

Assessing The Conflict Resolution Mechanisms In Nigeria: A Case Study Of Farmers-Herders Conflicts

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Abstract—Violent conflicts between nomadic herders from the northern region of Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's economy, security and stability. The purpose of the study is to identify and evaluate the factors contributing to the Farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria which included drought and desertification, loss of grazing reserves, changes in pastoralism and farming practices, rural banditry and cattle rustling, escalating conflicts across northern Nigeria, erosion of traditional mechanisms and the impacts of conflict resolution mechanisms in resolving the conflicts. It found that several policies and mechanisms put in place by the government at various levels, security agencies and civil societies have not yielded positive impacts as the farmers-herders crisis kept escalating for the period of study. It further found that the conflict has wreaked serious havoc on the society, economy and livelihood of people. It concluded that if these impacts are not mitigated, they will aggravate the conflict and render all conflict resolution mechanisms ineffective to resolve.

Keywords—Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Farmers, Herders, Nigeria

Introduction

Scholars see conflict as inevitable in any society. It is the form of social interaction whereby agents strive to get limited resources by eliminating or weakening their contenders (Ekong, 2003). Gyong (2007) posits that it is a fight for control and hegemony, it is also seen as interaction among individuals who notice irreconcilable demands and interference from each other in achieving those goals (Folger *et al.*, (2009). Countries, as well as continents of the world, have had their share of conflicts from Europe to America, Africa to Asia, conflict is a common phenomenon. For instance, the West African Savannah-Sahel has been besieged by crises and catastrophes. Nigeria has also been plagued with conflicts varying in dimension, process and groups involved from religious, ethnic, to communal and political conflicts. Scholars have claimed that most conflicts emanate from a struggle

for scarce resources among different groups in societies (Abbass, 2012 and Momale, 2003).

A vivid example of a source of conflict from struggles to scarce resources is the use of land for crop farming and animal husbandry. To boost production, farmers struggle for arable land to cultivate crops, and herders struggle for grassland and water resources for their animals to graze. The conflict of interest between farmers and herders has frequently led to amplified farmers-herders conflict which consequently, negatively affected security in many West African countries. Also as argued, the Sahelian drought of the 1970s and 1980s, and the accompanying migration of herders into areas of the humid forest zone of West Africa lead to a huge increase in the prevalence of farmers-herders' conflict (Tonah, 2006).

A Brief look at Farmers-Herders Conflicts

Many empirical works have established the historical co-existence of farmers and herders in a symbiotic relationship (Bassett, 1988; Seddon and Sumberg, 1997; Moritz, 2010). Although, Seddon and Sumberg (1997) established that there exists a historical account of fluctuating conflict, competition and cooperation between farmers and herders in sub-Saharan Africa.

More recently, pastoral and farmer conflicts in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa have escalated into widespread violence, loss of properties, massive displacement of people and loss of lives (Hussein *et.*, 2000). The Fulani are said to come from Senegambia, before spreading across some 20 states in West Africa and the Sahel, up to Western Sudan and the Central African Republic (Blench 1994; Shehu and Hassan 1995; Blench 2010; McGregor 2014). The Fulani contributes 90% of the cattle herd ownership which in turn constitutes 3.2% of the national gross domestic product in Nigeria (Abass, 2012; Koster and de Wolf, 2012). They also constitute the backbone of the meat and milk industry in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a primary data collection method with purposive sampling technique. Data collected are focused on the Middle-Belt as focal point for Fulani herdersmen and farmers feud in Nigeria. Although, the

trend of the violence had transcended the Middle-Belt in Nigeria to the western and Southern part of Nigeria, the choice of Middle Belt is to justify the central place where the crises initiated and is most rampant. The data are presented in a regular and coherent timeline approach. These are therefore reshuffled into graphs to show the trend of growth in crop and agricultural production in Nigeria. It also shows the negative impact of the farmers-herders conflict on the agricultural sector among other economic factors responsible for the consistent rise in the rate of unemployment in the country. The graphs shows a consistent increase in the number of deaths as a result of the farmers-herders conflict as well as consistent increase in internal displacement in Nigeria. Descriptive method of data analysis is employed using the timeline of events.

