



## **Beyond the Rhetoric of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Northcentral Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects**

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# Beyond the Rhetoric of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Northcentral Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

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## Abstract

A hardest truth that has characterized human existence is the reality that conflict is inevitable in every social relation. Put differently, conflict occurs whenever disagreements exist in a social situation over material conditions thereby creating antagonisms or frictions between individuals or groups. Disagreement over the use of essential resources such as farmland, grazing areas and water between herders and local farmers remains the major source of the conflicts in those communities. In Nigeria, clashes between nomadic Fulani herdsmen and farmers used to be confined to the Northern-most region of the country but have spread to the North Central zone such that these disputes pose a grave threat to life and livelihood. Succinctly, the crux of this study was interrogating the Great Green Wall Initiative as Environmental Peacebuilding Approach to farmer/herder Conflict in North-central Nigeria. The theoretical foundation was laid on the group conflict theory while relying on exegesis of relevant secondary sources in its methodology. This paper posits that despite the recurring attacks by criminal herdsmen on farmers and their host communities across the North Central region, the Nigerian government particularly at the federal level has failed on its own part to consciously evolve relevant laws and regulations to check the menace. Furthermore, in addressing these anomalies, this study contends that the government (federal and state) must create the Department of Drought and Desertification Amelioration in the Federal Ministry of Environment to strengthen the institutional arrangement for more



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effective coordination of activities towards the implementation of the UNCCD in the country.

**Keywords:** Conflict; Farmers; Herdsmen; Insecurity; Peace-Building.



## Introduction

The fact that conflict is unavoidable in all social relationships is one of the worst realities that have defined human life. Put differently, conflict arises whenever there are disagreements about material circumstances in a social setting, leading to animosities or frictions between people or groups. Among other things, disputes over ownership or competing access to natural resources are the main causes of war in Africa. In his submission, Blench (1996 cited in Emmanuel, 2021) claims that there are two types of resource disputes: eco-zonal conflicts, which include rights to water, grazing, and hunting, and point resources, which include mining, farms, and reserves. Conflict between farmers and herders seems to be sparked by the fight for survival and the defence of economic livelihoods (such as farmlands, crops, and livestock) in many Nigerian communities. The main cause of disputes in those communities continues to be disagreements between local farmers and herders over the use of vital resources like water, grazing pastures, and farmland. Among other factors, environmental changes and security imbroglio are known as factors forcing herdsmen into new communities in search of adequate pasture to feed their cattle, and by doing so, encroach on farmers' resources, causing conflict.

Retrospectively, conflicts between herdsmen and farmers groups are not limited to Nigeria alone. Herdsmen-farmers conflicts are emerging and disrupting communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Mali, and across the West African sub-region. In West Africa, conflicts between farmers and nomadic cattle herders have been a common feature of economic activities for ages (Tonah, 2011 cited in Adekunle, 2024). Conflicts between farmers and nomadic Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria have expanded from the country's northernmost region to the North Central Zone and spilled into states of Southern Nigeria. However, for this study, we are only looking at the North Central Zone. In Nigeria, there have been numerous violent conflicts between Fulani herders and host communities for several years, resulting in hundreds of fatalities and destruction of property. Oladeji (2023) claims that Fulani militants were the fourth most deadly group in 2014. They use machine guns to raid villages, attack, and threaten farmers, murdering roughly 80 people between 2010 and 2013 and 1,229 in 2014. The majority of these deaths took place in the states of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba in the North Central State of Nigeria. There were also comparable Fulani herders and farmers armed battles with groups from Eggon, Jukun, and Tiv farming communities in the region. 712 people lost their lives as a result of these hostilities (Global Terrorism Index, 2015 cited in Solomon, 2021).



Additional incidents escalated to Agatu, Benue, in 2017. About 300 individuals were killed in the Agatu incident. Another occurrence occurred on New Year's Eve of 2018, when the country's mainstream media claimed that Fulani herdsmen had killed over 70 people in Benue State. This sparked widespread national and international outrage.

## Problematique

Anti-grazing laws have been enacted by a number of Northcentral state governments to reduce hostilities between farmers and herders. All of this was done in an attempt to strengthen links between the two sides. From June 17 to June 20, 2017, armed herders attacked the Mambilla Plateau in Taraba State's Sarduma Local Government Area. Several herders were slain in Taraba State's Leme Community on January 30, 2018 (Solomon, 2021). A similar incident occurred on April 10 in Dori, Mesuma, Gashaka Local Government Area, Taraba State, on January 17, 2018, in Gareji Village. Conflict between herders and farmers in Taraba has been influenced by a variety of land resource concerns. In Northern Nigeria, especially Taraba, farmers and herders have little access to land resources. When grazing meadows and farmers compete, there is a lot of violence. According to Abbas, the hardest-hit local government districts in Taraba State include Ibi, Bali, Wukari, and Takun (2012 cited in Oladeji, 2023). Notwithstanding these laws, wars typically cause considerable loss of life and property. These conflicts seriously endanger lives and means of subsistence.

