PASTORALISTS' FARMERS' CONFLICT
AND THE SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

MEMORANDUM BY THE NIGERIAN WORKING GROUP ON PEACE BUILDING AND GOVERNANCE
Pastoralists-farmers’ conflicts in Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today poses a threat to national survival. Thousands of people have been killed, communities have been destroyed and so many farmers and pastoralists have lost their lives and property in an orgy of killings and destruction that is not only destroying livelihoods but also affecting national cohesion. Nigeria has about 19 million cattle much of it in the hands of pastoralists and we need to seek solutions to the problem of pastoralism while resolving the problem of insecurity that has arisen.

The Problem

Nigeria’s population has grown from 33 million in 1950 to about 192.3 million today. This phenomenal increase of the population has put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralists. One of the outcomes of this process has been the blockage of transhumance routes and loss of grazing land to agricultural expansion and the increased southward movement of pastoralists has led to increased conflict with local communities. This is particularly the case in the Middle Belt – notably in Plateau, Kaduna, Niger, Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba, and Adamawa States. The conflicts primarily involve Fulani pastoralists and local farming communities. As violence between herdsmen and farmers has grown and developed into criminality and rural banditry, popular narratives in the form of hate speech have exacerbated the crisis.

The Law, Politics and Pastoralism

One of the greatest difficulties in addressing and resolving issues surrounding pastoralism is the politicisation of legal regimes and the blockages to the enactment of or implementation of laws that can redress the key challenges posed. In 2016 for example, a bill was proposed - “A Bill for an Act to establish Grazing Reserve in each of the states of the Federation Nigeria to improve agriculture yield from livestock farming and curb incessant conflicts between cattle farmers and crop farmers in Nigeria” was thrown out. There is an emerging conflict between the constitutional principle on free movement of persons and goods and laws emerging in some States restricting movement. Some States have enacted laws or are processing bills to prevent open grazing on their territory. There are four initiatives so far in Benue, Ekiti, Taraba and Edo States. Could such laws be effective in prohibiting pastoralism, which is practiced by millions of Nigerians?
Developing a Comprehensive Framework

A new policy framework on the farmers-pastoralists crisis should be developed that is both comprehensive and mutually beneficial to both groups. An inter-ministerial committee should be constituted with experts and stakeholder membership to draw up the framework. There must be a consultative process that listens to the concerns of all stakeholders in developing the new framework so that the outcome would have national ownership. Pastoralism is not sustainable in Nigeria over the long term due to high population growth rate, expansion of farming and loss of pasture and cattle routes. At the same time, cannot end or be prohibited in the short term, as there are strong cultural and political economy reasons for its existence. The new policy should develop a plan for a transitional period during which new systems would be put in place. The framework should map out the duration, strategy and timelines for the transition plan. Finally, a comprehensive approach to address the growing crisis associated with violence affecting pastoralism and farmers in Nigeria is necessary.

Introduction

Pastoralists-farmers’ conflicts in Nigeria have grown, spread and intensified over the past decade and today poses a threat to national survival. Thousands of people have been killed, communities have been destroyed and so many farmers and pastoralists have lost their lives and property in an orgy of killings and destruction that is not only destroying livelihoods but also affecting national cohesion. Each day, we witness more reprisal killings that are simply making the possibilities of peaceful resolution more difficult. Rural banditry is becoming the norm in the Nigerian hinterland and has been transformed into a vicious criminal activity. The result is that the scale of loss of both herds and human life has been escalating and the victims are on all sides – subsistence farmers, commercial farmers and pastoralists. Nonetheless, we write this memo to say we cannot give up to hate and destruction, let’s pause, reflect and seek a way out of the crisis. Nigeria has a large pastoral population the logic of whose livelihood is often misunderstood. What is better understood is the culture of farming, which is rooted in a specific location and has activities that take place regularly. The assumption that pastoralism is in itself an irrational production system is far from the truth. Pastoralism is the main livestock production system in much of Africa where pastoralists live in semi arid zones. It is a historically developed strategy to cope with the uncertainties associated with climate change, build up of parasites and other related challenges. It is above all an efficient way to produce livestock at relatively low prices through the use of non-commercial feeding stock. Historically, pastoralists have been able to meet the meat demand in West Africa with a relatively high level of efficiency without government subsidy for generations. Different methods including the use of farm residue and open range grazing has allowed this trend to flourish. Nigeria has a landmass of 98.3 million hectares, 82 million hectares of arable land of which about 34 million hectares are currently under cultivation. In crop farming, human beings only directly utilize about a quarter of the total biomass. The other three quarters is in the form of crop residue and low quality crop, which is not directly useful to people. It is this residue that cattle (ruminants) convert into meat and milk. In addition to this, cattle also utilize grasses on fallow lands, non-arable poor quality lands, open ranges and fadama in the same manner. Pastoralists move their animals to these locations to access these opportunities. This system of production is breaking down today as violent conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have arisen and created a major national crisis.
Nigeria’s population has grown from 33 million in 1950 to about 192.3 million today. The United Nations recently projected more growth in terms of population in the coming years, 364 million in 2030 and 480 million in 2050 respectively. This phenomenal increase of the population has put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralists. Specifically, the demographic increase has led to an expansion in cultivated farmland and a reduction in available grazing land for pastoralists that is characterised by competition over dwindling resources. In the far north, the impact of desertification as well as the crisis of energy, which has resulted in deforestation, coupled with climatic uncertainty and lower rainfall have made it more difficult to sustain increasing populations, pushing many farmers and pastoralists with livestock southwards. This has happened gradually over a period of decades – with an apparent increase over the past decade – and has added to pressure on land and water in central and southern Nigeria.

