000). Indeed their voice rarely counts. Narayan, et al.(2000)had advocated for the “voice model” as a primary strategy to rural transformation.

By extension this could be sufficiently deployed as a peace building strategy to engage both the rural farmers and the nomadic herdsman and particularly understand what they want and amenable ways to resolve same. There should be a periodic platform for the rural farmers to discuss issues related to peace and their overall wellbeing in particular to build strong alliances aimed at ensuring the involvement of the rural farmers in peace building in the rural areas. Guijt (2008) argues that there are the ideas, orientations and ways of seeing things encapsulated in the phrases ‘seeking surprise’ and ‘messy partnerships’.

Security and empowerment, institutionalization of anti-vulnerability strategies such as building of local vigilante groups and rural information agents will provide on the ground information against infiltrators and perceived enemies in the rural areas who are neither secured nor shielded against access by external forces and similar security threats. In particular, policies aimed at mainstreaming rural security and conflict into policy and development planning in Nigeria is critical and strategic in particular in the context of transformation of women and the girl child who are the most vulnerable.

The Nigerian government should create a platform for engagement of the rural people in peace and security policy to bridge rural security policy gaps and engender policy and practice in the rural areas of Nigeria. Suitable strategies should encompass creating rural farmer’s connectivity, including leaders and representatives of pastoralist and farmer organisations, officials of federal and state governments, security officers, leaders of civil society organisations and local vigilante Groups. The aim is to create a common interface between relevant stakeholders.

The core findings of the content review are that the systemic and engendered dimensions of rural violence reinforce the understanding of profound disregard and bias against the rural areas.

The study does not only call for radical policy transformation and strategic overhaul of the security dilemma of the rural areas, also the seemingly institutional forms of rural insecurity and violence which results in vulnerability. Government at all levels should provide a platform for addressing the perennial and systemic problems of rural violence.

To operationalize policies, punitive measures must be devised within constitutional provision. Although this requires further research—the present study sets in motion an agenda that has both theoretical, policy and development relevance to douse the problem of rural violence.

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