Succinctly, several scholarly studies have espoused the obvious inadequacies of the conventional criminal justice system and a host of other mechanisms that should have arrested the descent into anarchy. The application of restorative justice as part of the existing mechanisms was unable to resolve the farmers-herdsmen conflict and inability to address and arrest the dangers of climate change. This study becomes a complete departure as it attempts to unravel the inevitability of the Great Green Wall Initiative as a workable solution towards addressing the menace of the herdsmen-farmers conflict. With its range of stakeholders including National Governments, International Organizations, the Private Sector and Civil Society who all work together under the coordination of Pan African Great Green Wall (PAGGW) to combat land degradation and improve the livelihoods of the affected communities, it is therefore not out of place to argue that its efforts to combat land degradation, drought and desertification and other menace orchestrated by impacts of climate change and establishment of fodder farms to reduce over grazing,



enhance livestock production and increase rural income and reduce farmers-herders conflicts addresses the one solution towards ameliorating the issues under discourse. Hence, this study is instrumental in attaining the objectives of investigating and unravelling the politics of herdsmen attacks in the North Central region of Nigeria; examining if there is a socio-economic implication of farmers-herdsmen conflict in North Central region of Nigeria; and determines if the Great Green Wall Initiative become the golden idea towards addressing herdsmen and farmers conflict in the North Central region.

In order to appraise the issues raised, the paper is discussed in five parts. The first part introduces, problematizes the issue under discourse and states the objectives of the study. Second part review concepts related to the topic, retrospect into herdsmen attacks in Nigeria, empirical review, and the theoretical framework. The methodology of this paper becomes the third section. The fourth section focuses on findings which encapsulate discussion of findings relating to the Great Green Wall Initiative as an Environmental Peacebuilding Approach to farmer/herder Conflict in North-central Nigeria. The last section of this study is the conclusion and recommendations.

## Conceptual Framework

Several scholarly works have been conducted, particularly on the interpretation of variables related to this study topic. This work, therefore, will thematically review relevant literature by structuring it based on similarity, conformity, or ideals.

## Conflicts

Human existence is inherently characterised by conflict. Conflicts in families, the workplace, and even while watching the news on TV are unavoidable (Omisore & Abiodun, 2024). Conflict arises when one party implies that another party is against its interests. People often observe only the observable aspects of conflict, such as angry words and behaviors of opponents (McShane and Von Glinow, 2008, cited in Akele, 2022). Adijat (2023) asserts that conflict is a natural occurrence in human society. The impact of nationality on human society extends beyond the animal species as well. Most frequently, we witness two creatures, such as lions or elephants, slugging it out or fighting with one another. Even domesticated/tamed animals, such as goats, chickens, and cows, fight violently against themselves, a sign that there is conflict between them. According to Manu, Bime, Fon, and Ajaga (2014 cited in Onwubiko et al., 2023), competition for limited resources is the



primary cause of intergroup or community disputes; however, conflict arises from the insatiable nature of human demands.

Reacting to the above submission, Ogunmoroti (2024) contends that violence is a common way for conflict to manifest itself, and once it takes on this form, it becomes unwanted and unproductive. Both antagonism and mutual fulfilment and development can result from conflict. In a similar vein, Adeleke (2020) believes that conflict is not always a bad thing. It is among the most potently constructive forces for social development. Conflicts can therefore be either beneficial or detrimental to humanity. This study focuses on the former, namely the destructive war that afflicted Nigeria through the farmers-herdsmen conflict.

### **Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict**

Conflict between farmers and herdsmen is essentially the verbal and violent altercations that farmers typically have with herders due to their struggle for resources, such as land for grazing on one hand and water for irrigation or drinking on the other. Conflicts between nomadic/transhumant livestock keepers and peasant/subsistence farmers are referred to as herders-farmers or herders-farmers conflicts. According to Hussein, Sumberg, and Seddon (1999, cited in Adekunle, 2024), confrontations between farmers and herders can take many forms, such as political action, resource disputes, ethnic conflicts, interest conflicts, evictions, murders, livestock raiding, and cattle rustling. There are distinctions between "farmer-herder" and "herder-herder" conflicts, claims Michael (2022). Herder-herder disputes typically occur between transhumant or nomadic livestock keepers and new groups vying for resources in their domain, such as pastures and water, as well as cow raiding. Conflicts between herders are exemplified by the brutal cattle raids that occur among pastoralists in East Africa. In other words, conflicts arise from cattle rustling and competition among pastoralists over a limited herding environment (Nwakanma and Boroh, 2019).