A Review of Theoretical Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflict

Many theories has explained the causes and nature of the farmer-herder crisis in Nigeria. First, this conflict is best to be described by the social conflict theory. According to this theory, social life is a competition and it focuses on the distribution of resources and power, which nature did not distribute equally. It sees society as the congregation of people of different needs and interests with scarce resources to meet their demands. This produces inequality that creates social conflict and social change (Egbuta, 2018). The social conflict theory sees struggles for power and control in the society as the major factor causing conflict. It emphasizes the role of conflict as an integral factor in shaping social conditions and the dynamics of social life (Mucha, 1978).

The Frustration–aggression theory is another theory that explains the farmers-herders crisis in Nigeria. The theory states that aggression results from blocking, or frustrating, a person's efforts to attain a goal (Friedman & Schustack, 2014). It hypothesizes that frustration always precedes aggression, and aggression is the sure consequence of frustration. This theory attempts to explain the cause of violence. Frustration is the condition, which exists when a goal-response suffers interference, while aggression refers to an act whose goal-response is an injury to an organism (or an organism surrogate). Furthermore, the theory of “greed and grievance” can help explain some of the causes of the Farmer-herder crisis. This model by Collier and Hoeffler (2002) refers to the two baseline arguments put forward on the causes of civil war. Although the argument now extends to other forms of war, such as the violent conflict in general, rebellion and insurgency. According to them, Greed is the argument that the desire to better their situation motivates the combatants in armed conflicts. It also says that combatant performs an informal cost-benefit analysis in examining if the rewards of joining a rebellion are greater than not joining. While Grievance stands for the argument that hostilities occur over issues of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, social class, etc., rather than issues that have to do with the

economy. The section below looks at the various factors contributing to the escalation and continuation of the farmers-herders crisis in Nigeria.

The Dialectical materialism is also a theory that one can rely on in explaining the evolution and causes of the farmers-herders crisis in Nigeria. The theory is based on the concept of the natural world evolution and emergence of new qualities of being at new stages of evolution. It posits that man’s consciousness of himself in a society lies in his material condition. In this case, the material condition can be seen as what an individual owns or what one can become in the society. Given this, dialectical materialists are of the firm believe that conflict will be inevitable in the absence of equity and justice occasioned by limited resources.

Thus, to allay the vicious circle of dialectics to ensure harmonious co-existence in the society, the theorists advocate that attempts must be made to ensure equity and justice as a sine qua non for progress or development (Shakhnazarov, 1978). This theory as revealed, appropriately explains the situation of the farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria.

Factors Contributing to Farmers-Herders Conflicts

There is no doubt that in recent years, there are increase in fatalities resulting from farmers-herders conflict. Some factors have been adduced to the sudden rise in the crisis in recent years. Among the factors are climatic changes like droughts and desertification; population growth resulting in expansion of human settlements; technological and economic changes resulting in new livestock and farming practices; crime like rural banditry and cattle rustling; political and ethnic strife as intensified by the spread of illicit firearms; and cultural changes resulting in the collapse of traditional conflict management mechanisms (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Environmental changes have destroyed agriculture and human livelihoods, making millions of herders and others to move southwards in search of grazing land. For instance, 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.

Population growth also worsens the farmers-herders crisis. Some of these grazing reserves were lost due to population growth associated with demand for farmland, the urban and other infrastructure among others (International Crisis Group, 2017). Another cause is the growth of Nigeria’s cattle population to 25 million cows in Nigeria, and the number of cattle is expected to increase to 60 million by 2050 (Fabiya and Otunuga, 2016). More food and water is required to satisfy massive numbers of animals when they move from one place to another. Farmers accused the herders of failing to manage their cattle and allowing them to damage farmers’ crops. However, the herders

accused farmers of stealing their cattle and sheep (Fabiya and Otunuga, 2016).

Another factor is banditry and cattle rustling. The conflict between herdsmen and farmers was becoming a regional security threat. As a result, the local authority is weakened in the enforcement of the agreement between the groups. Many herdsmen have to arm themselves with weapons to protect their cattle and homes to ensure security. Banditry and cattle rustling also drive herdsmen southwards. In recent time, cattle rustling have grown in size and group in many northern states where large bandit organizations operate freely (International Crisis Group, 2016). These conflicts were associated with poverty, inequality, and religious extremism.

