



Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict

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Executive Summary

Violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's security and stability. With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the north east. Yet to date, response to the crisis at both the federal and state levels has been poor. President Muhammadu Buhari's administration and affected state governments need to work together, taking immediate steps to shore up security for herders and farmers, strengthening conflict-resolution mechanisms and initiating longer-term efforts to reform livestock management practices, address negative environmental trends and curb cross-border movements of both cattle rustlers and armed herders.

Familiar problems – relating to land and water use, obstruction of traditional migration routes, livestock theft and crop damage – tend to trigger these disputes. But their roots run deeper. Drought and desertification have degraded pastures, dried up many natural water sources across Nigeria's far-northern Sahelian belt and forced large numbers of herders to migrate south in search of grassland and water for their herds. Insecurity in many northern states (a consequence of the Boko Haram insurgency in the north east and of less-well-reported rural banditry and cattle rustling in the north-west and north-central zones) also prompts increasing numbers of herdsmen to migrate south. The growth of human settlements, expansion of public infrastructure and acquisition of land by large-scale farmers and other private commercial interests, have deprived herders of grazing reserves designated by the post-independence government of the former Northern region (now split into nineteen states).

Herders migrating into the savannah and rain forests of the central and southern states are moving into regions where high population growth over the last four decades has heightened pressure on farmland, increasing the frequency of disputes over crop damage, water pollution and cattle theft. In the absence of mutually accepted mediation mechanisms, these disagreements increasingly turn violent.

The spread of conflict into southern states is aggravating already fragile relations among the country's major regional, ethnic and religious groups. The south's majority Christian communities resent the influx of predominantly Muslim herders, portrayed in some narratives as an "Islamisation force". Herders are mostly Fulani, lending an ethnic dimension to strife. Insofar as the Fulani spread across many West and Central African countries, any major confrontation between them and other Nigerian groups could have regional repercussions, drawing in fighters from neighbouring countries.

As these conflicts increase in frequency, intensity and geographical scope, so does their humanitarian and economic toll. The increasing availability of illicit firearms, both locally-produced and smuggled in from outside, worsens the bloodshed. Over the past five years, thousands have been killed; precise tallies are unavailable, but a survey of open source reports suggests fatalities may have reached an annual average of more than 2,000 from 2011 to 2016, for some years exceeding the toll from the Boko Haram insurgency. Tens of thousands have been forcibly displaced, with

properties, crops and livestock worth billions of naira destroyed, at great cost to local and state economies.

The reaction from Nigeria's federal and state authorities, so far, has been wanting. Aside from the recent push against Boko Haram and military operations against cattle rustling, they have done little else to address rural insecurity in the north. Federal security and law enforcement agencies have established neither early-warning nor rapid response mechanisms; they have not arrested and prosecuted perpetrators of violence or offered redress to victims. Until recently, officials have paid little if any attention to improving livestock management practices to minimise friction with agrarian communities. State governments' responses overall have been short-sighted; most have failed to encourage community-level dialogue. As a result, both herders and farmers are taking matters into their own hands, further aggravating conflicts.

President Buhari's government, which is increasingly viewed with misgivings by many in central and southern states, should make it a priority to take firm and transparent steps to ensure better protection for both herders and farmers. Affected state governments also should better coordinate with federal authorities to reduce risks of violence. The federal government's failure to define a clear and coherent political approach to resolving the crisis, or even acknowledge its scope, is putting Nigerian citizens at risk. Federal and state authorities should implement five steps. In the short term, these include:

- ❑ **Strengthen security arrangements for herders and farming communities especially in the north-central zone:** this will require that governments and security agencies sustain campaigns against cattle rustling and rural banditry; improve early-warning systems; maintain operational readiness of rural-based police and other security units; encourage communication and collaboration with local authorities; and tighten control of production, circulation and possession of illicit firearms and ammunition, especially automatic rifles, including by strengthening cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries' security forces;
- ❑ **Establish or strengthen conflict mediation, resolution, reconciliation and peacebuilding mechanisms:** this should be done at state and local government levels, and also within rural communities particularly in areas that have been most affected by conflict;
- ❑ **Establish grazing reserves in consenting states and improve livestock production and management in order to minimise contacts and friction between herders and farmers:** this will entail developing grazing reserves in the ten northern states where governments have already earmarked lands for this purpose; formulating and implementing the ten-year National Ranch Development Plan proposed by a stakeholders forum facilitated by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in April 2017; and encouraging livestock producers' buy-in through easier access to credit from financial institutions.

In the longer term, federal and state governments should consider the following:

- ❑ **Address environmental factors that are driving herders' migration to the south:** this will require stepping up implementation of programs under the Great Green Wall Initiative for the Sahara and the Sahel, a trans-African project designed to restore drought-and-desert degraded environments and livelihoods including in Nigeria's far northern belt; and developing strategies for mitigating climate change impact in the far northern states;
- ❑ **Coordinate with neighbours to stem cross-border movement of non-Nigerian armed herders:** Nigeria should work with Cameroon, Chad and Niger (the Lake Chad basin countries) to regulate movements across borders, particularly of cattle rustlers, armed herders and others that have been identified as aggravating internal tension and insecurity in Nigeria.

Although some of the proposed steps will not yield immediate results, Nigeria's federal and state authorities, as well as other relevant actors, need to take remedial actions with a greater sense of urgency. Failure to respond, decisively and effectively, would allow Nigeria to continue sliding into increasingly deadly conflict.

Abuja/Brussels, 19 September 2017

Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict

I. Introduction

Although Nigeria chiefly is known for its oil and gas production, agriculture employs about 70 per cent of its labour force.¹ Small-holders in the country's centre and south harvest most of the country's tuber and vegetable crops while pastoralists in the north raise most of its grains and livestock.² Over 90 per cent of pastoralists reportedly are Fulani, a large ethnic group straddling several West and Central African countries.³ Pastoralists own approximately 90 per cent of the national herd, estimated at 19.5 million cattle, about 975,000 donkeys, 28,000 camels, 72.5 million goats and 41.3 million sheep.⁴ 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).⁵ About 30 per cent of live animals slaughtered in Nigeria are brought in by pastoralists from other countries.⁶

Historically, relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. By and large, they lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship: herders' cattle would fertilise the farmers' land in exchange for grazing rights.

But tensions have grown over the past decade, with increasingly violent flare-ups spreading throughout central and southern states; incidents have occurred in at least 22 of the country's 36 states.⁷ According to one report, in 2016 over 2,000 people were killed and tens of thousands displaced in Benue and Kaduna states alone.⁸

¹ As petroleum became Nigeria's major export, agriculture shrank from 60 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the early 1970s to about 23 per cent; it still accounts for 75 per cent of non-oil exports. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, *The Green Alternative: The Agricultural Promotion Policy 2016-2020*, 2016.

² Roger Blench, "Conflict between Pastoralists and Cultivators in Nigeria", review paper prepared for the British government's Department for International Development (DFID), Nigeria, 9 August 2010. There are over ten million pastoralists living in 28 of the country's 36 states. For more see Ismail Iro, *From Nomadism to Sedentarism: An Analysis of Development Constraints and Public Policy Issues in the Socio-Economic Transformation of the Pastoral Fulani of Nigeria*, PhD dissertation, Howard University, 1994; Mohammed Bello, Sahabo Mahdi and Pastoral Resolve, *A Compendium of Studies and Issues in Pastoralism in Nigeria* (Yola, Nigeria, 2005).

³ The Fulani, the world's largest semi-nomadic group, live in fourteen West and Central African countries, from Senegal to Central African Republic. They established the Sokoto caliphate (1804-1903), which played a key role in the revival and spread of Islam in northern Nigeria.

⁴ Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, *National Agricultural Sample Survey 2011*.

⁵ "Keynote address delivered by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Chief Audu Ogbah, OFR, at retreat on livestock and dairy development in Nigeria, held at Musa Yar'Adua Centre, Abuja, on 7-8 June, 2016", Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Abuja.

⁶ FAO Nigeria, *FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013-2017*, p. 5.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior Nigeria Police Force officer, Abuja, 2 June 2017.

⁸ "Nigeria: Farmer-Fulani Herder Violence in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau States", Assessment Capacity Project, 21 March 2017.