### **A retrospective on herdsmen attacks in Nigeria**

One of the main causes of national concern is the constant attacks and deaths by herdsmen. Egbas (2018) conducts a retrospective analysis and argues that between 1996 and 2006, conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Bauchi and Gombe states resulted in the deaths of around 121 individuals. Many villages have also recently experienced serious attacks that are said to have been carried out by Fulani herdsmen, especially in the northern central, and south-eastern areas. About ten



Agatu towns in Benue state have experienced unheard-of hardship since January 2016 as a result of men suspected of being herdsmen. The herdsmen are said to have killed over 500 Agatu locals. According to Ezekwesili (2023), there have been fatal conflicts between cattle breeders and rural farmers in Abia State, the Communities of Uzuakoli in Bende Local Government Area, Ebem and Akanu in Ohafia, and Umuchieze in Umunneochi. Blood baths were almost caused by the invasion of farmlands in the communities of Ebem and Akanu, but the foresight of the local leaders, who promptly alerted the police, prevented violent altercations. Because of the severity of some of the cases, the Abia State Government had to step in and stop the local youths from taking revenge or engaging in reprisal attacks. It established a peace commission, which put an end to the impending disaster.

Expanding the argument, Israel and Adebayo (2021) submit that in Enugu State, the situation is the same. Of the 482 communities in the state, it is impossible to identify one that has not experienced the savagery of Fulani Herdsmen, which leaves behind enduring sorrows. Most farmers have suffered from rape, killing, maiming, and kidnapping by cattle herdsmen, which has left them terrified. Tamgbo Ogueji, a member of the traditional ruler's cabinet in the Eke community in the Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, was allegedly murdered by suspected Fulani Herdsmen in March 2014. Due to an unreported conflict with the herders, the 85-year-old was shot dead in his home early in the morning. The town of Nkpologu community in Uzo Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State was thrown into mourning in January 2015, following news of the death of a young woman on New Year's Eve during a Fulani herdsmen's robbery attack on a commuter bus. In April 2016, suspected Fulani Herdsmen invaded Ukpabi Nimbo Community in Uzo Uwani L.G.A of Enugu State, killing scores. The herdsmen, numbering more than 100, reportedly stormed the sleeping community in the early hours of a Monday morning, carrying guns, bows, arrows, machetes, and swords to execute their mission. The attacks of Fulani Herdsmen have not only been witnessed in North-Central and South-East alone, but also farmers in Lagun, Iyana Offia, Offia, Atagba, Lapata, and their surrounding communities in Lagelu L.G.A of Ibadan, Oyo State, alleged that a group of Fulani armed men attacked their communities, carting away valuables.

According to the Global Terrorism Index Report (2018 cited in Ogunmoroti, 2024), between January and September 2018, about 1,700 people were killed by ranchers. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced and thousands killed in conflicts between farmers and herdsmen since the Fourth Nigerian Republic was established



in 1999. Ethno-religious tensions have been exacerbated by the fact that most farmers and herdsmen conflicts have been between Muslim and Fulani herdsmen peasants. Most deaths occurred in the Nigerian Middle Belt, in particular in the states of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba, with a recorded 847 deaths. The state of Zamfara in the Northern Belt recorded 229 deaths. In June 2018, over 200 people died and 50 houses were burnt in clashes between farmers and herdsmen in Plateau State. In October 2018, herdsmen killed at least 19 people in Bassa. By 2018, over 2000 people were killed in those conflicts.

Succinctly, Adijat (2023) contends that between 26 and 27 January 2020, 32 villagers were murdered by herdsmen in Plateau. On June 7, 2021, at least forty people were killed in an attack on the Odugbeho village, allegedly by Fulani herdsmen. On 12 April 2022, 23 were killed in an attack by herdsmen against the Mbadwem (Guma local government area) and Tiortyu (Tarka local government area) communities. On 7 September 2023, Na'aman Danlami, a Catholic seminarian studying for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Kafanchan, died in a fire set by Fulani militants when their attempted kidnapping of a priest living in the rectory was unsuccessful. Attacks on 23–25 December 2023 in Plateau State resulted in at least 200 deaths and injuries to more than 500 people in at least 17 rural communities in Bokkos and Barkin Ladi, attributed to Fulani militias. On 23 January 2024, suspected Fulani herders killed at least 30 people and burned and ransacked schools, places of worship, and houses in Kwahasalek village, Mangu.