One of the outcomes of this process has been the blockage of transhumance routes and loss of grazing land to agricultural expansion and the increased southward movement of pastoralists has led to increased conflict with local communities. This is particularly the case in the Middle Belt – notably in Plateau, Kaduna, Niger, Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba, and Adamawa States. The conflicts often have localised dynamics, but primarily involve Fulani pastoralists and local farming communities.

The Nigerian state has a relatively weak rural presence and has neglected the agrarian sector since the 1970s, when oil revenues began to dominate the economy. There have been few improvements in agricultural productivity and livestock production as a result of the dependence on oil revenues, which have not been re-invested in productive economic activities.
State response in the context of the lingering conflicts between farmers and pastoralists has been both ad hoc and reactive, with no concrete and sustainable strategies for conflict management and peace building beyond the deployment of security or establishment of commissions of inquiries. One of the key pathways here is for the state to be more proactive in its responses by putting in place mechanisms that are institutionalised and sustainable both at the local and state levels.

As violence between herdsmen and farmers has grown and developed into criminality and rural banditry, popular narratives creating meaning, context and (mis)understandings have been emerging. The narratives emerging on rural banditry in the media and in popular discourse are becoming part of the drivers for expanding conflicts in the country. The protagonists in this saga are often presented as being nomadic Fulani cattle herders, who are mostly Muslims, and sedentary farmer communities of several other ethnic extractions, who are often, but not always, non-Muslims. These two distinct groups are usually depicted as perpetrators and victims, respectively. Perspectives of the social, religious and ethnic characteristics of these rural communities are framed into expansive essentialist discourses that actively breed and sustain suspicion and distrust. The result is negative stereotyping between “the one” and “the other” that lead further to ethnic and religious bigotry which fuels the hate process, culminating in further chains of attacks and counter or revenge attacks being exchanged between these different groups. Nigeria urgently needs to find pathways to get out of the crisis and one approach may be the development of grazing reserves for pastoralists.

Grazing Reserves as Possible Solutions

It is clear that Nigeria and indeed Africa have to plan towards the transformation of pastoralism into settled forms of animal husbandry. The establishment of grazing reserves provides the opportunity for practicing a more limited form of pastoralism and is therefore a pathway towards a more settled form of animal husbandry. Grazing reserves are areas of land demarcated, set aside and reserved for exclusive or semi-exclusive use by pastoralists. Currently, Nigeria has a total of 417 grazing reserves all over the country, out of which only about 113 have been gazetted. There are many problems facing the implementation of the provisions of the 1965 Grazing Reserve Law and the management of the established grazing reserves. First, most of the grazing reserves were established by the then Northern Regional Government. Since the 1970’s subsequent military and civilian governments have in effect abandoned the policy of establishing and developing grazing reserves. Secondly, State governments have not been diligent in sustaining previous policies and have not surveyed and gazetted most of the designated grazing reserves. Indeed, only 113 (about 27%) of the 417 proposed grazing reserves have been gazetted.
Whether we support or oppose pastoralism, it is clear that at least in the short and medium term, many herds must continue to practice seasonal migration between dry and wet season grazing areas, incorporating past harvest grazing farmland in the highly developed and ecologically sound pattern of transhumance evolved by the pastoralist over the centuries. This is an important point to make at this point when many political actors think it is possible to simply and abruptly ban open grazing. There is indeed, the need for permanent settlement of pastoralists both in the far north and semi humid zone of the middle belt. It is important to focus on the development of grazing reserves as part of the solution.