According to another, incidents involving herders accounted for 44 per cent of all fatalities in the country in 2016.⁹ These conflicts are, by every measure, complex and multidimensional. Formulating appropriate responses requires a clear diagnosis of their root causes, evolution, impacts and implications.

This report analyses the factors that help cause or aggravate these conflicts, their evolution and spread, and their human toll. It further assesses responses, especially by the federal government and its security agencies, and outlines possible strategies to reduce or prevent violence. The report is based on interviews conducted in September 2016 and July 2017 with a range of actors and stakeholders, 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, as well as victims of the violence in Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Ekiti, Enugu, Kaduna and Nasarawa states.

⁹ "A Look at Nigeria's Security Situation", SBM Intel, Lagos, 19 January 2017.

II. Drivers of the Violence

For centuries, pastoralists drove their cattle east and west across the Sahel, the semi-arid zone south of the Sahara Desert that includes Nigeria's far northern belt. In the early 20th century, some herders started shifting their migratory routes farther south, pushed by a series of droughts in the far north, but also attracted by heightened security in central and southern Nigeria and by better control of parasitic diseases (such as trypanomiasis or sleeping sickness) in the central and southern zones.¹⁰ Herders also wanted to evade the much-hated cattle tax (*jangali*) imposed by the British colonial government in the northern region.¹¹ As cattle herds migrated southward, so did conflicts between pastoralists and farmers.

Among the principal causes and aggravating factors behind this escalating conflict are climatic changes (frequent droughts and desertification); population growth (loss of northern grazing lands to the expansion of human settlements); technological and economic changes (new livestock and farming practices); crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling); political and ethnic strife (intensified by the spread of illicit firearms); and cultural changes (the collapse of traditional conflict management mechanisms). A dysfunctional legal regime that allows crime to go unpunished has encouraged both farmers and pastoralists to take matters into their own hands.

A. Drought and Desertification

Nigeria's far north is arid and semi-arid, with a long dry season from October to May and low rainfall (600 to 900 mm) from June to September. In 2008, the National Meteorological Agency reported that over the preceding 30 years the annual rainy season dropped from an average of 150 to 120 days. In the last six decades, over 350,000 sq km of the already arid region turned to desert or desert-like conditions, a phenomenon progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year.¹² In Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states, estimates suggest that 50-75 per cent of the land area is becoming desert.¹³ These environmental changes have wrecked agriculture and human livelihoods, forcing millions of pastoralists and others to migrate south, in search of productive land.

Migration initially was seasonal, with herders spending December to May in the central zone before returning north. Over the last two decades, however, as available pastures shrank in the far north, herders have been staying in the central zone longer – from December to June or July. More recently, some have chosen to graze their herds there permanently. This has triggered increasing disputes over land and water use with central Nigeria's growing populations of sedentary crop farmers.

¹⁰ Blench, R. 1994. *The expansion and adaption of Fulbe pastoralism to sub-humid and humid conditions in Nigeria*. Cahiers d'études africaines vol. 34, no. 133, pp. 133-135.

¹¹ Crisis Group interview, University of Maiduguri lecturer, Maiduguri, 22 October 2016.

¹² Federal Ministry of Environment, *National Policy on Desertification and Drought*, 2008.

¹³ *FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013-2017*, op. cit., p. 6.

B. *Loss of Grazing Reserves*

Most of the 415 grazing reserves established by the northern regional government in the 1960s have since been lost. Only 114 were formally documented or demarcated, though the government failed to back these agreements with legislation guaranteeing exclusive usage or take active measures to prevent encroachment.¹⁴ The rest succumbed to pressure from rapid population growth and the associated demand for farmland, were overrun by urban and other infrastructure, or appropriated by private commercial interests.¹⁵ With the Northern region's division into nineteen states, reserves straddling two or more state jurisdictions lost collective management. The cumulative effect has been to significantly reduce the availability of designated grazing reserves, forcing herders to seek pasture elsewhere.

C. *Changes in Pastoralism and Farming Practices*

Changing practices among both farmers and pastoralists have also strained relations. Over the last three decades, some cattle herders have gradually adopted sedentary lifestyles, leaving cattle herding increasingly to young men or boys, aged 9 to 25 years, who often lack the civility and maturity to resolve disputes amicably.¹⁶

For their part, crop farmers, with federal government help, have expanded into previously uncultivated land. Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) in the 1970s encouraged the use of water pumps while National Fadama Development Projects (NFDPs) have helped farmers exploit wetlands (river valleys and flood plains) for dry season irrigated agriculture since 1993.¹⁷ More fertile, well-watered land, coupled with improvements in rural-urban transportation and an expanding urban market, has boosted farmers' incomes and dry-season employment.

But cattle herders lost access to grass-abundant wetlands, which they had previously used with little risk of livestock straying into farms.¹⁸ Furthermore, high-value crops promoted by the National Fadama Development Projects, notably tomatoes and onions, produce little residue for livestock feeding, further diminishing available fodder.¹⁹ In this changed environment, relations became more competitive and

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Miyetti Allah, cattle breeders association of Nigeria official, Abuja, 12 October 2016.

¹⁵ Growing 2.7 per cent annually, Nigeria's population increased from about 33 million in 1950 to about 187 million in 2016. 47.8 per cent now live in urban areas and that population is growing about 4.7 per cent per annum. "Nigeria", World Statistics Pocketbook (<https://unstats.un.org>).

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, cattle breeders' association official, Kaduna, 18 September 2016.

¹⁷ The term *fadama* can refer to any naturally flooded piece of land but applies particularly to valley bottoms. The NFDP's main objective was to promote agricultural production by exploiting surface and shallow aquifer water resources for small-holder owned and managed irrigation systems. In its first phase, the core implementing states were Bauchi, Gombe, Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. African Development Fund, *Republic of Nigeria, Fadama Development Project, Appraisal Report*, September 2003. The second and third phases (Fadama II and Fadama III) established projects in all states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), designed to raise the incomes of rural land and water resource users, on a sustainable basis.

¹⁸ Farmers ignored the 1988 National Agricultural Policy provisions that 20 per cent of floodplains be set aside for grazing.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, cattle breeders' association official, Kaduna, 18 September 2016.

confrontational, especially in the absence of negotiations between farmers and herders to ensure access to grazing grounds and livestock routes.

D. Rural Banditry and Cattle Rustling

Rural banditry also is driving herders south.²⁰ Over the last decade, cattle rustling has grown in scale and organisation in several northern states where large bandit groups operate with mounting audacity.²¹ While this occurs throughout the north, the main theatres have been the Kamuku forest in Kaduna, Falgore forest in Kano, Dansadau forest in Zamfara and Davin Rugu forest stretching through Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states.²² Cattle theft reportedly also has been a major source of funding for Boko Haram in the north east.²³

The loss is hard to estimate: many thefts, especially those occurring in remote villages or forests with limited state security presence, go unreported. One report estimated that in 2013 more than 64,750 cattle were stolen and at least 2,991 herders killed in states across the north-central zone.²⁴ From 2011 to 2015, bandits, cattle rustlers and other criminals killed 1,135 people in Zamfara state alone, according to the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC).²⁵ Vigilante groups formed to combat bandits (variously known as *Yan Banga*, *Yan Sa Kai* and *Kato da Gora*) have compounded insecurity in some areas where the arrest and summary execution of rustlers sometimes has invited massive retaliatory violence.²⁶ Elsewhere, vigilantes have turned into predators themselves, extorting cash and cattle from herders as “protection levy”.²⁷

E. Escalating Conflicts across Northern Nigeria

In recent decades, northern Nigeria's various conflicts also have displaced herders southward.²⁸ These conflicts – linked to poverty, inequality and religious extremism

²⁰ During the 1980s, bandit groups, locally known as *kwanta*, attacked merchants and other travellers along major highways. Since then criminal groups have proliferated, now engaging in armed robberies, raids on villages, sacking of rural markets, ransom kidnapping and cattle rustling. For more, see Mohammed J. Kuna and Jibrin Ibrahim (eds.), *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*, Centre for Democracy and Development (Abuja, 2015); and Olaniyan, Azeez and Yahaya, Aliyu, “Cows, Bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria”, *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2016), pp. 93-105.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, pastoralist organisation representative, Abuja, Kaduna and Lafia, September-October 2016.