## **The Great Green Wall Initiative: Goals and Implementation**

The National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW) was established by Act of Parliament in 2015 to pursue the laudable vision of the African Union and its Heads of State and Governments when they adopted and launched the Great Green Wall in the Sahel and Sahara Initiative (GGWSSI).

National governments, international organisations, the private sector, and civil society are among the many stakeholders involved in the GGWSSI. They collaborate under the Pan African Great Green Wall (PAGGW) to fight land degradation and enhance the standard of living in the impacted communities. To advance the GGW Initiative's implementation, international partners like the European Union (EU), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Bank, Global Environment Facility (GEF), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have raised significant funds.



The initiative, which was launched in Nigeria in 2013, focuses on fighting against threats like desertification, drought, and land degradation that are caused by the effects of climate change. It also aims to improve the livelihoods of impacted communities, lessen the apparent signs of poverty, and increase people's resilience to these phenomena. Eleven (11) nations are involved in the GGWSSI, which ran from Djibouti to Senegal (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Mauritania).

By 2030, the GGWSSI hopes to establish 10 million green jobs, rehabilitate 100 million hectares of degraded land, and sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon. When this goal is fulfilled, it is expected to change Africa's arid regions from a danger to livelihoods to a source of them. Millions of people who are impoverished and experiencing the consequences of the climate crisis will have their lives completely changed by it. Among other beneficial consequences and repercussions, it will also aid in ending the cycle of migration and war that is common in Africa's Sahelian regions. To oversee and coordinate the execution of National GGW priority actions, member states have set up National GGW Agencies or focal points at the national level.

The scope of the implementation process of the National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW) covers the northern frontline States (Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Yobe).

To achieve the mandate of the Agency, the following components are pertinent:

- Degraded land restoration and rehabilitation through Afforestation and reforestation.
- Farmers' Managed Natural Regeneration to restore and improve agricultural, forested, and pasture lands by encouraging the systemic re-growth of existing trees or self-sown seeds.
- Promotion of alternative livelihood activities to reduce dependency on scarce natural resources, enhance the rural economy, and generate employment.
- Promotion of alternative sources of energy to reduce deforestation and enhance carbon sequestration.
- Promotion of dryland agriculture to strengthen food security and the rural economy.



- Establishment of fodder farms to reduce over-grazing, enhance livestock production, increase rural income, and reduce farmers – herders' conflicts.
- Dune fixation to protect agricultural lands and infrastructure.
- Oasis rehabilitation to enhance livelihood activities and food security.
- Water resources management to ameliorate the impacts of drought and promote irrigation practices.
- Sensitization and awareness campaign to mobilize the rural communities towards the implementation of the programme.

## **Empirical Review: The Farmer-Herder Conflict Nexus in Nigeria**

There have been existing works generally on issues and challenges facilitating herdsmen and farmers' dilemma and fiasco in Nigeria, and scholars have established their opinions on the subject based on their research. A critical look at some of these works will be of advantage to this study.

In another study, Adeniyi, Nnamchi, and Onyia (2023) contend that the herdsmen/farmers conflict in the North Central Region and other parts of Nigeria has made violent conflict in the country take another dimension. The central thesis of their study was to examine herdsmen/farmers conflict as a new dimension of the conflict in Nigeria, with a study of the North Central Region. The specific objectives of their study were to discover the factor(s) triggering herdsmen attack in the North Central Region of Nigeria, find out the effects of farmers/herdsmen attack on socio-economic development and food production in the region and identify and recommend measures to end herdsmen/farmers conflict and waste of lives and properties of innocent people in the North Central Region of Nigeria. In achieving these objectives, their study adopted a survey and documentary research method. Data was sourced through the use of primary and secondary sources of data collection. Data for the study were collected using 17 questionnaire items. Findings of their study revealed that the factors triggering herdsmen/farmers conflict in the region are competition for resources (grazing land), desertification, anti-open grazing law, and one-sided reporting by the media, lack of appreciable efforts by Federal Government to stop the attack, That the consequences of herdsman attack



are; low agricultural output, loss of lives and properties, hunger and human insecurity.

In response to Haruna's (2021) argument that the herdsmen and farmers crisis has remained the most predominant resource-use crisis in Nigeria. The necessity to provide good governance has been hampered by the activities of herdsmen. The herdsmen/farmer crises have demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the insecurity in rural communities where most of the crises are localized, with reverberating repercussions nationwide. Haruna describes the relationship between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in the incessant land crises witnessed in Nigeria and how it affects the livelihood security of those involved and land sustainability for the local communities. The paper adopts structural functionalism as its theoretical framework in analyzing. The study concluded that there is a need to identify the causes, repercussions, and proffered resolution of the critical issues that are at the roots of the herdsmen/farmers crisis.