**The Law, Politics and Pastoralism**

One of the greatest difficulties in addressing and resolving issues surrounding pastoralism is the politicisation of legal regimes and the blockages to the enactment of or implementation of laws that can redress the key challenges posed. In 2016 for example, a bill was proposed - “A Bill for an Act to establish Grazing Reserve in each of the states of the Federation Nigeria to improve agriculture yield from livestock farming and curb incessant conflicts between cattle farmers and crop farmers in Nigeria.” The National Assembly on the basis that the Bill appeared to be seeking to favour one particular profession carried out by mainly one ethnic group, the Fulani, threw it out. The problem is that if we cannot have grazing reserves and if pastoralists cannot move, how do we expect the 19 million cattle grazing in the country to survive and how do we protect our Constitutional principle of free movement.

**Free Movement and Restrictions to Transhumance**

There is an emerging conflict between the constitutional principle on free movement of persons and goods and laws emerging in some States restricting movement. In Section 41(1) of the Nigerian Constitution, it is stated that:

> “Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom.”
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Some States have enacted laws or are processing bills to prevent open grazing on their territory. There are four initiatives so far:

2. Taraba state: Anti-Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill 2017. ‘A bill for a law to prohibit open rearing and grazing of livestock and provide for the establishment of ranches and the Taraba State livestock and ranches administration and control committee and for others connected thereto 2017’.
3. Edo State Bill: A Bill for A Law to Establish the Edo State Control of Nomadic Cattle Rearing/Grazing Law and for Other Purposes.

It is worthwhile posing the question whether laws can be effective in prohibiting pastoralism, which is practiced by millions of Nigerians. As some of the laws have already been passed, they would have to be tested in court. It is important to stress however that the Constitution guarantees free movement of persons and goods across Nigeria and no State government can withdraw constitutionally entrenched rights. Secondly, following a legislation by the Ogun State Government and the Supreme Court Judgment on the matter cited as “A.G. OGUN STATE V. ALHAJA AYINKE ABERUAUSBA (1985) 1 NWLR PG. 395” States were barred from interfering with inter-state commerce and the free movement of goods and services.
Developing a Comprehensive Framework

Livestock production in Nigeria is in existential crisis and the country lacks a cohesive and comprehensive policy framework for livestock development and regulation in Nigeria. The defunct Northern Grazing Reserve Law has not been updated, the Land Use Act of 1978 is dysfunctional, emerging state grazing reserve laws, the ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol and other related international instruments have to be updated and streamlined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Piecemeal of sectorial approach to livestock development will not suffice. A new policy framework should be developed that is both comprehensive and must be mutually beneficial to pastoralists and farmers. Any policy that does not take into consideration the welfare of both sides will most likely fail or meet resistance by either side. An inter-ministerial committee should be constituted with experts and stakeholder membership to draw up the framework. There must be a consultative process that listens to the concerns of all stakeholders in developing the new framework so that the outcome would have national ownership.

The Future of Pastoralism and Animal Husbandry

Pastoralism is not sustainable in Nigeria over the long term due to high population growth rate, expansion of farming and loss of pasture and cattle routes. At the same time, pastoralism cannot end or be prohibited in the short term as there are strong cultural and political economy reasons for its existence. It is important therefore to develop a plan for a transitional period during which new systems would be put in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ranching can be pursued as one of the possible models in areas with lower population densities in the North East (Sambisa Game Reserve in Borno State) and North West (Gidan Jaja Grazing Reserve in Zamfara State);
2. Semi-intensive systems of animal husbandry should be pursued accompanied with requisite investment in infrastructure, training, extension, marketing and animal health service delivery in conjunction with the private sector;
3. The traditional form of pastoralism should continue for a period to be agreed upon with some improvements (in the form of coordinated mobility between wet and dry season grazing areas and effective management of farmers and pastoralists relations);
4. Use of and development of grazing reserves to target pastoralists with large stocks where skills for pasture production, large milk production, etc can be promoted;
5. Development of integrated crop-livestock systems with farmers and pastoralists being encouraged to keep some animals in their farms;
6. In order to meet the feeding needs of herds, alternative low water and drought resistant grasses should be produced, in response to the impact of desertification on fodder production.
Modernization of Livestock

Nigeria has one of the lowest productivity levels of livestock in the world. It is for this reason that Nigeria imports very large quantities of milk, fish and chicken. The Nigerian herd requires sustained efforts at quality development based on a modernisation strategy that would transform the industry and move the country towards the objective of self-reliance.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

I. Commercial ranches should be established in some of the sparsely populated zones in the North East and North West.

ii. The business community should be encouraged through policy measures to invest in the establishment of modern dairy farms.

iii. Sensitisation programmes should be undertaken on the values of livestock improvement and breeding centres for the production of quality heifers to improve pastoral stock should be developed all over the country.

iv. Efforts should be made towards modelling best practices of pastoral-farmer relations as evident in countries such as Chad, Ethiopia and Niger, where the existence of institutionalised and functional mechanisms for pre-empting and resolving conflicts between farmers and pastoralists enable them to live in peace.