²² Rustlers reportedly operate in ten states, including parts of Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Crisis Group interviews, military officers, community and civil society leaders, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Benue states, September 2016. Some were previously herders whose stocks were stolen. Crisis Group interview, lecturer, cattle breeders' association representatives, Kaduna and Abuja, September and October 2016.

²³ “Statement by Borno state government banning cattle import to check Boko Haram's funding”, 4 March 2016.

²⁴ Cited in Samuel Egwu, “The Political Economy of Rural Banditry in Contemporary Nigeria”, *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*, op. cit.

²⁵ “1,135 people killed in Zamfara banditry in four years – NSCDC”, *Daily Trust*, 17 February 2017.

²⁶ In one reprisal in 2014, bandits killed more than 100 residents in Yar Galadima village in Zamfara state. Crisis Group interview, community leader, Kaduna state, 16 September 2016.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Zamfara state agriculture ministry officer, Abuja, 20 February 2017.

²⁸ For more on conflict in northern Nigeria, see Crisis Group Africa Reports N°168, *Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict*, 20 December 2010; N°196, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (I): The Jos*

– have forced large populations to migrate, devastating local economies and livelihoods, including cattle rearing. In Borno state, the north east vice chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), Alhaji Mafindin Danburam, claims association members lost over one million cattle to the Boko Haram insurgency.²⁹ The economic losses and insecurity have compelled many herders to move south.

Easy access to small arms, including assault rifles, makes the situation more dangerous. Weapons come from various sources, some local, others from black markets across West and Central Africa, including from Libya's looted stockpiles.³⁰ Herders say they carry weapons to defend themselves and their herds against heavily armed rustlers and other criminal gangs in farming communities.³¹ Local vigilantes also say they procure weapons for self-defence.³² Whatever the motivations and justification, the increasing prevalence of weapons has amplified the human cost.³³

F. *Erosion of Traditional Mechanisms*

In earlier decades, herders and community chiefs agreed on stock routes (*burti* or *butali*), sometimes under local government auspices. Disputes over wandering stock or damaged crops typically were resolved by village chiefs and herders' leaders (*Ardos*).³⁴ Those that defied the decisions of these community-level mediators were referred to local authorities. This system started crumbling in the 1970s, undermined by the involvement of the police and courts. Pastoralists hated these new institutions: corrupt police at times extracted fines and bribes while alien and protracted court processes immobilised their herds. Furthermore, local political leaders have tended to favour sedentary farmers, whose votes they crave, over itinerant herders, who may not be around at election time. Consequently, herders feel increasingly marginalised and are largely distrustful of local political leaders as conflict mediators.

The absence of effective mediation mechanisms, including sustained community-level dialogues, can encourage violence. In many instances, local governments do not implement recommendations of commissions charged with investigating the conflicts, due to lack of will and widespread governmental lethargy. Over time, both herders and farmers have lost confidence in the ability of authorities to mediate and conciliate. Aggrieved parties have turned to violence to seek redress or revenge.³⁵

Crisis, 17 December 2012; N°216, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, 3 April 2014.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Yola, Adamawa state, 5 November 2016; "Boko Haram: We lost over 1 million cattle to insurgents – MACBAN", *Daily Post*, Abuja, 12 January 2017.

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Nigeria Customs Service officer, Abuja, 9 June 2016; and member, Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Illegal Weapons, Abuja, 10 June 2016. In 2013, Nigerian military officials reported that Boko Haram insurgents had also received arms from Libya, following 2011 fall of Muammar Qadhafi regime. See Crisis Group Report, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)*, op. cit., p. 25.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, herders in Birnin Gwari, Kaduna state, 17 September 2016; Lafia, Nasarawa state, 21 September 2016; Kuje, Abuja, 22 April 2017.

³² Crisis Group interviews, vigilante leaders, Lafia, Nasarawa state, 22 September 2016.

³³ Crisis Group interview, senior police officer, Abuja, 8 June 2016.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, community leader, Kaduna, Kaduna state, 17 September 2016.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, community leader, Keffi, Nasarawa state, 9 June 2016.

III. The Toll and Impact

These conflicts have exacted a heavy humanitarian toll with thousands killed and tens of thousands displaced. Some estimates suggest about 2,500 were killed country-wide in 2016 – a toll higher than that caused by the Boko Haram insurgency over the same period.³⁶ In Benue, one of the hardest-hit states, Governor Samuel Ortom reports more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016.³⁷

Tens of thousands also have been displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states; in the absence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, most seek shelter in other poor, rural communities, straining their already scarce resources.³⁸ The fear of conflict alone can drive residents to relatively more secure urban and semi-urban areas.³⁹ Since both authorities and donors often ignore these conflicts, affected localities receive far less support from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and international agencies than those impacted by the Boko Haram insurgency.

For women and girls, the impact is frequently magnified. The relatives of men killed in the violence often evict widows from their farmland. Moreover, post-conflict economic and social disenfranchisement renders women and girls even more vulnerable to sexual and economic predation.⁴⁰

The economic toll has also been huge. According to a 2015 study, the federal government was losing \$13.7 billion in revenue annually because of herder-farmer conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states.⁴¹ The study found that on average these four states lost 47 per cent of their internally-generated revenues. In March 2017, Benue state Governor Samuel Ortom asserted that attacks by herders coming from more northerly states, and possibly also from Cameroon and Niger, had cost his state N95 billion (about \$634 million at that time) between 2012 and 2014.⁴²

³⁶ In March 2017, the humanitarian needs assessment organisation, ACAPS, reported that in 2016 alone, at least 2,069 people died in herder-related violence in just Benue and Kaduna states. *Nigeria Farmer-Fulani Herder Violence in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau States*, ACAPS, 21 March 2017.

³⁷ “Over 1,800 killed in herdsmen, farmers clashes in Benue in three years – Governor”, *Premium Times*, 5 July 2017.

³⁸ *Nigeria Farmer-Fulani Herder Violence*, ACAPS, op. cit. Other estimates present lower figures. In February 2017, SBM Intelligence reported 1,425 people killed in attacks involving herders in 2016, as against 1,240 killed by Boko Haram through that year. See *A Look at Nigeria's Security Situation*, SB Morgen, 13 February 2017. Also in February 2017, the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, reported that communal violence, mainly involving herders and farmers in Kaduna state, had killed around 1,300 since January 2016, compared to about 850 killed by Boko Haram over the same period. In June 2017, a tally by the Lagos-based *Sun* newspaper, based on media-reported incidents, stated that 1,102 people were killed in herder-farmer violence over the twelve months from June 2016 to May 2017, compared to 474 killed by Boko Haram over the same period. “Herdsmen attacks; Deadlier than Boko Haram”, *Saturday Sun*, 3 June 2017. Newspaper editors admit their data is not comprehensive, including only incidents reported by the media.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Kaduna, September 2016. This has led to the emergence of new settlements in places like Kagoro and Manchok among others.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, Kaduna, Makurdi and Enugu, September 2016; telephone interviews, July 2017.

⁴¹ “The Economic Costs of Conflict: Evidence on Violence, Livelihoods and Resilience in Nigeria's Middle Belt”, Mercy Corps, July 2015.

⁴² “Benue lost N95b in herdsmen attacks”, *The Nation*, 22 March 2017.

