

**FARMERS/HERDERS CLASHES AND THE CHALLENGES  
OF MANAGING INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS  
(IDPS) IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

For quite some time now, particularly since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has been confronted with a lot of socio-political challenges such as ethno-religious crises, militancy in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country, leadership crises, corruption, just to mention a few. These problems have largely threatened the country's corporate existence and impeded her development drive, a part from posing very serious humanitarian crisis for the leadership of the country to contend with. One area that has assumed alarming dimension in recent time and has appeared to be escalating geometrically across the divides of Nigeria is the issue of farmers/Herders clashes. These groups which were hitherto living in harmony have suddenly turned to enemies, thereby causing insecurity of lives and property which has in turn resulted to a quantum of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) for government to cater for in the wake of recent economic downturn and other competing needs. It is against this backdrop that the paper examines the impact of farmers/Herders Clashes on the management of Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria, with a view to x-raying the root causes, socio-economic and political impact on the Nigerian economy and state as well as the health, infrastructural, educational and other challenges confronting the effective and efficient, management of IDPs in Nigeria. The paper is thus divided into introduction, conceptual framework, foundations of farmer/Herder Clashes in Nigeria, socio-economic and political impacts, the challenges of IDPs' management in Nigeria, Conclusion and Recommendations.

**Keywords:** Farmers, herders, clashes, managing, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

**Introduction**

Over the years, there has been growing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria arising from ethno-religions or communal clashes, boundary disputes, natural disaster like flood, terrorism such

as the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, and in the recent time farmers/Herders Clashes that have engulfed almost all parts of the country. This thus, makes people fled t heir homes for safety, particularly women and children (Odunmorayo, 2015). The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reports that out Of the world's 33.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPS), 1,538, 982 are in Nigeria. This number keeps increasing because of continuous conflicts and violence in the polity, particularly between the farmers of various ethnic groups and Fulani pastoralists of northern Nigeria.

Since 1999 there have been reported cases of farmers / Herders Clashes in different parts of the country particularly the north east, north – central, south –east, and south – west geopolitical zones that have large population of crop farmers co-existing with the herders who are usually Fulani pastoralists from northern Nigeria and neighboring countries of Niger, Mali and Chad. Pertinent among these cases are the Agatu, Guma, Tarka, Gwer-west, Makurdi, Buiuku and Ukum Local government areas in Benue State; Bursari, Dmaturu, Fume, Gaidarn, Gujba, Jakusko, and yunusari in Yobe State among others. There have been Media reports alleging Fulani herdsmen attacking farmers in communities in Nasarawa, Kaduna, Delta, Enugu, Rivers, Ekiti, Taraba and Niger States (Okeke, 2014; Nigerian Newsword, July 16, 2016; The Daily Post June 10, 2013; The Vanguard August 7th, 2013).

The frequency of these farmers /herders Clashes has generated a lot of - fears among Scholars, practitioners and well-meaning individuals as it has “unavoidably led-to the increase in the number of displaced persons in Nigeria” (Rotimi, 2015 p.1). Apart from these crises disrupting the means of livelihood of many displaced persons, a dozen of them suffer humanitarian crises because of the poor conditions under which most of the IDPs live in. Suffice it to say that, most IQPs in Nigeria are housed in overcrowded camps, mainly School facilities and empty government buildings with few basic amenities such as ater, electricity, health care services, and education that do no commiserate with the population at the camps, thereby making life quite unbearable for the IDPs (Odunmorayo, 2015; Eweka and Olusegun, 2016).

Several studies on farmer/herders conflicts in Nigeria have tended to focus attention on eco-violence, political ecology, climate change, fresh water scarcity, the need for grazing reserves, causes and implications for national - development, amon others (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012; Audu, 2013; Okeke, 2014; Okoli and Ateihe, 2014; Luka and Erunke, 2014), with very little attention paid to the challenges posed by these crises in the management of IDPs. It is in view of this, that the study fingers out the impact of famers/Herders Clashes on the management of internally Displaced persons (IDP.S) in Nigeria for investigation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Concepts have varied meanings depending on the context within which they are used. Consequently, the key concepts in this paper are explicitly defined in the context with which they are used.

#### **Farmers**

Agriculture generally is the art of cultivation of crops and rearing of animals. So farming is all about growing crop and raising animals with a view to meeting the national needs of the people and enhancing food security. Therefore, farming is that activity that involves the growing of plants, trees, seeds, tuber crops, vines, barley and fruits as well as the rearing of animals like cattle, sheep, fish, birds among others (Hornby, 2015, Audu, 2013). Farmers are thus, those who own or manage a farm. In other words, they are people who undertake farming activities as a means of livelihood or to complement other sources of income available to them. These farm activities could be on a large scale, medium scale or subsistence level, depending on one's ability to employ the productive forces.