Alexander and Ugwu (2021) further argue in their study that the Fulani herdsmen are nomadic people. In the past, the nomads have often come into conflict with the local farmers. The conflicts have now continued to increase daily, and the nature of the attacks has changed. Herdsmen now allegedly use firearms. Also, in recent years, the herdsmen–farmers conflict has been very common in many parts of Nigeria. Such conflicts have caused a lot of losses to Nigeria, the state, local communities, and families. The herdsmen–farmers conflict has become a social problem for Nigeria and a source of national concern. The clash between herders and farmers has become a major cause of increasing violence and general insecurity in Nigeria. In most of these encounters, citizens are regularly killed, internally displaced, and the destruction or loss of property leaves an already endangered populace even poorer. All the government responses so far have not yielded positive results for the problem. All these have implications for social work practice in Nigeria and hence the need for this work. Social work is a helping profession, and thus, there is a need for exploration of areas for intervention.

Murtala, Ismail, and Samuel (2021) argue that the conflict between herdsmen and farmers is a threat to Nigeria's unity. Throughout Nigerian history, especially after independence, and worst still today, it has been the basis of tension, animosity, and hostility among Nigerians. The rise of this conflict in political culture is not surprising in the context of the relationship between the trajectories of pluralism and development in the country. Farmers and herdsmen's competition against each



other over resource control came along with a resurgence of the call to re-fashion the federal system. They studied the protracted herdsmen and farmers' crisis in Nigeria and discussed the politics involved in the conflict and its effect on inter-group relations. It also discussed steps to ensure the elimination of the present situation of in-built periodic political crises over the control of the country's central authority and its resources. The primary cause of the recently recurring herdsmen and farmers crisis in the country is political. The situation has been brought about by the long years of bad governance and the opportunism of the political class, which triggers the quest for restructuring and the quest for true federalism. Consequently, the unavoidable conclusion is that Nigeria should remain a corporate entity. It must also revert to a proper federal system rather than a unitary system. The present system imposed by the military should be jettisoned. Therefore, the Constitution is expected to reduce federal power. Their study brings to fore that any attempt to sweep the issue under the carpet would be a gross injustice to Nigerians and would be tantamount to needless enthronement of a state of continual political crisis.

Christian (2021), in his study, contends that the interaction of farmers and herders has, for many years, not led to happy tales due to the conflict of interest over land resources, which are valued by both parties for the sustenance and advancement of their trade. This appalling situation has generated heated discourses in many circles with various suggestions and strategies advanced to end this imbroglio to no avail. Such had also attracted the researcher to engage in a scholarly voyage of interrogating the consequences of these incessant conflicts between farmers and herders on agricultural production, with further implications on the security conditions of farmlands. To achieve the above, the documentary evidence method of gathering data was employed, while the intractable conflict theory was employed to dissect the study. The findings of the study revealed that farmers/herders crises in the country, which have led to the wanton destruction of human lives and properties, including livestock and farmland assets, have been the major cause of low agricultural production in the country. It was also discovered that the displacement of farmers was due to the high level of insecurity of the farmlands due to the activities of the warring parties in the conflicts, which made those places unsafe for habitation.

Succinctly, Emmanuel and Bamidele (2020) contend that farmers-herdsmen conflict has become a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria. They argue that the continuing occurrence of this conflict can be explained by the non-application of restorative



justice procedures by the government when dealing with such conflict. This has made the structures of traditional conflict resolution ineffective. Hence, they conclude that the application of restorative justice as part of conflict resolution mechanisms will more sustainably resolve the farmers-herders conflict in the country, as well as enhance national security and development.

Nwakanma and Boroh (2019) argue that the worsening violence between farmers and nomadic herdsmen in Nigeria has remained an issue of concern on the laundry list of the Nigerian State, policymakers, security agencies, International bodies, as well as Social science scholars. While conflict is considered a normal and inevitable outcome of human relationships, the concern here is the devastating socio-economic, political, and environmental implications of the conflict between these two livelihood groups, as well as its impact on national development. Whereas several factors have been adduced for this growing violence ranging from climatic transformations, deteriorating environmental conditions, desertification, soil degradation; political and ethnic strife; breakdown in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms; proliferation of arms in the country and a dysfunctional legal regime that neglects justice; this paper, relying on the demographic theory of conflict, demonstrates how population overshoot in Nigeria explicate the new violent and widespread dimensions of the farmers-herders conflict. This paper, relying on the Demographic theory of conflict, argues that among the various causes of the Farmers-Herders conflict, the exponential growth of Nigeria's population and the inability of the Nigerian State to meet the needs of the populace, contributes to the endless contest for space and property in the country, referred to in this paper as 'population induced warfare'.