Communities and households also pay a heavy price. The ethnic Nzor-Tiv Global Association estimated its Agatu communities in Benue state lost N65 billion in property (\$204 million) during the early 2016 herder attacks.⁴³ The loss of large cattle herds, crops (due to population displacements and damage to irrigation facilities), as well as increases in transport and labour costs in post-conflict environments all increase poverty and food insecurity in affected communities – and beyond.⁴⁴

The conflicts, particularly herder attacks on farming communities, have spawned dangerous political and religious conspiracy theories. One is that the attacks are part of a longer-term Fulani plot to displace indigenous populations and seize their lands.⁴⁵ Among Christian communities, herder attacks are widely seen as a subtle form of jihad.⁴⁶ In March 2016, the prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, Dr Samuel Uche, said: “We are aware there is a game plan to Islamize Nigeria, and they are using the Fulani herdsmen to initiate it”.⁴⁷ In the south east, Biafra separatist groups describe the attacks as part of a northern plot to overwhelm the peoples of the south and forcefully convert them to Islam.⁴⁸ Some southerners accuse President Buhari of deliberately failing to stop herder aggression, pointing to his pastoral Fulani background and his position as life patron of the cattle breeders’ association, (MAC-BAN), to buttress their charges.⁴⁹

These charges are not supported by any solid evidence, but they are aggravating inter-faith distrust and undermining the country’s fragile unity. The Sultan of Sokoto, Mohammed Sa’ad Abubakar III, spiritual head of Nigerian Muslims and a prominent Fulani, has repeatedly stressed that Fulani herdsmen who kill should be prosecuted as criminals and even terrorists, but many remain unconvinced in a country with deep inter-faith suspicions.⁵⁰

Communities in the middle belt and south have formed self-defence vigilante groups, some of which have threatened organised reprisals. In March 2014, Leonard Karshima Shilgba, an ethnic Tiv academic and thought leader, warned that if the federal government could not stop the attacks, “the Tiv people would also demonstrate that they equally have the right and also the capacity to raise a standing army of thousands from each ward and kindred”.⁵¹ Following an April 2016 attack on Nimbo,

⁴³ This figure was provided by the president general of Nzor-Tiv Global Associates, Edward Ujege, at a public hearing convened by the House of Representatives in Abuja, 25 May 2016.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, community leaders, Lafia, Nasarawa state, and Makurdi, Benue state, September 2016.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, several community and civil society representatives, Lafia, Nasarawa state, and Makurdi, Benue state, September 2016.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, civil society leaders, Kaduna, Lafia, Makurdi, Enugu and Ekiti, September 2016.

⁴⁷ “Unease over ‘Islamization’ plot”, *The Authority* (Abuja), 22 March 2016.

⁴⁸ For background on the resurgence of Biafra separatist agitation, see Crisis Group commentary, “Nigeria’s Biafran Separatist Upsurge”, 4 December 2015; and Nnamdi Obasi, “Nigeria: How to solve a problem like Biafra”, *African Arguments*, 29 May 2017.

⁴⁹ In September 2016, a human rights group, Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), even charged the president for complicity in the herdsmen’s attacks. No evidence has been provided. “Enugu herdsmen attack: CLO accuses Buhari of sponsoring killings”, *Vanguard*, 1 September 2016.

⁵⁰ “Treat killer herdsmen as terrorists”, *Daily Trust*, 13 September 2016.

⁵¹ “New terror”, *The Source* (Abuja), 31 March 2014. The Tiv are one of the two major ethnic groups in Benue state. They have had a long history of confrontation with, and resistance of, the Fulani,

in Enugu state in the south east, the separatist Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) ordered “Fulani herdsmen to leave Biafra land or ... face our wrath”.⁵² In May 2016, Ekiti state Governor Ayodele Fayose warned of possible attacks on Fulani herdsmen if their alleged predatory behaviour vis-à-vis locals continued.⁵³ And the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Reverend Olasupo Ayokunle, warned: “If the government fails to stop the provocation by the Fulani (herdsmen), they should be prepared for war. No ethnic group has a monopoly of violence and no ethnic group should be a monster to others”.⁵⁴

To date, these reprisals against northern herdsmen have not materialised. But signs are ominous. The interplay of herdsmen's attacks on farming communities and inflammatory rhetoric by ethnic and Christian leaders in the south could spark even more violence. The geographic spread or escalation of the conflicts could put Nigeria's military and other security forces under greater stress, diverting the resources they need for operations against Boko Haram in the north east, militants in the Niger Delta and other security challenges.⁵⁵

There may also be wider regional implications. A major confrontation involving Fulani herdsmen could draw in their brethren from beyond Nigeria. A retired Nigerian military officer told Crisis Group that the Fulani could mobilise support, including fighters, from several West and Central African countries, which would worsen the security situation in two already fragile regions.⁵⁶

dating back to the Sokoto caliphate in the nineteenth century. They have also suffered some of the greatest losses in herder-farmer violence since 2013.

⁵² MASSOB accused Buhari of protecting the attackers and called on all Igbo youths and pro-Biafra groups to “wake up and let us unite and face our enemies”. “Fulani herdsmen: Attacks threaten Nigeria's existence”, *Vanguard*, 27 April 2016.

⁵³ “Ekiti killings: Fayose warns Fulani herdsmen, says we'll protect our people”, *Vanguard*, 22 May 2016.

⁵⁴ “Herdsmen's menace could lead to war, CAN warns FG”, *The Punch*, 9 May 2017.

⁵⁵ In January 2017, Nigeria's highest military officer, chief of defence staff, General Abayomi Olonisakin, said the military was contending with at least fourteen security challenges across the country. See “CDS: Military confronting 14 security threats nationwide”, *Daily Trust*, 10 July 2017.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Kaduna, 17 September 2016.

IV. Deficient Responses

A. Federal Government

The federal government has, over the years, explored various responses. In April 2014, then President Goodluck Jonathan's government inaugurated an inter-ministerial technical committee on grazing reserves, tasked with proposing strategies for ending the conflicts.⁵⁷ Concurrently, the government set up a political Committee on Grazing Reserves, chaired by then Benue state Governor Gabriel Suswam. The report issued by Suswam's committee called for the recovery and improvement of all grazing routes encroached upon by farmers and recommended that the Central Bank of Nigeria release a total of N100 billion (\$317 million) to the country's 36 state governments for ranch construction.

The National Executive Council (NEC) approved these recommendations but Jonathan's defeat in the March 2015 elections interrupted their implementation. Although the central bank released N100 billion to state governments, they failed to construct any ranches. On 19 January 2017, the House of Representatives set up a committee to investigate accusations that the funds had been looted and report back within four weeks. The committee's findings remain unpublished to this day.

Soon after assuming office in 2015, President Buhari directed the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to formulate a comprehensive live-stock development plan including measures to curb farmer-herder clashes. In August 2015, a FMARD committee recommended short-, medium- and long-term strategies, including development of grazing reserves and stock routes. On 25 January 2016, the government announced it was presenting a plan to the Nigerian Governors Forum to map grazing areas in all states as a temporary solution for cattle owners until they could be persuaded to embrace ranching.⁵⁸

Most central and southern states, however, opposed the plan, which they viewed as favouring Fulani herders. On 3 March 2016, seeking to mollify this opposition, Agriculture Minister Audu Ogbah announced the government was sending a bill to the National Assembly to prohibit cattle from roaming in cities and villages.⁵⁹ He added that the government had ordered fast-growing grass from Brazil to produce "massive hectares of grasses", which would be ready for consumption "within the next three months".⁶⁰ More than a year later, there has been no further word about the cattle banning bill and the promised grass.

B. Security Agencies and Judicial System

The federally-controlled Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) are thinly deployed in rural areas and often lack early-warning mechanisms. Even when community and civil society groups get involved,

⁵⁷ The committee included representatives from the federal environment, works, science and technology, interior, and water resources ministries.

⁵⁸ "How I plan to end Fulani herders, farmers' clashes – Buhari", *Premium Times*, 25 January 2016.

⁵⁹ "Agatu massacre: Nigeria deploys troops, to ban cattle from villages, cities", *Premium Times*, 3 March 2016.

⁶⁰ "Why we are importing grass, by minister of agriculture", *Vanguard*, 25 March 2016.

both herders and farmers say the response to distress calls is often late. Herders say they sometimes have to seek revenge because security forces take no action against attackers who kill them and steal their cattle. Farmers say the agencies' failure to respond promptly to distress calls and punish aggressors emboldens the herders.⁶¹

The more typical response has been to deploy the police, and sometimes the army, after clashes take place. In a few cases, police have arrested and prosecuted both herders and vigilantes bearing firearms.⁶² More often, the country's dysfunctional law enforcement and criminal justice system fails to arrest or prosecute any perpetrators. Moreover, authorities have generally treated these crimes as political rather than criminal acts, arguing that sanctioning suspects could spark further violence. Even if commissions of inquiry are established, they typically are used as instruments to temper tensions rather than pursue justice.⁶³ These responses, however well meaning, create a climate of impunity.⁶⁴

Under the Buhari administration, the security response has been particularly questionable. In February 2016, following public outcry over attacks by herders that killed scores of people in ten farming villages in the Agatu area of north-central Benue state, Buhari ordered an investigation. Nothing has been heard about it since.⁶⁵ On 24 April 2016, Information and Culture Minister Lai Mohammed said the government was working "silently" toward ending the violence, promising: "In few weeks from now, we will begin to see the result of that".⁶⁶ Again, there was no follow up. In April 2016, after widespread condemnation of an attack on Ukpabi Nimbo in Enugu state, the president ordered the police and military to "take all necessary action to stop the carnage", pledging that stopping herder attacks had become a priority.⁶⁷ Since then hundreds have died in more clashes. On 15 July 2016, the chief of defence staff, General Gabriel Olonisakin, announced "Operation Accord" to stop the violence.⁶⁸ Nothing more was heard of that campaign. Following clashes in southern Kaduna in late 2016, which killed between 200 to 800 people, the army deployed troops to the area. Still, attacks have continued.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, herders in Kaduna, 18 September 2016 and Abuja, 20 April 2017; representative of Ukpabi Nimbo community, Enugu state, Abuja, 20 February 2017.

