



HERDSMEN and
FARMERS' CRISIS in NIGERIA:
THE WAY OUT


In spite of the huge revenues which accrue from oil, agriculture remains central to Nigeria's economy. This centrality is not because of its contribution to the gross domestic product of 25% (about N4,575 billion) but rests more with the role of agriculture in the lives of the people. Agriculture employs up to 70 per cent of the population who eke out a living through various forms of land cultivation and animal husbandry. Agriculture is also significant because Nigeria looks forward to feeding itself and to discontinuing the importation of rice (by 2018) and other food stuff. It is anticipated that soonest, Nigeria will not only attain self-sufficiency in food but will become its major exporter. Already, there are attempts at exporting yams and grains. This anticipation is also borne out of the large numbers taking up agriculture; according to the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Audu Ogbe, over 12 million people are engaged in rice production alone. Equally significant is the envisioned role of agriculture as part of economic diversification from oil. Part of the latter initiative includes food processing and supply of raw materials for industrial production. Agriculture is therefore significant in Nigeria because of cultural values as well as its new role as a major pillar in economic and social policy.

It is possible for Agriculture to achieve the anticipated goals. However, there are challenges that go beyond the common factors of production and its processes. All over Nigeria, there are constant clashes between farmers and herdsmen, a development which imperils production on both sides. The roots of the perennial crises relate to the reliance of both on land for their survival. The dominant form of agriculture in Nigeria is shifting cultivation and small holdings while most of the herders are nomadic. When water and fodder become scarce because of dwindling and absence of rainfall and/or increasing desertification, the herders move southwards from the Sahel regions to the Guinea Savannah and rainforest regions where water is available in ponds, rivers and rivulets all year round. Some of the herders are said to come from neighbouring countries in the Sahel region.

The nomadic pattern of animal husbandry of the herdsmen has brought them into several clashes with the farmers, including horticulturists. In many instances, cattle invade farms and eat up the crops. There are complaints that parcels of land which are left fallow to recuperate for the next cropping season are trampled upon by cattle and rendered heavily compacted to till. There are also complaints that cattle defecate in drinking water points thus rendering them unsuitable for human consumption. From the herders, there are allegations of killing and theft of their animals, including cattle rustling. The altercation between the two groups has resulted in local skirmishes with attendant destruction, looting of farms, burning of households, raping of women and killing of cattle. On many occasions, human lives are lost as well.

The herders and farmers clashes have been recorded in virtually every geo-political zones of Nigeria, although there is a higher frequency in the North-central region. The triggers are the same: animals eating up/destroying farms and the owners of the latter rising in protest. The situation is leading to radicalisation and rise in extremism on both sides – of the farmers and the herders. The herders organise and arm themselves to protect their cattle and means of livelihood while the farmers also mobilise to protect their farms and communities.

In the 2016-2017 study of radicalisation and rise of extremism in Kogi state by ActionAid Nigeria, it revealed that constant conflicts between herders and farmers played some role as a trigger. There were frequent conflicts between the indigenous population that are predominantly farmers and the herdsmen. The former blames their poverty on the latter whose cattle destroy crops leaving little for consumption and even less for sale. As part of the skirmishes in Kogi state, there are assaults especially on women, children and persons with disabilities. These conflicts which did not spare vulnerable segments of the population harbour potentials for radicalization and the rise of extremism. The horrendous nature of the conflict and impact are huge and unacceptable. The state response itself was not well thought through but follows the routine security approach resulting in further trauma for the already distressed citizens.



In addition, the youth, hitherto the main force in agriculture, now stay idle and some are using the idle time to radicalise themselves to grapple with why the herders have made life difficult. There is a clear sense of “they” Vs “us’ in the Kogi case. In addition, some of the youths have also resorted to the use of drugs either to muster courage to confront the invaders or as a refuge from the economic and social misery created by intermittent herders Vs farmers conflicts. Thus, incidents that began as herdsmen-farmers clash has assumed wider ramifications for peace, security and enabling environment for agricultural—and other forms—of social and economic production.

There are similar incidents of violence between farmers and herders elsewhere outside the North-central region. For most of 2017, there was almost a full scale war in Southern Kaduna.

This disturbance led to scores of killings, hundreds of homes were torched, and triggering wide scale humanitarian crisis as people fled their homes. There is now some lull in the fighting but absolute peace is yet to return and most of the people are still in the internally displaced people’s (IDP) camps.

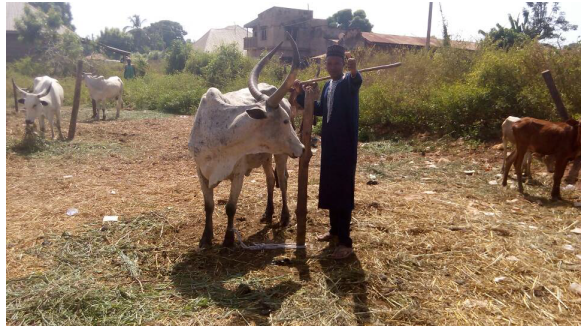
In a similar vein, most of the entire Agatu local government area of Benue state was overran in 2016 by marauding militia thought to be mercenaries hired herdsmen. According to survivors, the attack, complete with assault weapons, was spectacular and seem beyond what the typical herders are capable of. There is a clear departure from the more traditional violence in which the main weapons were den guns, bows and arrows. The attackers moved unchallenged –no police or other security personnel—in an orgy of bloodletting (which includes women and children), arson and flattened over 14 communities which led thousands of people to be displaced.

