

# Curbing Crop Farmers and Herders Clashes in Nigeria: The Ranching Option

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## Abstract

Nigeria is a West African country with a huge population and over 70% of the population are peasant and subsistence farmers scattered in rural areas. Due to a decrease in arable and grazing lands, there are clashes between crop farmers and herders which have increased significantly in the last two decades. Some of the causes of the clashes include the destruction of crops by cattle, contamination of drinking water sources, sexual harassment of women by herders, animal rustling and killings, impunity and ineffective governance security agencies, tremendous increase in population, urbanization, desertification, industrialisation, insurgency, banditry, ethnic and religious inclination, effects of climate change, poverty among others. It is estimated that 13.7 billion dollars have been lost due to these clashes. This is in addition to the loss of human lives and a huge number of internally displaced persons. There are efforts to curb these clashes. One of the ways to achieve this is the use of ranching where livestock will not graze in the open. Ranching has the potential to increase productivity, the attraction of socio and economic infrastructure, create employment, and prevent animal rustling among others. This paper seeks to examine ranching as one of the ways to improve livestock productivity and curb farmers-herder clashes in Nigeria.

## Introduction

Competition for common, limited, and declining natural resources often trigger violent conflict across the world which is counter-productive (Adisa and Adenkunle, 2010). Thus, the clashes between herders and crop farmers in Nigeria can be traced to time immemorial and this is highly related to who takes ownership of productive land. Violence between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers is one of Nigeria's most persistent security problems and has left thousands of people dead in recent decades. The volatility and intensity of resource-based conflict are usually heightened when the conflicting groups of different ethnic nationalities, faiths, and socio-cultural values as in the case of cattle herders and crop farmers in Nigeria. This is true for the conflicts in the centre of Nigeria where most crop farmers are Christians by religion and herders belonging to the Islamic faith. The herders normally attack farming communities with sophisticated weapons which leads to the destruction of infrastructure, raping of women/girls, and burning of houses and property. In certain cases, the entire community is razed with fire, and members are rendered homeless. There are attacks in Benue and Plateau States as well as some communities in the southern parts of Nigeria where people were slaughtered. The conflicts have been taken to the next level and currently threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria. There is an overwhelming need to seek ways and means of not only resolving the conflict but possibly searching for appropriate strategies to prevent/manage such conflicts in the future. Therefore, the overall objective of the paper is to examine the immediate and remote causes of the conflict between crop farmers and herders and to examine ranching as a possible strategy to mitigate the conflict.

## Causes of Crop Farmers-Headers Clashes in Nigeria

**The immediate causes can be classified into:**

***Destruction of crops by cattle:*** It is a well-known fact that the destruction of farmers' crops by cattle will result in conflict. Such destruction is usually perpetrated by straying cattle or in the presence of herders and sometimes in the presence of herders and farmers. Researchers agree that the most frequent cause of conflict is the destruction of crops (Tonah, 2006; Ofuoku and Isife, 2009).

***Contamination of drinking water sources:*** It is generally known among crop farmers and herders that cattle need drinking water just like human beings. However, the bone of contention is usually when cattle destroy and contaminate the source of drinking water with dung and urine. Also, since the herdsmen see water as a common resource to which they can lay claim, they insist on their right to use which could result in conflict with its effects negatively on the socio-political and economic development (Tenuche and Ifatimehin, 2009).

***Cattle theft, rustling/killing of cattle:*** One of the issues that normally cause herders-farmers conflict is cattle theft (or cattle rustling) in the region. Other than the terrorist group (Boko Haram) several violent bandit groups

threaten the herders' and their animals' security in Northern Nigeria (Shehu, 2018). Cattle rustling is causing herders big economic losses as their livelihoods depend on the livestock. Once cattle are rustled in a community, the herders normally hired assassins to brutally retaliate irrespective of one's involvement in the crime.

***Impunity and Ineffective Governance:*** The weak security mechanism in Nigeria is not able to prevent deadly attacks between conflicting groups. Usually, police or military forces are very late to respond to attacks and cannot stop the armed groups before they burn down villages or kill people. This has several reasons, one of which is ill-trained and ill-equipped security agencies. They are not well equipped with the technologies needed for tough nature conditions such as forests and hills. Also, some officers are allegedly in cahoots with attackers, which makes it harder for the state to cope with the situation (Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2016).