⁶² "Two Fulani herdsmen jailed 20 years for illegal arms", *The Nation*, 17 May 2016; "Court sentences 15-year-old killer herdsman to death for murder", *The Punch*, 10 May 2017.

⁶³ "Governments only set up panels to buy time, and when the problem drops from the headlines, they go back to business as usual". Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Abuja, 12 February 2017.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Benue states, September 2016.

⁶⁵ In spite of a public admission by the national secretary of a Fulani group, Gan Allah Fulani Association, Saleh Bayeri, that the attack was a reprisal for the Agatu's alleged killing of a prominent Fulani man in 2013, no arrests were made, no suspects charged. See: "Exclusive: Why we struck in Agatu — Fulani herdsmen", *Premium Times*, 19 March 2016.

⁶⁶ "Nigerian government working 'silently' to resolve herdsmen/farmers clashes — Lai Mohammed", *Premium Times*, 24 April 2016.

⁶⁷ "Buhari breaks silence, orders 'herdsmen' brought to justice", *Premium Times*, 27 April 2016.

⁶⁸ "Farmers/herders clash: Military to launch Operation Accord", *Daily Trust*, 15 July 2016; "DHQ plans special task force on herdsmen's killings", *The Punch*, 31 August 2016.

⁶⁹ "Nigerian govt says 204 killed in Southern Kaduna crisis", *Premium Times*, 13 January 2017; "808 killed in Southern Kaduna, Catholic Church alleges", *The Nation*, 30 December 2016.

C. *Federal Legislature*

The federal parliament also has failed to respond effectively. In 2011, Niger state Senator Zainab Kure sponsored a bill to create a National Grazing Reserves Commission and establish national grazing reserves and livestock routes, but it was not passed and eventually expired when the Seventh Senate lapsed in May 2015.⁷⁰ From 2015 to 2016, three new bills were introduced to create grazing reserves, livestock routes and ranches across the country. After much wrangling, all three were dropped in November 2016 on the grounds that land use was exclusively a state government prerogative.⁷¹

Unable to enact new laws, the federal legislature has limited itself to holding public hearings and passing resolutions. On 9 March 2016, the Senate passed a resolution declaring Boko Haram insurgents were behind attacks on farming communities across Benue, Taraba, Plateau and several other states.⁷² Unsupported by any public evidence, that resolution was widely seen as a diversion, particularly as spokespeople for the herders' association had admitted committing some of the attacks in reprisal for previous wrongs.⁷³ On 10 May 2016, the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Intelligence and National Security held a public hearing on herder-farmer violence.⁷⁴ The hearing was not followed by any policy recommendations or action toward ending the violence.

D. *State Governments*

In the absence of clear federal guidance, state government responses vary. Several have established state and local peace commissions or committees to promote herder-farmer dialogue and resolve conflicts.⁷⁵ Others, like Ekiti state in the south west and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja in the centre, have passed laws regulating grazing activities.⁷⁶ In Benue and Taraba states, governments have introduced laws banning all open grazing. In Edo state, the government said it would create fenced grazing areas with watering facilities, requiring herdsmen to feed their cattle there and pay for the service.⁷⁷ Herders, who consider these regulations restrictive,

⁷⁰ "National Grazing Reserves Commission (Establishment and Development) Bill 2011", No. C 2603.

⁷¹ This was according to the 1979 Land Use Act. "Senate rejects grazing reserve bill, says it's unconstitutional", *Thisday*, 10 November 2016.

⁷² "Agatu killings: Senate blames Boko Haram, not Fulani herdsmen", *Premium Times*, 9 March 2016.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Saleh Bayeri, Interim National Secretary of Gan Allah Fulani Association, Abuja, 8 October 2016.

⁷⁴ "Herdsmen/farmers clashes: Nigerian govt proposes ranches, herdsmen insist on grazing routes", *Premium Times*, 11 May 2016.

⁷⁵ In 1997, the Gombe state government set up a Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict Resolution Committee. Crisis Group interview, former commissioner for agriculture in Gombe state, Abuja, 20 February 2017.

⁷⁶ Ekiti state, on 29 August 2016, passed a law banning grazing or movement of cows at night and stipulating that any herder found with weapons would be charged with terrorism. It followed up by establishing the Ekiti Grazing Enforcement Marshals (EGEM), in October 2016. In Benue state, the House of Assembly, on 4 May 2017, passed a bill prohibiting open rearing and grazing of animals and for herders to carry firearms.

⁷⁷ The state government said it also planned to create a database check on attacks by suspected herdsmen. "Edo to register northerners – after Ekpoma killing", *The Cable*, 23 June 2017.

often fail to comply. In the Federal Capital Territory, herders still roam their cattle widely; in Taraba state, the cattle breeders' association has rejected the grazing ban law, vowing a legal challenge.⁷⁸

Some local reactions have been more forceful. In Borno, Niger and Plateau states, authorities occasionally have expelled herder groups from specific areas, following local protests.⁷⁹ In May 2016, the governor of Abia state, Okezie Ikpeazu, revived a local vigilante outfit popularly known as the Bakassi Boys.⁸⁰ He directed all community chiefs to nominate ten youths for a two-week intensive training with "reformed" Bakassi vigilantes before deployment to rural communities. Two months later, the Cross River state government announced plans to set up a 3,000-member "Homeland Security Service". Local officials said the members would not carry firearms, but carry out activities such as providing intelligence on herders' movements and activities.⁸¹

These measures may have reduced clashes in some area, but elsewhere; they have made the situation worse. The expulsion of herder groups has only deepened their resentment. If community-based vigilante groups attack herders in the south, herders might take revenge against southerners residing in the north, thereby further widening the conflict.

E. *Civil Society*

Civil society responses have varied. Ethnic and community-based groups defending farmers' interests typically have organised press conferences and protests, seeking to draw national – and even international – attention to their plight. Some have instituted legal actions; for instance, in May 2016, the Benue-based Movement Against Fulani Occupation (MAFO) filed a suit at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court based in Abuja, demanding the federal government pay N500 billion (about \$1.6 billion) as compensation for failing to protect its citizens. Others, such as the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organisation Afenifere, have set up arrangements to monitor both herders and cattle thieves.⁸²

In turn, livestock producers' groups and pastoralists' organisations, strenuously defend herders' interests and insist media reports of incidents are often politically motivated.⁸³ Fulani umbrella groups, such as Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, also tend to downplay herders' involvement in the violence. The back and forth between highly partisan positions further complicates the search for common ground.

Non-governmental organisations generally have been more conciliatory and constructive in response to the violence. They have focused on post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding, improving early warning and strengthening relations between communities and security agencies.

⁷⁸ "Miyetti Allah to challenge Taraba grazing ban in court", *Daily Trust*, 24 July 2017.

⁷⁹ In April 2009, local authorities expelled 2,000 herders from Wase, Plateau state. In April 2015, the Niger state government evicted a group of 250 herders. "How Niger state tackles Fulani and farmers' crisis", *Sahel Standard* (Abuja), 11 May 2015.

⁸⁰ "Herdsmen attack: Abia govt revives Bakassi Boys to guard rural communities", *Vanguard*, 7 May 2016.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, senior police officer in Cross River state, Abuja, 9 October 2016.

⁸² "Afenifere sets up panel to monitor herdsmen in S'West", *The Punch*, 29 March 2017.

⁸³ "Allegations of killings by Fulani herdsmen political, says group", *Premium Times*, 19 May 2016.