Nein, Kasikoro and Amos (2019) in their study argue that the Northcentral of Nigeria has been gripped with Herdsmen insurgency, the problem of insecurity that has almost affected the Federal system of government in Nigeria, where unity in diversity is no longer seen as a hallmark for forming a federal state. The central thesis of their argument was to investigate the causes and effects of the Herders' insurgency and its implications on Federalism in Nigeria. Their study employed secondary sources of data collection, using the theoretical framework of conflict theory as an analytical tool. One major finding is that the Herders' insurgency is due to the influence of Boko Haram, which has negative implications for the coordinated existence of Nigerian federalism.

## Theoretical Framework



The theoretical thrust adopted in this study is the Group Conflict explanation. This approach emphasizes the role of power struggles amongst various groups in society in understanding the source of political violence. A proponent of this theory draws attention to the cleavages within a society, especially between ethnic, racial, and religious groups. One common strand of the group conflict explanation often used in analysing violence in African politics is the argument that locates the source of conflict or violence in the cultural pluralism of this country.

According to these researchers, sub-national groups within significantly distinct institutions, cultures, and histories have served as the primary locus of political identification and socialisation rather than nations (Anifowose, 1982 cited in Ezekwesili, 2023). While the group explanation's ethnic conflict model has been useful in understanding political and religious violence in Nigeria and Africa, its focus on linguistic and cultural divisions tends to underestimate the level of interethnic cooperation that existed in Nigeria before and soon after independence.

As argued by Ademola (2023), the second premise of the group conflict approach is that conflict between various actors within a particular political system frequently results in political and religious violence. As a result, disputes between political actors over the authoritative allocation of values are a part of all politics. And every society shares the problem of differential distribution of power and authority. Accordingly, the differential distribution of these values invariably becomes an important determining factor of political conflict or violence.

This method helps one comprehend how Nigeria's scarce resources fuelled fierce competition for control over the allocation and redistribution of scarce resources among the country's numerous politicians and ethnic groups. Both the intra-ethnic conflict within the nation and the conflict between the regions were manifestations of this. The culmination of a prolonged struggle for power between the dominant political groups within the federation. Hence, the group complex theory explanation is acceptable for this investigation.

## Methodology

This study utilises content analysis as its methodology. It is mostly a thorough analysis of academics' opinions and stances about the herdsmen-farmers crisis, insecurity, and Nigeria's security dilemma in the Northcentral part of Nigeria. Journal articles, textbooks, newspapers, non-governmental organisations like the Great Green Wall Initiative, and other players in the security and agriculture



industries are some of the sources. To ensure validity and reliability, the data used in the study were cross-matched.

## Results and Discussion

### Politics of herdsmen attacks in the North Central region of Nigeria

The Nigerian government, especially at the federal level, has failed to proactively develop pertinent rules and regulations to curb the threat, even though criminal herdsmen have been attacking farmers and their host communities throughout the North Central area regularly. The country's pastoral lifestyle is not governed by any comprehensive legal framework (Dalori, 2016). Due to the frequent attacks by herdsmen on their people and property, a few impacted states, like Taraba and Benue, have recently passed anti-grazing laws that limit grazing activities within their borders (Ndukwe, 2021). The Gan Allah Fulani Association's Interim National Secretary stood up for his kinsmen in a case involving the Fulani Herdsmen's February 2023 attack on the Agatus, an ethnic group in Benue, claiming that it was a retaliatory attack by his people in retaliation for the death of a well-known Fulani man. Concluding the aforementioned issues, Akinkiole (2022) stated that although many stakeholders support anti-grazing legislation, some still oppose it, claiming that they are ineffective because they were rushed and violate herdsmen's rights. Therefore, before passing the legislation, the state governments should have designated certain regions as ranches and provided water, veterinary facilities, nets, schools, and other amenities. They should have done extensive consultation. According to the constitution, herdsmen are entitled to travel to conduct their business. States will increase and diversify their sources of income by establishing ranches. A law with religious and ethnic overtones can only drive us as a nation's citizens apart. Herdsmen are being sent out of the United States indirectly by the current law, which lacks an alternate grazing place.