Competing for land ownership is also a factor that has contributed to the escalation of the farmer-herder conflict. The Fulani perceive themselves as the owners of the land which was leased legally to them or their parents, and they reject the views of those who perceive them as trespassers on grazing lands. However, on the part of many farmers, Fulani herders are strangers who are occupying the land of indigenous people (Clark, 2018).

Cultural and religious beliefs are also key factors that drive farmers-herders conflict. Some scholars believed that the herdsmen-farmer conflict is an ethnic war between the Fulani group and settled ethnic groups, including Christian communities in Nigeria (Clark, 2018).

Strategies to Fighting Farmers-Herders Conflict

To fight the farmer-herder menace, many efforts have been made by stakeholders or actors in different areas. In 1965, the northern regional government initiated one of the first attempts to respond to the farmers-herders conflicts in the country (Peace and Security Forum, 2017). The grazing reserves apportioned a large proportion of land to be exclusively used by herders to rear their livestock. However, the grazing reserve system did not receive adequate support. The need to have a grazing route has resurfaced again in recent times. A National Grazing Reserve Bill was sponsored in 2016 at the Parliament to address the herdsmen-farmers conflict. The "Land Grazing Bill" aimed at securing areas for herdsmen across the federation and the mapping out of grazing routes was sponsored in the national assembly. This Bill seeks to establish a National Grazing Reserves Establishment and Development Commission. The successful signing of this bill into law means there will be a limited area reserved for the Fulani Herdsmen and their cattle.

The Northern Region Grazing Reserves Law in 1965 created corridors for the passage of migrating livestock and about 415 grazing reserves across the country (Kwaja and Ademola-Adeleyin, 2018). Similar to the grazing reserves was the establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in 1989. The main goal of the programme was to

integrate nomadic pastoralists into national life through mobile basic education and skill acquisition. The programme intended to integrate them into society through education.

Also, the deployment of security has been a dominant feature on the path of government to fight the farmers-herders conflict. For instance, a Special Task Force, Operation Safe Haven (STF-OSH) was deployed since to restore law and order in Plateau State. The government in recent time expanded the mandate of STF-OSH to include Kaduna State, thereby replacing Operation Harbin Kunama II, (Scorpion Sting) (Agande, 2017).

There was also state-level legislation prohibiting open grazing. For instance, the Benue State government enacted the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017, on May 22, 2017, to respond to the lingering conflict between farmers and herders in the state. Other states also responded to the lingering conflicts between farmers and herders within their borders. Taraba State Governor for instances signed the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill 2017 into law on July 24, 2017, which began implementation in January 2018.

In response to the economic, political, and security challenges posed by climate variability and environmental degradation, the African Union introduced the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in 2007. The GGWI set out to create an 8,000km (nearly 5,000 miles) of trees along the southern Sahel, accompanied by rural development and ecosystem management initiatives, to combat the encroaching desertification of the Sahara Desert. In 2015, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) formulated what was referred to as a "Comprehensive Livestock Development Plan". The plan was to address the lingering conflict between farmers and herders across the country and develop grazing reserves as well as cattle routes, through a review of the existing program.

Impacts of Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria

The farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria claims to have various impacts on lives, infrastructure, and the economy. The conflict undermines the production of food and raw material for the manufacturing sector in Nigeria (Haro and Doyo, 2005; De Haan, 2002). This contributes to the high level of poverty and starvation in the land, and also lead to social disorganization in the families. This conflict undermines the peaceful symbiotic relationships that existed between farmers and herders.

Figure 1 below shows the trend of growth in crop and agricultural production in Nigeria between 2005 and 2018. This line graph in figure 1 shows that there is a continuous downward trend in the growth of crops and agricultural output in Nigeria. Though, the origin of Herders-Farmers' communal conflict dated back to the beginning of agriculture in Africa (Last, 2007). In

recent times, the violent conflicts which are known to North-Central Nigeria (i.e. Taraba, Adamawa, and Benue States) have spread to other geopolitical zones in the country. The North-Central region is known to be the food basket of the country with a population predominantly farmers. Over time, the farmers-herders conflict escalated and led to deaths and forced displacement, as well as the destruction of

agriculture and livestock (Egbuta, 2018). The persistent attacks in Benue state have had a spill-over effect on the neighbouring state of Nasarawa. In January 2018, the News Agency of Nigeria reported that over 18000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were in 11 camps in Nasarawa state (Mercy Corps, 2015).