International partners are encouraging herder-farmer dialogues through various local initiatives. For instance, in June 2016, the British Council-sponsored Nigeria Reconciliation and Stability Project (NRSP) supported the Bayelsa state Peace and Conflict Management Alliance in organising a dialogue between farmers and herders.⁸⁴ Likewise, on 27 April 2017, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored and hosted a conference on herder-farmer dialogue, involving the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), MACBAN, the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) and others.⁸⁵

There are some encouraging results. Representatives of herding and farming communities pledged to continue working for peace at a November 2016 mediation forum in Shendam, Plateau state, organised by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) with support from the German embassy.⁸⁶ And, in April 2017, a herder-farmer dialogue in the Udege and Agwada Development Areas of Nasarawa state, facilitated by some local politicians and community leaders, produced a peace agreement.⁸⁷ But results remain limited and fragile.

⁸⁴ "Group begins campaign to end herdsmen, farmers' clashes in Bayelsa state", *The Punch*, 18 June 2016.

⁸⁵ "USAID helps forge solutions on farmers, herders clashes", *Leadership*, 10 May 2017.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Abuja, 19 April 2017.

⁸⁷ "Farmers, herders agree to end hostilities in Nasarawa", *Daily Trust*, 21 April 2017.

V. Five Steps to Help Address the Conflict

Like the Boko Haram and Niger Delta insurgencies, the herder-farmer crisis is a threat to Nigeria's national security. President Buhari's government and state government should acknowledge this and work together in five areas to prevent further conflict.

A. *Improve Security for Herders and Farmers*

An immediate step is to improve security for both herders and farming communities. At a minimum, the federal government and its security agencies should intensify operations against cattle rustlers, improving systems to track livestock movement and trade, arresting individuals who carry illegal firearms and prosecuting suspected assailants.

1. Strengthen police capacity to curb rustling and banditry

In recent years, the federal government and governments of some northern states have initiated several joint efforts against cattle rustlers and bandits. In July 2015, the governors of Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina and Zamfara states jointly funded an anti-rustling operation in the Kamuku/Kuyanbana forests that straddle all six states. The operation involved four organisations: the army, Nigeria Police Force, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and Directorate of State Security (DSS). In 2016, the army launched two other operations against cattle rustlers and bandits in the north west, parts of the north-east and north-central zones.⁸⁸

Some state governments, such as Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto, also have negotiated peace agreements with the bandits, inviting them to lay down their arms and return stolen cattle in exchange for building roads, hospitals and schools in their communities and grants of cash and land to individuals.⁸⁹

These efforts have yielded some results, recovering large numbers of stolen cattle.⁹⁰ However, cattle rustling and banditry still persist on a significant scale. Armed groups have returned to some parts of Zamfara state where bandits seemingly had agreed to arms-for-development proposals.⁹¹ That said, gains produced by amnesty programs and cash rewards could prove short-lived; such programs risk entrenching a culture of violent crime and banditry among constituents who seek to leverage such activities to extract state concessions.

In the near term, and together with continued attempts to reach peace deals, governments should sustain ongoing military and other security operations. Further down the road, they should consider shifting their strategy for curbing cattle rustling

⁸⁸ These were Operation Shara Daji and Operation Harbin Kunama.

⁸⁹ For example, a Zamfara state government-initiated peace dialogue led to an arms-for-development agreement in October 2016. "Govt, rustlers reach truce", *Daily Trust*, 4 November 2016. In April 2017, police reported about 1,000 bandits had renounced banditry and surrendered arms. "Police recover 20 rifles, 2,734 cows from rustlers", *Daily Trust*, 22 April 2017.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, MACBAN official, Abuja, November 2016. On 27 January 2016, the joint-anti-rustling operation reported recovering over 30,000 stolen cattle. "Kamuku Forest: 6 governors review operations, say 30,000 cattle recovered", *The News*, 30 January 2016.

⁹¹ "Return of bandits spreads fear in Zamfara", *Daily Trust*, 10 September 2017.

and other banditry from episodic military operations to steadily deploying more and better-equipped police units in rural and forested areas where bandit groups are based. This would allow police to respond rapidly to incidents and discourage further attacks.

2. Improve livestock tracking

Smarter animal tracking and identification systems can also curb cattle rustling. State ministries of agriculture should oversee cattle branding, certify cattle traders, monitor cattle markets and regulate abattoirs and slaughterhouses. The federal agriculture and transport ministries should renew efforts to establish safer and more efficient arrangements for transporting livestock across the country. Although a long-distance transportation arrangement, utilising the government-run rail system, was inaugurated in 2016, the effort was suspended shortly thereafter amid mutual accusations of bad faith and incompetence.⁹² Adoption of so-called smart devices could also help. Herders acquiring solar-powered Livestock Tracking Devices and herders' associations subscribing to and regularly updating the Cattle Rustling Information System (CATRIS), could help generate some of the information security agencies need to track rustlers and recover stolen cattle.⁹³

3. Prevent attacks on farming communities

The federal government should follow through on promises to stop armed attacks on farming communities, especially in badly affected southern Kaduna and Benue states. To that end, federal security agencies – notably the police and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps – will need to focus on preventive measures, including community liaison mechanisms to upgrade intelligence gathering, early warning and rapid response.

A key priority is to curb the influx and possession of illegal firearms, especially automatic rifles. The new federal whistle-blower program on illegal firearms is a promising start; it should be supported by speedily following up on informants' leads and protecting their identities.⁹⁴ Likewise, the steps taken by several state governments to curb illicit weapons should also be sustained.⁹⁵

Better coordination between federal and state law enforcement would be another important step. The former could set up an inter-agency task force, overseen by the federal justice ministry, to help states investigate major cases of herder-farmer

⁹² The major long-distance transport parties were the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL), a government-owned institution; Connect Rail Services Ltd, bulk freight and logistics service provider; and the Cattle Dealers Association of Nigeria.

⁹³ CATRIS is a portal developed by the non-governmental Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), which provides documentation and real-time alerts on cattle rustling incidents, to relevant officials and agencies. It is an off-shoot of a peace project supported by MacArthur Foundation. The LTDs are micro-chips that "can track the location of cattle and send panic or emergency alerts to the authorities in times of trouble". Crisis Group interviews, corporate services executive of mobile telecommunications company, Abuja, 12 February 2017.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, retired police officer, Abuja, 15 April 2017.

⁹⁵ On 21 January 2016, Nasarawa and Benue states announced plans to disarm militias along their common boundaries. "Nasarawa/Benue meet to disarm militias over border clashes", *The Independent* (Lagos), 22 January 2016. Similarly, in October 2016, Plateau state offered amnesty to gun fabricators and dealers who quit their illicit trade. "Lalong offers amnesty to gun fabricators", *Daily Trust*, 17 October 2016.

violence and bring culpable parties to justice. At a minimum, the Buhari administration could investigate major high-fatality incidents that have occurred under its watch.

Finally, state governments also could provide greater assistance to victims of herder-farmer violence, especially those not directly involved in the violence. Working with local and international organisations, they could, for example, expand humanitarian aid for displaced persons, especially women and children.

B. Support Community-based Conflict Resolution

Local and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms have proved effective in both averting violence and helping communities recover from conflict. Forums that allow various constituencies – farmers, pastoralists, community vigilantes and state security agencies – to monitor, identify, discuss and manage potential threats can be particularly helpful. These also can be used to help farmers and pastoralists explore mutually beneficial ways to coexist.⁹⁶ Wherever possible, state and local governments should support or establish such mechanisms, especially across the worst-affected north-central region.

For their part, local politicians, ethnic, religious and community leaders, as well as representatives of pastoralist and farmer associations need to speak out against violence. The media should try to provide more balanced coverage that avoids inflaming tensions through stereotyping, unfair generalisations and sensational reporting.

C. Establish Grazing Reserves and Encourage Ranching

There is urgent need to reform and improve grazing arrangements. In March 2016, the federal government announced its intent to establish grazing areas across the country, but vehement opposition from farming communities forced it to relent.⁹⁷ It needs a more nuanced approach, which takes into account local sensitivities regarding cattle roaming and open grazing, not only in the south but also in predominantly farming areas of the north-central zone.