***Indiscriminate bush burning:*** During the dry season, herders find it difficult to feed their cattle. Before the onset of the rainy season, some of them set bushes on fire which sometimes escalate into the farm and destroy both harvested and un-harvested crops. According to Ofuoku and Isife (2010), during the dry season, grasses and forages dry up, and herdsman believe that if the dried vegetation is burnt, fresh pasture would regenerate. In the process of burning, the fire spreads into adjoining farms destroying crops in farmers' farm

***Disregard to constituted authority:*** Rural communities in Nigeria have power structures made up of traditional rulers, chiefs, village/town unions etc. These local authorities have rules and regulations as well as means of embarking on rural development projects to better their lives and assist the government in community development. Ofuoku and Isife (2010) report that most herdsman normally refuse to pay development levies imposed on crop and livestock/poultry farmers by traditional authorities in their host communities.

***Decrease arable and grazing lands:*** The livelihood of all stakeholders is entirely dependent on the common factor of land. A crop farmer depends on land for crop yield to survive, while a herder perceives his herd which depends on grazing lands as his life because life is worthless without his cattle. He assumes that farmers' encroachment on his grazing fields and routes is a call to war (IRIN, 2009). Due to decreasing in arable lands and grazing lands as a result of urbanization, desertification, population growth, industrialization, etc, both crop farmers and herders are always in conflict for productive land

#### **The remote causes can be classified into;**

***Ethnic and religious inclination:*** Ethnic rivalry is one of the factors indirectly fuelling crop farmers-cattle herder conflict in Nigeria. According to Klare (2001), these conflicts often appear to be ethnic and indeed may have evolved into such, but they risk misinterpretation if scholars ignore their origins in resource disputes. The herders are about 29% of the Nigerian population and belong to a major ethnic group of Hausa-Fulani (Mikailu, 2016). They are always bold and daring in issues of crop farmer-cattle herder conflict. Again, religion is another portent hidden force in an escalation of farmer-cattle herder conflict. Such conflict arises in communities dominated by Christians and the cattle herders are mostly Muslims, therefore, religious sentiments become a major cause of the clashes.

***Poverty and Internal Displacement:*** The worsening poverty in most African States including Nigeria may be responsible for escalating conflict in the region. In Nigeria, the people directly involved in the farmer-herder conflict are mostly rural poor farmers and cattle herders who may not be the real owners of the herds. There are no proper Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps for the people who had to leave their villages because of the farmer-herder conflict. The so-called "camps" where some people could find shelter are usually churches or school buildings, which also negatively affect the daily life and education opportunities of host communities (Genyi, 2017).

***Effects of climate change:*** Climate change is one of the root causes of this conflict. Nigeria's northern regions face a desertification problem that affects the livelihoods of many people (Okeke, 2014). According to United Nations, the area which turned into desert or semi-desert in the past sixty years is around 350,000 square kilometers in Nigeria. The desertification continues in southern parts of the country at a speed of 600 meters each year (Shehu, 2018). The effects of climate change are drying up the Chad basin and encouraging desertification in the North, thus forcing herders to move southward in search of water and grasses for the herds. In the south, the pressure of development and deforestation is compounding the effects of climate change and less land is left for farming and even lesser for grazing purposes. This situation ultimately leads to conflict between farmers and cattle herders. Mikailu (2016) confirms that the problem may get worse in coming years as climate change and desertification push migrant herders farther south.

#### **Consequences of Herders Crop Farmer Clashes**

In Nigeria, the conflict between farmers and cattle herders had been in existence for several years but has been more pronounced in the past two decades. The consequences have been alarming. It is estimated that over

10,000 people have been killed over the past decade (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; Ilo, *et al.*, 2019). To underscore the lethality of the Fulani herders, it is reported that the death toll resulting from conflicts between herders and farmers in 2016 alone was about 2,500 persons and that between 2011 and 2015 fatalities averaged 2,000 deaths (International Crisis Group, 2017). According to NLTP (2019) it is estimated that 13.7 billion dollars (6.7 trillion Naira) has been lost due to these clashes. Updated data from the Nigeria Security Tracker documented those fatalities from herders-farmers conflicts in 2017 and 2018 were 1,041 and 2,037 deaths, respectively (Campbell, 2018).