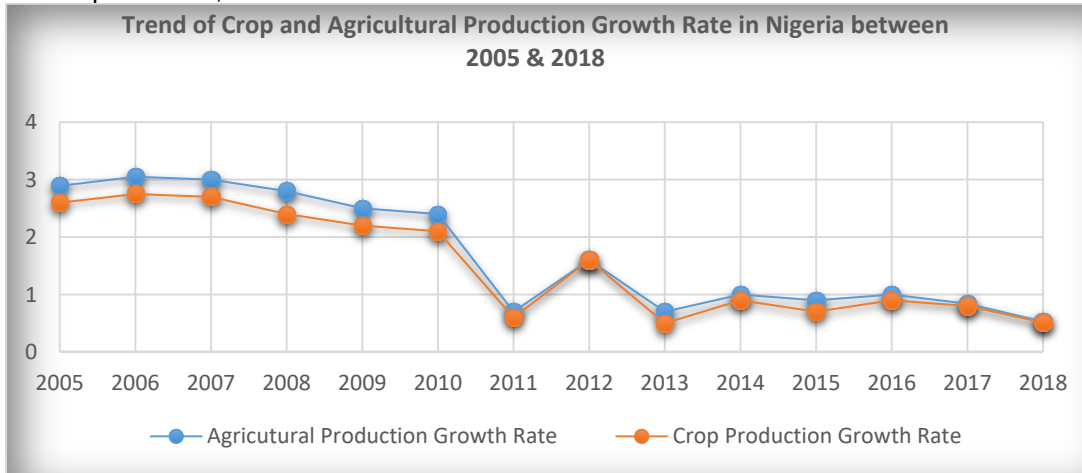


Figure 1: Growth of Crop and Agricultural output in Nigeria between 2005 & 2018

Source: The CBN Annual Report.

This conflict also led to the reduction of output and income of crop farmers as a result of the destruction of crops by cattle and indiscriminate bush burning. These violent attacks that have caused deaths, displacement of people and destruction of agriculture and livestock have reduced agricultural activities in the country, particularly the north-central that has the highest incidence of this farmers-herders conflict. This can be adduced to the cause of reducing the growth of crop and agricultural production as can be seen in figure 1.

Furthermore, the farmer-pastoralist conflict has also been claimed to lead to losses in monetary terms (Sulaiman and Ja’afar-Furo, 2010). They also argue that it is a negative phenomenon which lead to loss of lives and properties which invariably impact negatively on the community. They agreed that this may bring about more poverty in the land.

Figure 2 shows the trend of unemployment rate in Nigeria between 2005 and 2018. The line graph shows that the unemployment rate had been on the increase since 2005 except in 2012 when it fell continuously to 2014. From 2015 however, the unemployment rate in Nigeria rose continuously till 2018. The huge number of the population is involved in agriculture, and about 75 per cent of the workforce is engaged in agricultural production in Nigeria (Osugiri *et al.* 2012). The negative impact of the farmers-herders conflict on the agricultural sector among other economic factors can be said to be responsible for the consistent rise in the rate of unemployment in the country. Many people involved in agriculture have been displaced from their economic base and lives actively involved in economic activities in the communities have been killed.

