

## Farmer-Herders Crisis: 149 People killed in Plateau, Benue, Edo, Ebonyi and Kogi States.

### BACKGROUND



- Nigeria continues to be affected by recurring violent conflict between farmer-herders in some States, posing a grave threat to national security and destruction of the sources of social and economic livelihood of people. Statistics generated from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) from January – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018, put the figures of deaths arising from Farmer-Herders conflict at 528<sup>1</sup>. The figure suggests that the conflicts have increased in frequency, intensity and geographical scope with dire humanitarian, social, political and economic consequences.
- Inherent in this conflict is the issue of access to natural resources such as water and land for grazing or farming exacerbated by worsening climatic conditions due to Global Warming. (see *WANEP-Nigeria's Situation Tracking Analysis on Agro-Pastoralist Conflict: Vol. 2, January 2018*)<sup>2</sup>
- The increasing availability of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) both locally-produced and those smuggled in from other countries further compounds the crisis.

### INCIDENT PROFILE

As at 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018, a cumulative fatality of 149 people including women and children<sup>3</sup> were recorded in violent confrontations and attacks arising from the Farmers-Herdsman conflicts in Plateau, Benue, Edo, Ebonyi and Kogi States. Several people were allegedly injured with houses burnt down during the incidents. Residents have abandoned their ancestral homes to seek refuge in neighbouring communities and States for fear of attacks and safety.

Between 2<sup>nd</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> March 2018, 74 people<sup>4</sup> including four security personnel (2 Military Personnel and 2 Police Officers) were reported dead with several others injured including security operatives and local Vigilante members in violent attacks carried out in Bokkos and Bassa LGA's of Plateau State – there are reports that indicate that the Military Personnel were killed by suspected herdsmen while responding to a distress call of the clash between community members and herdsmen at Rafiki Village, Bassa LGA of the State. However, a counter statement emerged from the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) claiming that five (5) Fulani Herdsmen were killed with over 150 houses burnt down in the State<sup>5</sup>. Allegations of attacks and killings with cattle rustling have largely been attributed to reprisal attacks. These attacks triggered peaceful protests from Irigwe community women in Miango District, Bassa LGA, against the killings of women and children during attacks in Miango Villages<sup>6</sup>. The affected communities in Plateau State include; Nzharuvo, Rotsu, Dundu, Rafiki, Dong and Dutse Kura in Bassa LGA and Ganda community in Bokkos LGA.

Similarly between 3<sup>rd</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> March 2018, 34 people including two (2) Police Officers were also reportedly shot dead<sup>7</sup> in attacks by suspected armed herdsmen in Omosu-Edimoga community, Okpokwu LGA; Umenger, Tse Orogbo and Tse Igbe communities in Guma LGA, Benue State. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2018, four (4) people including three farmers and one herdsman were reportedly killed with 2 others injured in a violent clash between farmers and herdsmen in Igbeagu community, Izzi LGA of Ebonyi State. The communal clash occurred when farmers demanded that the herdsmen vacate their farmlands<sup>8</sup>.

Another report of coordinated attacks by suspected armed herdsmen in Oganienugwu, Iyale and Ikende communities, Dekina LGA and Abejukolo, Obakume and Agbenema communities, Omala LGA, Kogi State (From 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> March 2018) claimed the lives of 32 people, 20 houses razed by fire and many others demolished in the violent incidents.<sup>9</sup>

On the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018, five (5) people were reportedly killed with 12 others injured in attacks carried out by suspected armed herdsmen along Ugboha Amedokhian road, near Leprosy camp in Ugboha Community, Esan South-East LGA and Odiguete Village, Ovia North-East of Edo State.<sup>10</sup>



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## **RISK ANALYSIS:**

Though the negative impacts of the farmer-herders conflict have been receiving media and research attention; the political commitments/responses have neither doused the tensions nor de-escalated the crisis. This was evident in one of the recent attacks in Plateau State that occurred during the visit of the President to the State to launch a Five-Year Road Map for Peace Strategy<sup>11</sup>. Despite successive State Governments' attempts in addressing the conflict, premeditated attacks are recorded on a daily basis with accusations and counter accusations traded between farming communities and MACBAN. These persistent attacks have potential to undermine human security and socio-economic livelihood of the affected States.

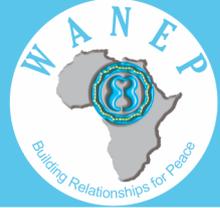
The enactment of the "Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law" by Ekiti, Benue and Taraba States respectively; and the controversial cattle colony initiative proposed by the Federal Government were intended to regulate the activities of farmers and herders to ensure peaceful social cohesion. However, the implementation of law and prohibitions seemingly generated controversies and heightened tensions across affected States. This was also manifested in the attack of Kogi State amid its Government's open invitation to herdsmen to relocate to the State and the approval of 15,000 hectares of land<sup>12</sup> in support of the Federal Government's quest for the cattle colony scheme.

The farmers-Herders conflict has been entrenched oscillating between blurred lines of social and political factors with political undertones. The Global Terrorism Index (2018) rated Fulani Herdsmen raids as the second biggest internal security threat to peace in the country after Boko Haram terrorist group<sup>13</sup>. As States continue to battle this threat, pertinent questions on the appropriate security model to adopt to permanently resolve the conflict remain unanswered.

## **MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS:**

The Federal and State Government devise strategies in combating the farmers-Herders violence are as follows:

- Deployment of Military Operation "Ayem Akpatuma-Cat Race" in Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa, Kaduna, Niger and Kogi States and intensified security patrol to affected communities to prevent reprisals as well as forstall further break down of law and order.
- In Benue State, data is being gathered for compensation for damages caused by herdsmen attacks in the State. This initiative will not only prioritise ending the persistent violence, but will ensure victims and community resilience through compensations.
- The Federal Government leadership and inauguration of the National Food Security Council will ensure prevention and mitigation of farmers-herdsmen clashes,<sup>14</sup> and address other issues relating to climate change, oil spillage, grazing areas, etc.
- The Plateau State Governor convened joint security meeting with stakeholders from both the Fulani and Irigwe community of Bassa and Bokkos LGA with a view to unravel the remote causes of the conflict and find sustainable solutions to the crisis in the State. In addition, following renewed attacks and efforts to prevent an escalation of



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the violence, the State Government imposed a dusk to dawn curfew in the affected communities in Bassa LGA.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The Nigerian Police Force should intensify efforts to implement disarmament and seizure of illegal firearms and ammunitions in possession of all suspected Militias, Bandits and Vigilante groups across States in Nigeria.
- The Nigerian Government in consultation with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Traditional Institutions should carefully consider all the options/strategies put forward in managing agro-pastoralist conflicts with particular focus on the underlying conflict sensitivities and risks involved as well as ensure sustainability.
- The Federal Government should ensure that the proposed consultations are transparent and outcomes doable to address the key concerns of the parties in conflict. In addition, political leaders should refrain from inciting the communities with inflammatory speeches.
- The State authority should be restored to ensure that the killings are prevented while crimes committed are speedily investigated and tried in a competent court of law.

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