As a first step, the federal government, working with state governments, should jointly survey, demarcate and officially document existing grazing reserves that have not been over-run by human settlements and infrastructure. The federal government also should follow through on its plan to establish new grazing reserves in the ten northern states that have already provided 55,000 hectares to that end.⁹⁸ It should help state governments develop these areas following the model provided by the

⁹⁶ Civil society groups and non-governmental organisations also have an important role, particularly in promoting dialogue and several organisations are already engaged in this regard. For instance, in June 2016, the Nigeria Reconciliation and Stability Project in collaboration with the Bayelsa State Peace and Conflict Management Alliance, launched a campaign to promote peaceful co-existence between herders and farmers in Bayelsa state. In March 2017, the Lagos-based Strength in Diversity Development Centre (SDDC) started consultations with Fulani leaders in the southwest, toward promoting peaceful coexistence with farming communities.

⁹⁷ “Nigeria to create grazing areas in south to end farmers, herdsman clashes – Minister”, *Premium Times*, 13 January 2016.

⁹⁸ The states listed were Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Gombe, Taraba, Niger, Adamawa, Jigawa and Sokoto. Following local protests, the Plateau state government subsequently claimed it had not consented to establishment of any grazing reserve.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which is funding three reserves in Sokoto state.⁹⁹

Separately, the federal government should take steps to encourage ranching. The Buhari's administration's Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) 2016-2020 acknowledges "the cattle value chain has become a security problem ... as roaming cattle increasingly is a source of friction between land owners and herdsman". Accordingly, "a key shift is necessary: retaining cattle in ranches".¹⁰⁰ Likewise, an April 2017 northern leaders' summit recommended "a concerted development of ranches" as a key step toward ending clashes.¹⁰¹

Some initial steps have been taken. In April 2017, a policy dialogue initiated by the federal agriculture ministry and facilitated by UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recommended that the government formulate and implement a ten-year National Ranch Development Plan. It also called for securing support from traditional livestock producers by helping them establish cooperatives and linking them up with financial institutions such as Bank of Agriculture (BOA) and Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing system for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL). Significantly, the foremost livestock producers' group, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), though initially reticent about the ranching option, has endorsed these recommendations.¹⁰²

The federal government's policy direction and stakeholders' concurrence signal a growing consensus on the imperative of shifting from open grazing to ranching. Already, some retired military officers, former civil servants and multinational corporations have established a few large ranches. The federal government could advance this process by formulating and implementing the proposed National Ranch Development Plan. The federal ministry of agriculture and rural development, along with various other relevant local and international agencies, should apply the ideas and resolutions generated at the National Conference on Transforming the Nigerian Livestock Industry, held in Abuja in September 2017, in driving the formulation and implementation of the proposed plan.

That said, governments of some states, like Benue and Taraba, that recently introduced new laws prohibiting open grazing, should exercise restraint in enforcing such laws, and encourage a phased transition to ranching. They and other state governments should promote ranches, including by clarifying processes for acquiring land and obtaining credit, devising modalities for ranch management training, and encouraging private-public partnerships. Federal and state governments also need to work out

⁹⁹ In March 2017, IFAD announced plans to establish three grazing reserves. Each reserve will have a veterinary clinic and a nomadic school. They are being established under its Climate Change Adaptation and Agri-business Support Programme. "IFAD to construct three grazing reserves in Sokoto", *Daily Trust*, 25 March 2017. In some states, notably Kaduna, where herder-farmer relations are extremely fraught, there is need to respect local sensitivities in deciding where reserves will be located, particularly to ensure they do not encroach on community farmlands.

¹⁰⁰ *The Green Alternative: The Agricultural Promotion Policy 2016 – 2020*, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰¹ Communiqué issued after a two-day summit organised by Sir Ahmadu Bello Memorial Foundation (SABMF) on "Rethinking the Security and Development Agenda for Northern Nigeria", Kaduna, 24-25 April 2017.

¹⁰² "MACBAN lauds efforts to tackle farmers/herdsman clashes", *Leadership*, 26 April 2017.

alternative plans for the large numbers of herders who may lose their livelihoods in the transition from open grazing to ranching.

D. *Combat Desertification*

Some estimates suggest that during the twenty-first century, two thirds of Nigeria's eleven far northern states could become desert or semi-desert regions.¹⁰³ Besides provoking considerable economic and livelihood losses, this would force many more pastoralists to migrate southward, risking more conflicts with the growing farming communities.

Over the longer term, therefore, federal and state governments should intensify implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative for the Sahara and the Sahel. The project initially called for planting a 15km wide belt of trees, running 7,775km across nine African countries from Senegal to Djibouti. It was later broadened to include building water-retention ponds and other basic infrastructure, establishing agricultural production systems, and promoting other income-generating activities.¹⁰⁴ Nigeria's National Agency for the Great Green Wall aims to rehabilitate 22,500 sq km of degraded land by 2020. Thus far, the agency's impact is scarcely felt: there is no evidence of increased tree cover, significant new infrastructure or environmental restoration across the eleven impacted states.¹⁰⁵ The agency needs to be reorganised, better resourced and more goal-oriented to deliver results within the 2020 timeline.¹⁰⁶

In the same spirit, the federal government should develop strategies for mitigating the impact of climate change, managing environmentally-induced migration, preventing conflicts over use of land and other natural resources – and implement them. In November 2011, the government drafted a National Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change (NASPA); in November 2012, it adopted a National Policy on Climate Change. The country's official development policy, called Vision 20:2020, also contains climate considerations. These policies and plans, until now largely only on paper, should be implemented.

E. *Strengthen Regional Cooperation*

Some dimensions of the herder-farmer conflict can only be fully addressed within a regional framework. This will require Abuja to work in close coordination with neighbouring countries both to manage human and cattle movements across borders and to fight illicit arms trafficking.

¹⁰³ Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Federal Ministry of Environment, *National Policy on Desertification and Drought*, 2008.

¹⁰⁴ The Great Green Wall was originally conceived by then Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. In 2007, the African Union (AU) Commission adopted it as the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI). It involves over 30 partners, including African countries, the European Union, French government, World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), Global Environment Facility (GEF), UN Commission to Combat Desertification and FAO.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, former National Agency for the Great Green Wall staff, Abuja, February 2017.

¹⁰⁶ At the UN Climate Change Conference in December 2015, donor countries and multilateral agencies pledged \$4 billion over five years to support GGWSSI's implementation. It is not clear how much of these pledges have been honoured.

Following revelations that foreign herders were involved in attacks on farming communities, Agriculture Minister Ogburn said the government would present proposals at the African Union “to compel member countries to take steps to prevent their herds from grazing into neighbouring countries”, warning there could be “a major international crisis if we do not stop it now”.¹⁰⁷ To that end, the government should engage the governments of Cameroon, Chad and Niger, as well as the ECOWAS commission, to reach agreement on how to collectively monitor and regulate international transhumance pastoralism, in accordance with relevant international instruments including ECOWAS Protocols.¹⁰⁸ It should also strengthen regional cooperation in combating desertification and mitigating the impact of climate change.

¹⁰⁷ “Agatu massacre: Nigeria deploys troops; to ban cattle from villages, cities”, *Premium Times*, 3 March 2016.