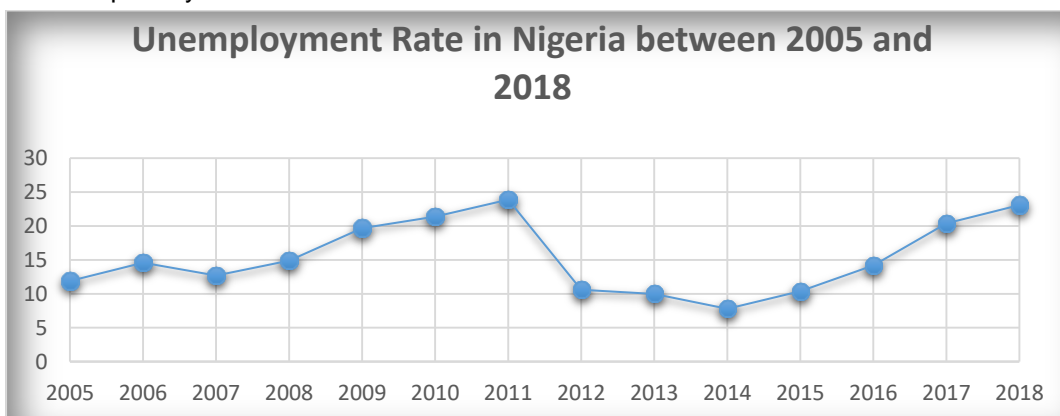


Figure 2: Annual Unemployment Rate in Nigeria between 2005 and 2018.

Source: The CBN Annual Report.

Also among the consequence of farmer-herdsmen conflict is the loss of lives and properties. A lot of farmers and herders died as a result of the conflict and at every occurrence of the conflict, government would form a committee to investigate the root cause but the inability of the government to implement the committees' report which means punishing the perpetrators of the conflict seems to be the major problem (Adams *et al.*, 2017). According to Ofuoku and Isife, (2010), some other consequences of the herders-farmers conflict include the displacement of farmers, erosion as a result of zero-grazing and loss of lives. This has cast dark clouds over the survival of the federation (Abbass, 2009).

Figure 3 shows the incidence of annual fatality in the farmers-herders conflict between 2009 and 2018.

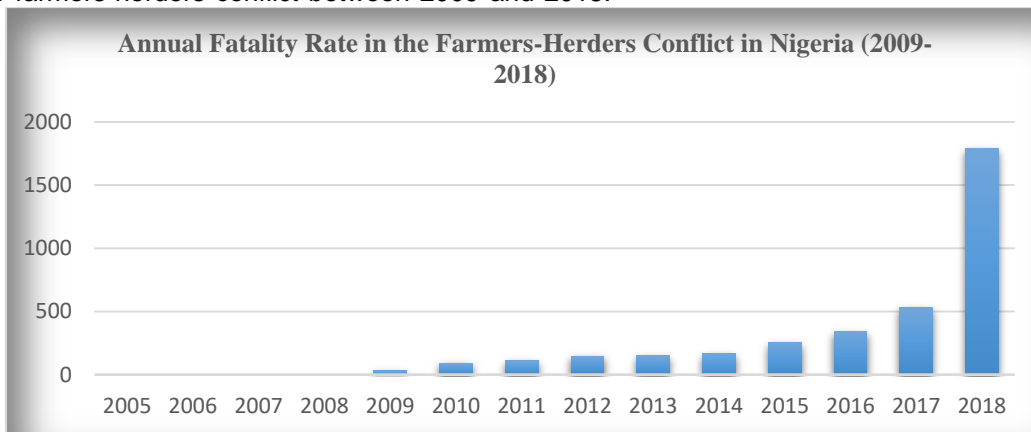


Figure 3: Fatality Rate in the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria (2009-2018)

Source: ACLED Database.

In addition to the impacts of the farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria, Ajibefun (2018) claimed that some of the social effects of the conflict include loss of human lives, sexual harassment of human lives, acquisition of arms and ammunitions, reduction of quality of social relationships, reduction of social support and high cases of rape. The economic effect of the menace include a reduction in output and income of farmers/nomads, loss of produce in storage, displacement of farmers, scarcity of agricultural products, loss of house and properties and infrastructural damages (Ajibefun, 2018). The surge of

attacks and counter-attacks has exacted heavy humanitarian and economic tolls, with potentially serious political and security repercussions. The humanitarian impact is particularly grave. From September 2017 through June 2018, farmers-herders violence left at least 1,500 people dead, many more wounded and about 300,000 displaced, and an estimated 176,000 in Benue, about 100,000 in Nasarawa, over 100,000 in Plateau, about 19,000 in Taraba and an unknown number in Adamawa (Crisis Group, 2018).