Succinctly, the "Land Grazing Bill," which was presented by former Agriculture Minister Audu Ogbeh and aims to plan out grazing routes and secure regions for Fulani herders throughout the federation, contains inconsistencies of its own. This is because it causes terror among the local farmers and host communities. Some farmers claim that establishing ranches within their territory would require them to cede a portion of their property to herdsmen. They therefore oppose such actions because they believe they will only increase violence.



The fact that Nigeria is a signatory to the 1998 ECOWAS transhumance agreement and the African Union pastoral policy, which establish laws and regulations that allow cross-border migration and transhumance rights, adds another dimension to this argument. Unfortunately, despite the unstable conditions among the states in the North Central area, no policy choice has been developed or put into effect by any of the governments to domesticate any of these continental decisions. Therefore, this finding corroborates the postulations of Abegunde and Nwaguru (2024), who contend that the Northern region of the country's porous borders is the reason why foreign herders continue to enjoy easy entry to our nation and wreak havoc. Hence, at this juncture, it is critical to note that while West African countries have bilateral agreements on pastoral mobility, especially with their neighbours, Nigeria does not have such agreements with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger.

As aptly captured by Abe (2024), Fulani herdsmen have persisted in causing chaos, primarily in the country's North Central region. Greater doom for lives in vulnerable places could result from the Nigerian Police's incapacity to contain them. Thus, a paradoxical hidden fact is that, despite being a part of the governing class since Nigeria's founding, Fulanis have not been able to obtain the establishment of grazing reserves as required by law. Nigerian Fulanis are disengaged, which results in misrepresentation and poor advocacy, whereas pastoral groups in other African countries are actively involved in the public policy process that affects pastoral life. In order to emulate other nations where law enforcement is in place and herders are departing peacefully with farmers and their host communities without any kind of violent conflict, as is possible in Nigeria, this is a critical issue that needs immediate attention.

## **Socio-Economic Implications of the Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in the North Central Region**

Violent clashes between crop farmers and livestock herders have emerged as one of Nigeria's biggest insecurity issues, ranking second only to the combined threat of Boko Haram and banditry. The violent conflict between the two factions has been expressed in the form of bloody conflicts (attacks and retaliatory assaults). These bloody attacks and counterattacks have created economic adverse effects and social or relational implications such as:

### **Loss of Human and Animal Lives**



The majority of these conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have led to humanitarian disasters that have caused the deaths of both people and animals. For example, since June 2014, 853 people have been killed in a conflict between Fulani ethnic groups and Tiv farmers. The number of Tiv people slain in 2014 is estimated to be 633, excluding women and children who perished in dilapidated camps, whereas the Fulani ranchers claimed to have lost 3,200 cows and 214 persons. Approximately 458 Tiv people have died so far in Guma, Gwer-West, Makurdi, and other cities along the Taraba state border, while more than 350 communities have been sacked and are currently residing in IDP camps. According to a report compiled by SBM Intelligence (2018 cited in Akele, 2022), a Lagos-based intelligence consulting firm, pastoral conflicts accounted for more deaths than Boko Haram last year.

## Displacement of Persons

There are several reports of people being internally displaced. Conflict between farmers and herdsmen can lead to displacement. For example, Ofuoku & Isife (2019) claim that host communities' conflicts force nomadic herdsmen to relocate. For fear of being attacked by bush nomads, host farmers, particularly women who stayed behind, stopped travelling to far-off farms. These displaced farmers are now a liability to other farmers, who must rely on them to provide food for their families. About 80,000 internally displaced people, or IDPs, have been registered by the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in four camps in the state's Guma and Logo local government areas (Nwakanma and Boroh, 2019). As of March 1, no fewer than 80,450 children are currently trapped in eight Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps established by the Benue state government to cater to victims of herdsmen incursions in the state. According to official figures obtained from the State Emergency Management Agency, SEMA, of the said figure, 47,353 are male, while 39,909 are female children.

## Destruction of Houses

In the majority of impacted areas in Nigeria, conflicts between farmers and herdsmen are also destroying homes. For example, an incident in Benue state on June 20, 2016, resulted in the deaths of at least 59 individuals. January 24, 2017: Farmers in Piga village, Ohimini Local Government Area, Benue State, were assaulted by renegade Fulani herdersmen, killing fifteen people. Additionally, on January 2, 2018, suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked Agambe-teir, Ayilamo, and



Turan in Logo LGA, Umenger, Tse-Akor, and Tamata near Tse-Abi in Nongor District of Guman LGA, and Ikende communities in Dekina LGA of Kogi State, killing 73 people, including seven members of Benue state livestock guards.