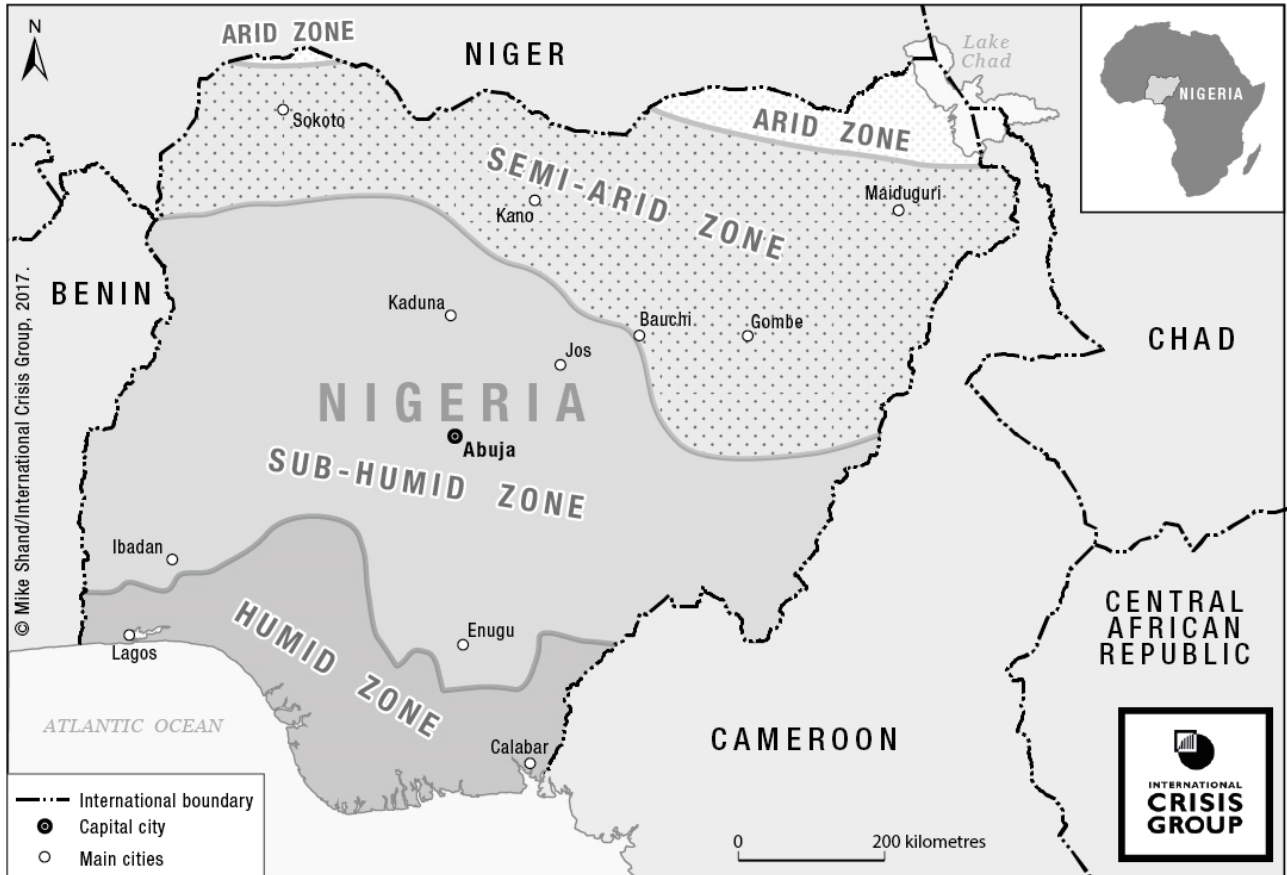
¹⁰⁸ These include the Transhumance Protocol of 1998; the Regulations of Transhumance between ECOWAS Member-States 2003; and the ECOWAS Strategic Plan for the Development and Transformation of the Livestock Sector.

VI. Conclusion

Escalating conflicts between herders and farmers are among Nigeria's most pressing security challenges. This could potentially generate bloodshed on an even wider scale unless President Buhari's government makes ending this violence a national priority. State governments also need to formulate and implement steps to address the needs and grievances of all sides transparently and equitably. Strengthening law enforcement, supporting local conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, establishing and protecting grazing reserves would all make a significant and immediate difference. In the longer term, the greater challenge will be curbing the arms influx and, crucially, addressing the environmental trends that are forcing herders south. Failure would spell greater danger for a country already battling other severe security challenges and, potentially, for the wider West and Central African region.

Abuja/Brussels, 19 September 2017

Appendix A: Map of Nigeria's Agricultural Belts



Appendix B: Map of Conflict and Insecurity in Northern Nigeria



Appendix C: Map of Nigerian States with High Incidence of Herder-farmer Casualties



Appendix D: Summary of Government Responses: Feeble, Failed or Forgotten

Nigeria's federal and state governments have launched numerous initiatives to curb herder-farmer conflicts in recent years. Most have been feebly implemented, truncated by political developments or forgotten.

a) *Federal Policy and Administrative Initiatives*

The most notable policy and administrative initiatives since 2014 have been the following:

- In April 2014, then federal agriculture minister, Akin Adesina, inaugurated an inter-ministerial technical committee to recommend steps for mapping, restoring and managing 415 grazing reserves and stock routes designated across the country. Later that year, the government created a Committee on Grazing Reserves, chaired by then Benue state Governor Gabriel Suswam. Both committees' recommendations were approved at appropriate levels, but implementation was truncated with the end of the Goodluck Jonathan administration in May 2015.
- Soon after assuming office in May 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari directed the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to formulate a comprehensive livestock development plan, including measures to curb farmer-herder clashes. In August 2015, an FMARD committee submitted a report with several recommendations, including development of grazing reserves and stock routes.
- In January 2016, the government announced a plan to appropriate land for grazing areas across the country. That plan was widely opposed in southern and north-central states, where it was viewed as benefiting one ethnic (Fulani) and occupational (herders) group at the expense of others. The government shelved the plan, opting to establish reserves only in states that provided land.
- In March 2016, Agriculture Minister Audu Ogbah announced that, to reduce cattle roaming in search of pasture, the government had ordered fast-growing grass from Brazil, to produce "massive hectares of grasses" that would be ready for consumption within "three months". The order has not been delivered.
- In November 2016, the government inaugurated a railway-based arrangement for transporting cattle from the far north to the south. It suspended the program within weeks as partners accused each other of incompetence and bad faith.

b) *Federal Security and Judicial Responses*

Deficient security measures: The federal government has initiated several security responses that continually fall short on results.

- The government typically deploys the federally-controlled police, and sometimes the army, to areas reporting attacks or clashes. These forces, poorly deployed in rural areas, often lack logistics for rapid response, especially across difficult terrain.
- In February 2016, following public outcry over scores killed in Agatu area, Benue state, President Buhari ordered a probe, pledging that "once the investigations

are concluded, we will act immediately to address the root of the problem". There has been no public report of that investigation or follow-up action.

- ❑ In April 2016, President Buhari said he had ordered security forces to "take all necessary action to stop the carnage", pledging that stopping the violence had become a priority of his administration. Since then there have been many incidents and hundreds killed.
- ❑ In July 2016, chief of defence staff, General Abayomi Olonisakin, said the military was launching a campaign, Operation Accord, to stop herder-farmer violence. There has been no update. In late 2016, the army deployed a new operation to southern Kaduna, which had suffered numerous attacks. The operation has curbed, but not ended, the violence.

Feeble judicial action: Police occasionally arrest and prosecute both herders and vigilantes bearing firearms, but relatively few perpetrators of violence face justice. Impunity has encouraged actors to take matters into their own hands.

c) *Federal Legislative Responses*

Failed legislative initiatives: In 2011, Senator Zainab Kure (Niger state) sponsored a bill at the National Assembly (federal parliament), to establish a National Grazing Reserves Commission, national grazing reserves and livestock routes. The bill was never passed and expired in the seventh senate in May 2015. From 2015 to 2016, three legislators sponsored similar bills. All were dropped in November 2016 on grounds that the Land Use Act 1979 made such decisions the exclusive prerogative of state governments. In March 2016, Agriculture Minister Audu Ogbah announced the government was preparing a bill to prohibit cattle roaming in cities and villages. Nothing more has been heard of that bill.

Ineffective public hearings: On 10 May 2016, the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Intelligence and National Security held a public hearing on herder-farmer violence. The report of that hearing was never made public, nor were any resultant policy prescriptions announced.

d) *State Government Responses*

Establishing investigation committees: Some state governments have, at various times, set up committees to investigate herder-farmer conflicts and recommend remedies; but recommendations are seldom implemented conscientiously.

Establishing dialogue and peace committees: Some state governments have established herder-farmer dialogue and peace committees. Probably the most prominent, involving Fulani herders and ethnic Tiv farmers, was established at the instance of then Benue state Governor Suswam in 2008 and chaired by the sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar III. Few of its recommendations have been implemented.

Introducing new laws regulating grazing activities: Some state governments and the Federal Capital Territory administration have passed laws or regulations guiding grazing activities, mostly limiting grazing hours and areas. Benue and Taraba governments have introduced new laws to prohibit open grazing entirely and encourage the transition to ranching. Herders resent existing regulations and view attempts to ban open grazing as ill-intentioned.

Establishing or encouraging community-based vigilantes: Some state governments, have encouraged formation of community-based vigilantes to prevent or resist herders' attacks. For instance, in May 2016, the Abia state government ordered the immediate resuscitation of a defunct vigilante outfit, Bakassi Boys, to help communities ward off attacks by herders and others.

Expelling herders: In Borno, Niger and Plateau states, authorities have at various times expelled herder groups from specific communities, following local protests.

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

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September 2017

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