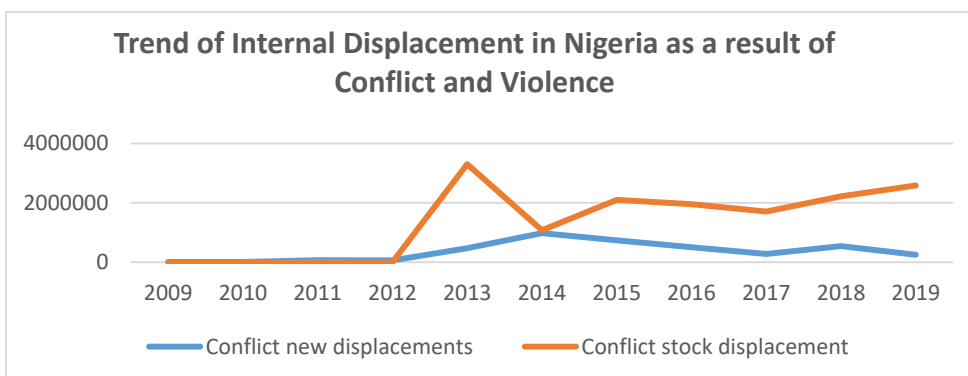


Figure 4: Trend of Internal Displacement in Nigeria from of Conflict and Violence (2009-2019)

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) Database.

Figure 4 shows the trend of internal displacement in Nigeria from conflict and violence between 2009 and 2019. Between 2009 and 2019, Nigeria recorded an average of about 353,636 new cases of internally displaced people. As shown in figure 4, there has been a consistent increase in internal displacement in Nigeria since 2009. Internal displacement resulting from violence and conflict reached its peak between 2013 and 2014: new displacement accounted for about 975,000 people in 2014, while stock displacement reached 1,0750,00 people in 2013.

Amnesty International (2018) claimed that Fulani Herdsmen have killed 168 people in January 2018 alone. It noted that response to communal violence is inadequate, too slow, and ineffective, and in some cases unlawful. Clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, Ondo, and Kaduna resulted in 168 deaths in January 2018 alone. Similarly, hundreds of people lost their lives in 2017. For instance, 549 deaths were recorded across 14 states while thousands were displaced in 2017. These 549 deaths and thousands that were displaced because of clashes between nomadic herdsmen and local farmers were recorded across Enugu, Benue, Taraba, Zamfara, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Cross Rivers, Adamawa, Katsina, Delta and Ekiti states, in 2017 (Okoro, 2018).

From the empirical investigation conducted in this study, and as noted by the Amnesty International (2018) it can be observed that the policies and mechanisms put in place to resolve the farmers-herders conflict have not yielded expected results. The impacts of the conflict snowballed on both human lives and the society; it also crept into the economy causing damages. It caused the destruction of farms and the displacement of farmers which has led to lower production of agricultural output. This has also deprived the people of their livelihood since the huge size of the affected depends on that source of livelihood. This, in turn, has increased the incidence of extreme poverty in the affected regions.

Findings

The study found that several policies and mechanisms put in place by the government at various levels, security agencies and civil societies have not yielded positive impacts as the farmers-herders crisis kept escalating for the period of study. The conflict wreaked serious havoc on the society, economy and livelihood of people. It also found that:

- Pastoralists need vegetation for grazing purpose while farmers equally need land for farming activities.
- Increase in human and livestock population with no corresponding increase in land mass fuels the conflict.
- Unemployment by youths has a direct bearing on the escalation of the conflict.

Conclusion

Violent conflicts between nomadic herdsmen from the northern region of Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's economy, security and stability. Some of the factors identified contributing to this conflict include drought and desertification, loss of grazing reserves, changes in pastoralism and farming practices, rural banditry and cattle rustling, escalating conflicts across northern Nigeria and erosion of traditional mechanisms. Several conflict resolution policies and mechanisms by the government at various level, security agencies, and civil societies have not yielded a positive impact as the farmers-herders conflict kept escalating for the period of study. This is evident in the rising nature of the conflict, and the increasing spread to new areas. This conflict wreaks serious havoc on the society, economy and livelihood of the people. These impacts if not mitigated, will aggravate the conflict and render all conflict resolution mechanisms ineffective to resolve conflicts.

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