Growing Conflicts and Imperative of Peacebuilding

Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic explosion of violent conflicts associated with the deteriorating relationship between farmers and herders, cattle rustling and rural banditry in Nigeria. There is also limited knowledge about who the perpetrators are and their motives.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A comprehensive approach to necessary to address the growing crisis associated with violence affecting pastoralism and farmers in Nigeria. The Federal Government should commission a large-scale research endeavour to carry out in-depth study to understand the reasons for the escalation of violence. Key actors, motivations and agency fuelling the crisis.

The Boko Haram Insurgency

Specific measures are required to address the Boko Haram insurgency North Eastern States of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe, which have close to 40% of the total cattle, sheep and goats of the National herd. These States also have the highest number of grazing reserves 255 or 61% of the 415 nationally identified grazing reserves. There are also many kilometres of stock routes interconnecting these reserves. The highest number of transhumance and trade cattle, sheep and goats from ECOWAS countries, Chad, Cameroun, Central African Republic and other countries, come into Nigeria on North Eastern International Transhumance Route.
Growth of Hate and Dangerous Speech

Hate speech has now become a generator and accelerator of violent conflicts and the phenomenon of fake news is worsening its negative impact.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There is need for the development of a media code to be used in sensitizing the media on the relevant international standards on reporting issues of conflict and banditry. This process should involve conflict sensitivity and safety training and it should be based on very strict journalistic standards. Appropriate laws and regulations should be developed at both the federal and state levels towards ensuring that the margin of what is seen, as “free speech” in the media will be effectively regulated.
Breakdown of Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

One of the most important dimensions of the growing conflicts between pastoralists and farmers has been the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. In the past, when conflicts arise, they were settles by village heads and ardos, Fulani community leaders and if the need for payment of compensation arises, there were traditional systems and knowledge of how to assess damage done and the amount necessary to compensate for the damage and not profiteering. What we see today as a breakdown of traditional authority in the context of conflict management is a consequence of the take over of their powers by the state at the federal, state and local government levels, through the ad hoc measures that are often time wasting and whose recommendations are not implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cattle routes should be restored and significant investment made in restoring traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. As massive corruption has accompanied the increased presence of the police and courts in matters affecting farmers and herders, there should be advocacy and administrative guidance to return to traditional methods of conflict resolution. There should be capacity development of farmers and herders associations so that they play a more positive role in the process.

The Environmental and Climate Pastoralism

Livestock produce some greenhouse emissions and pollutants. These can however be mitigated and even reversed by the sustainability of the methods that are used. On the whole, pastoralism is the only renewable non-extractive use of Ryland resources and it plays an essential role in maintaining soil and water quality. In addition, it slows down the loss of biodiversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Intensive capacity building is required in promoting and advocating for climate smart approaches to animal husbandry including the prevention of overgrazing, promoting integration of grazing and manure provision for farms and coordinated movement between ecological zones in the dry and wet seasons.

Legislative Solutions

There are discordant laws and regulations that legislate livestock production and pastoralism at the regional, national and state levels. Some of the newly emerging laws such as the “anti-grazing” state laws appear to contradict the free movement principle enshrined in the Constitution.
Expanding Grazing Reserves

The Nigerian livestock industry is largely dependent on natural vegetation. Although there is a vast hectarage of natural vegetation in the country they are not maximally utilized due to poor planning and conflicting government policies. It was estimated that there are over 40 million hectares of grazing land in Nigeria, out of which only 3 million hectares are specifically tagged as grazing reserves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. A harmonization of relevant laws and policies that governs grazing reserves. Specifically, the 1965 Grazing Reserve Law can be revived based on section 315 of the 1999 constitution in the 19 northern states.

ii. This should be complemented with a national review and protection of traditional stock routes;

iii. Regional instruments governing pastoralism should be protected and above all domesticated;

iv. In addition to the laws, consultative process between farming and pastoral communities are required to review the effect of statutes and regulations on routine practices of animal husbandry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The idea to encourage nomads to settle was first made in 1942 but never implemented. A clear policy of land grant to pastoralists should be developed and implemented by state governments.

There are about 40 Million hectares of grazing land in Nigeria, but only 3 Million are recognized as grazing reserves.
Digital Tracking of Cattles

The Katsina State Government has just launched a digital tracking system for cattle in the State. It involves inserting microchips in the animals skin and tracking them with mobile phones. The use of such technologies could help address the problem of cattle rustling and violence that have become so rampant. Such initiatives should be supported.

Construction of Positive Narratives

The atmosphere between farming and pastoral communities is extremely bitter and negative. Support should be provided for creative writers in Nollywood, Kannywood, radio and television to create new narratives showing how the interaction between the two groups could be peaceful and mutu-ally beneficial. Above all, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), as an institution with presence across the 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the country, should provide these critical services.

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