There are also some less published infractions which typically involve rural villages such as Moon district in Kwande local government area of Benue State. The district shares borders with Taraba State near the giant Kashimbila Dam. The herders invaded and ransacked the entire



district; killed people, including women and children and also destroyed houses. The district has been under occupation of the herdsmen, forcing the indigenes, who are predominantly farmers to be displaced for more than four years. This led to the cessation of agriculture as the villagers became internally displaced persons overnight. These less published incidents have similar effects as those which receive more publicity.

There is a clear challenge of managing co-existence at the level of herders and farmers and adequately addressing the crises generated. At some point, there was a draft National Assembly bill titled “Grazing Reserve (establishment) Bill 2016” seeking, as the titles suggests, to establish grazing reserves in every state of the federation. By the beginning of 2018, the federal government proposed “Cattle Colony” in each state (The Nation, 21/1/2018, page 5). It is uncertain whose land would be appropriated for such project; already the South-west and South-east geo-political regions have said they have for cattle colonies. In addition, the Minister of Agriculture, Chief Innocent Audu Ogbe, planned to import special weed seeds from Brazil for the herders. There are therefore questions about the extent of federal government’s even-handedness in its involvement in what is clearly a private business of herders.



In November 2017, Benue state government began to implement a new legislation on anti-open grazing. This legislation compels the herders as well as the local population to keep livestock in ranches and thus prevent the regular invasion of animals into farms and thereby eradicate the hitherto frequent conflicts. As an apparent reaction to the bill, there was massive invasion of over six communities in Guma in January 2018 (the Governor's home local government) in which 73 people were killed, houses torched and the residents turned into internally displaced persons. The attack, in phases, was extended to Awe LGA in neighbouring Nasarawa state where many of the assailed from Benue fled (The Sun 21/1/2018 page 1). The victims were given a mass burial on January 11, 2018 (Daily Trust 12/1/2018, page1).

The same anti-open grazing legislation has been passed in Taraba state and commenced on January 24, 2018. Before the commencement some herders began to kill in Taraba in apparent protests (The Nation 20/1/2018). In the wake of the Benue attack, the Governors of Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Benue and Kaduna states met in January 2018 and agreed to stop open grazing. Based on the Benue experience, it is perhaps too early to make any categorical statements but enforceability and political will are obvious problems. Before the legislation in Benue, the Governor of Ekiti gave executive orders permitting the citizens to confiscate any animal grazing openly. There is clear sense of perennial crises between herdsmen and farmers engulfing the country and negatively impacting on means of livelihood, especially agriculture. A nationwide response, rather than piecemeal efforts of individual states, is therefore crucial. It is unlikely that individual states have the wherewithal to enforce the open-grazing prohibition.

ActionAid in line with her human right based approach believes that both the herders and farmers have inalienable rights to co-exist in ways that each can engage in economic activities without let or hindrance. Accordingly, the following policy initiative which seeks to promote peaceful coexistence, and greater productivity in agriculture and livestock, is proposed as follows:-

1. In the modern age the practice of free/open grazing is now outmoded. Land has become precious and owners guard it jealously. The right to own land in accordance with existing laws must be protected from intrusion by others.
2. Ranching is proposed as an alternative to the current free grazing which courts crises and conflicts. This will require enabling legislation at the national level so that enforcement becomes the responsibility of the federal government.
3. The option being proposed should provide for public-private participation such that ranches can be developed and equipped with the necessary facilities and herders can have the option of buying or renting.
4. The ranching option will facilitate access to veterinary services for the livestock and is more conducive for the lives of animals and will promote faster breeding.
5. Ranching will equally make for easier access to education and health services for herders and their families, including access to clean water for both human beings and the animals.
6. Implementation of this option will usher in peaceful cohabitation between herders, farmers and the country as a whole because cattle would be spared long walks and can remain in protected shelters to conserve energy and easy to fatten. Agriculturalists can also farm crops without any anxieties of vandalism.
7. Ranching will also place agriculture in a position to fulfil the envisioned roles of source of foreign exchange and a major path to economic diversification.

8. The proposed initiative will facilitate easier dialogue with herders and farmers as both can be easily contacted and invited to meetings for dialogue about community affairs and matters of mutual interest.

CONCLUSION:

Agriculture will, in the foreseeable future, remain the main occupation of the Nigerian people. While it is challenged by slow pace of modernisation, it must quickly stop being encumbered by frequent conflicts and violence between herders and farmers to the detriment of both. In the modern day and age, the older modes of animal breeding through free/unrestrained grazing must cede place to the modern one which not only makes access to needed services easier for the herders but also more conducive for peaceful co-existence. The government needs to muster sufficient political will to implement the ranching agenda.

act:onaid

ActionAid Nigeria
Plot 477, 41 Crescent,
off Sa'adu Zungur Avenue,
Gwarinpa, Abuja

Tel: +234 (0) 812 888 8825-7
info.nigeria@actionaid.org
www.actionaid.org/nigeria

Lagos
1A, Adeboye Solanke Street
Off Allen Avenue (behind Zenith Bank)
Ikeja, Lagos.

Tel: +2348126644268

 ActionAid Nigeria
 ActionAidNG