### **The Use of Ranching in Curbing Crisis Between Crop Farmers and Headers in Nigeria**

Ranching is the rearing of livestock on land with defined boundaries, fenced or unfenced and some investment made for optimum livestock productivity. It is distinct from open grazing because the livestock are confined and cannot stray to other farms outside the ranch. It can vary in size from a few hectares to thousands of hectares (Moore, 2005). Facilities within a ranch may include paddocks, natural or sown pastures, water supply, reticulation, and a central handling yard. Others include a hay barn, silage pit, light truck, tractor, and essential implements for cultivation and forage conservation. It could also have a residential house, farm store, and office. Livestock reared in ranches have access to nutritious forages that improve carcass weight, quality, and milk yield. Ranches also reduce overgrazing of farmlands and consequently reduce soil erosion and other environmental degradations.

Ranching would importantly curtail cattle rustling and invariably put an end to incessant clashes between pastoralists and farmers thereby promoting peaceful co-existence. This is consistent with the Federal Government's position of the creation and management of ranches would provide a lasting solution to the herders-farmers conflict, provided that state governments consent to the idea by leasing out lands for such purposes. If the ranching policy receives the needed support of all key stakeholders for its successful implementation by the federal government and investors, the rural economies of the states that make up Nigeria will witness rapid growth along the value chain of livestock farming business. Investors can build ranches, lease them out to herders and generate incomes on a sustainable basis. Crop farmers would begin to enjoy smooth farming activities with abundant harvests due to the stoppage of man-caused damages to the crops. This would increase annual income from sales of farm produce. Crop residue would no longer be regarded as a gift of nature awaiting free grazing by herders' cattle. Ranching enables the accumulation and gathering of animal waste which is a good source of organic manure that helps improve the quality of soil and crop yield. Farmers can swap fodder with animal wastes just to exploit the barter alternative. Ranching or cattle colonies could attract basic physical and socio-economic infrastructure ranging from tarred roads, water supply systems, veterinary hospitals, health centres, abattoirs, schools, research institutes, dairy and skin markets among others which can benefit members of the sedentary cattle migrants, and indigenous farmers' settlements. The ranches across the nation may be dominated by the Fulani tribes which would foster cultural integration and national unity with the indigenous communities as enshrined and promoted by Section 15(3c) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended) which reads "to promote national integration, it shall be the duty of the state to encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties".

Another big potential of ranches is that they could grow to become the centre of a tourist attraction with its accumulated benefits namely; employment, the vibrancy of hotels, eateries, and transportation services amongst others. It could also checkmate the spray and transmission of diseases between cattle and humans especially normally observed through cross-country migration, nomadism, and open grazing. Ranching could reduce time committed to herding, thereby freeing labour hours for the acquisition of literacy and vocational skills which a majority of the herders are chronically lacking. Afuoku and Isife (2010) found that 70 percent of Fulani herders in Niger Delta areas had no western education. Such extra labour hours could be channeled into crop production for the herders to experience and appreciate the cost, suffering, sacrifice, and risks involved in manual or labor-intensive crop farming. Security against cattle rustling and other crimes can be enhanced through ranching.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The protracted conflict between pastoralist herdsmen and sedentary farmers in Nigeria has cost the country thousands of lives and incredible economic losses. Population growth, climate change, desertification, industrialization, the illegal armament of non-state groups, ineffective security personnel, impunity, etc. are some of the most important reasons for the ongoing clashes. The country's middle belt, a transition region

between north and south, faces disputes mostly because of its natural, ethnic, and religious features. The conflict has caused more casualties in recent years than the terrorist organization Boko Haram. Illegal armament and impunity should come to an end to stop indiscriminating killings. Security personnel should be trained better and respect internationally recognized human rights. The government must immediately implement the development plans, such as creating ranches and improving grazing reserves. Also, negotiations between the groups at local levels are very important, to include all stakeholders to work together in solving the problem. In this way, everybody would feel included and accept the outcomes of negotiations

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