## **Destruction of Farmlands and Crops**

The majority of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen were indeed brought on by the annoyance of farmers whose crops and farmlands were destroyed by herders. Herdsmen have frequently clashed with farmers who are eager to prevent thousands of cattle from damaging their crops and sources of subsistence. Haruna (2021) claims that cattle invasions in the South-South region of Nigeria, particularly in Delta and Edo States, typically result in the loss of more than 40 million worth of crops each year. This has made it more difficult for the host communities to survive because many crop growers have left their farms in order to avoid dying or suffering needlessly. Aliyu (2015 cited in Emmanuel and Bamidele, 2020) said that the fighting has kept destroying or losing crops and properties in Gboko, Benue State, making an already vulnerable population further destitute. Corroboratively, Ibrahim (2024) submits that both groups involved in the conflict suffered significant financial losses, with the herders appearing to have suffered greater financial losses than the farmers.

## **Distrust between Herdsmen and Farmers**

Burton (2016) asserts that the vast majority of the Fulani ethnic group's members are pastoralists who have no affiliation with militant activity. However, because of the violent group's behaviour, even these peaceful ones are generally viewed with distrust and hatred by the sedentary tribes whose land they take their cattle on. This has changed their connection with the majority of their host communities and fostered mistrust.

## **Addressing Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in North Central Region: Great Green Wall Initiative to the rescue**

As one might anticipate, these conflicts have had detrimental effects on almost everyone involved, including the farmers, the herders, the impacted communities, and the country as a whole. Despite acknowledging that the effects of climate change and desertification are the primary cause of the conflicts between Nigerian farmers and herders, the conflicts ought to be mercifully ended. In other words, the situation has escalated to such a point that the current government should shift its



conflict management framework to the implementation of the Great Green Wall Program, which calls for coordinated efforts to create an enabling environment through intentional government policies, institutional support, and other appropriate interventions. This is despite the criminal nature of the bloody grazing and the crimes committed by the Fulani herders throughout the nation, including kidnapping, crop destruction, arson, murder, rape, etc. Specifically, the interventions will focus on halting soil deterioration, preserving biodiversity, enhancing agricultural output, and lessening the effects of climate change.

Furthermore, in order to improve the institutional arrangement for more efficient coordination of activities towards the country's implementation of the UNCCD, it is essential to argue that the federal and state governments establish the Department of Drought and Desertification Amelioration within the Federal Ministry of Environment. To address the dual issues of drought and desertification, a number of sectoral and multi-sectoral programs in the fields of water, forestry, agriculture, and energy must be implemented or are currently being implemented. To achieve these goals, the government has also made it easier for other players to get involved, including the private sector, non-governmental organisations, and financial and technical development partners.

The issue should be settled through legal praxis, first by the due process of law based on criminal justice, to handle the bad eggs among herders. The government should fulfil its constitutional duty to protect all of its inhabitants by holding the perpetrators accountable, since the herders' killings are an affront to the highest law of the land. According to Nigerian criminal law, the Fulani herder faces penalties for the claimed crimes. Any herder found guilty of breaking the provisions of her current criminal law, which lays out the penalties for the various crimes the herders have committed, such as murder, rape, arson, kidnapping, and unlawful possession of firearms, should be promptly apprehended, prosecuted, and punished by the government. Additionally, the state governments whose nationals are the targets of these crimes ought to use every legal tool at their disposal to safeguard their residents. This is the first approach by which the machinery of law can tackle the difficulty of farmers/herders confrontations in the country.

Lastly, it must be noted that because of pastoralism and deforestation, the desert has engulfed various areas of the Northern region over time. This has prompted a large number of Fulani herdsmen to relocate southward from their base in these states. Nigeria's North Central and other regions are suffering the most. The



government must promote irrigation farming and forestry in order to stop this ongoing migration. Thus, even after spending decades in the Middle Belt, the Fulanis are still considered settlers by the natives when they end up on their land. Regular meetings, get-togethers, celebrations, and athletic events should all help to close this gap.

## Conclusion

Now and again, we are inundated with tales of violent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and some members of Nigerian crop-farming communities. However, the negative narrative stems from the fight between farmers and herdsmen for economic survival and safety in many Nigerian communities, which seems to incite conflict. With the acquisition of contemporary weapons and communication technology, the war has taken on a more hazardous dimension in recent years, leading to a significant loss of life and property. Due to the way this new dimension of conflict in Nigeria is spreading to other regions, the study concludes that the Great Green Wall Initiative's policy directions and goals must be implemented to address the problem. If this is not done, the conflict between Nigeria's farmers and herdsmen will be disastrous for the nation in the future.

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