Basically there are two forms of farmers; crop farmers and animal farmers. These are the people that engage in the cultivation of crops, and rearing of animals respectively. However, farmers in this paper could be taken to mean crop farmers who cultivate different forms of crops in the various geo-political zones of Nigeria, depending on what crops their soil supports and the annual rainfall available.

#### Herders

Herders are the pastoralist. They are nomads who give up their time and energy to the rearing of animal like cattle and sheep as a means of livelihood. Herders are also farmers in their own way but animal farmers.

Odoh and Chigozie, 2012 p.113 have quoted Saidu, one of the pastoralists from Wase district of Plateau State as underscoring the importance herders attach to their herds when he says thus;

Our herd is our life because to every nomad life is worthless without the cattle. What do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment of grazing fields and routes by farmers is a call to war..

The herders in Nigeria who are predominately from the northern part of the country are majorly of the Fulani origin who migrated eastwards from the Gambia River over the last one thousand years arriving Nigeria in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012). Other groups of herders include the Kanuri-related groups, the Shuwa-Arabs, the Yedina and the Uled Suleiman. However, "the cattle-based pastoralism of the Fulani has thus been the most significant focus of herders/farmer conflict in Nigeria" (Odoh, and Chigozie, 2012 p 113). The report of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) cited in Okeke (2014) indicates that herders in Nigeria resort to pastoralism instead of the sedentary practice of breeding livestock in ranches as it is done in advanced countries of the world such as the United States of America and Israel because it is relatively cheaper. This is in addition to their desire of finding good pasture for their cattle which can only be found in places where the soil is fertile and there is the presence of rivers.

#### **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are people who because of violence or natural disasters are made to abandon their homes and means of livelihood for safety of their lives and families, taking refuge in other places or environments other than theirs within their National boundaries. Ajiboye and Ajokpaniowo (n.d) sees IDPs as those individuals and families that are forced to move from their long-term abode to new places due to certain factors beyond their control. Such factors according to the Guiding principles on internal displacement may include situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, natural or manmade disasters (Kalin, 2008). One cardinal thing about this definition is that the affected persons are forced to leave their residences for a reason that could be natural or manmade but do not cross international boundaries.

The unrelated nations in Ajiboye, Akinlabi and Ajokpaniowo (n.d) has offered one of the most comprehensive definitions of Internally Displaced Persons when it refers to IDPs as:

persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of natural or manmade disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border (Ajiboye, Akintabi and Ajokpaniowo (n.d p.90).

In view of the above, the U.N has identified three main types of displacement that could warrant a person or group of persons to flee their homes for safety. These include; development-induced displacement, conflict induced displacement and disaster induced displacement. Among these three types, the displacement of people based on development may be for their common good and may not be sudden or unexpected. Whereas, conflict and disaster induced displacement usually comes sudden and unexpected. However, the magnitude and frequency of displacement witnessed in Africa and indeed Nigeria is man-made or conflict based. What this means therefore is that the internally displaced persons are reduced to the condition of refugees in their own father lands undergoing physical and psychological

trauma. The condition of IDPs in their respective camps is full of misery, squalor and agony (The Nation July 23, 2015). The groups of people often caught in this situation are mostly women and children-the vulnerable in the society.

#### **The Basis for farmers! Herders Clashes in Nigeria**

The frequent cases of Clashes between the Fulani leaders and farmers of various ethnic groups across Nigeria which has assumed alarming dimension over the years can be predicated on a number of factors. These factors could be political, environmental, economic, social, cultural or other-wise. This has largely to do with the composition, internal dynamics and configuration of Nigeria as a country. For quite some time now, these factors have singly or collectively ignited conflicts between the Fulani herders and the non-Fulani's crop farmers leading to wanton destruction- of farmer's crops and herder's cattle. This situation is captured by Okeke when he apatly asserts that;

This usually leads to the destruction of farmers corps. Thus, the herders provoke their victims to acts of resistance (preventing entry into farms, killing or stealing of Cattle, or poisoning fields). In response, the herders wage deadly attacks on farming communities (Okeke, 2014 .p.6'7).

One factor scholars and policy makers have argued has given vent to the farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria over the years is the environmental factor. This is borne out of the thinking that climate changes due to global warming - has given rise to certain unfavorable environmental conditions, particularly in the northern part of Nigeria which is the original home of the herders. Such conditions like desertification, inadequate rainfall or drought, loss of wetlands, environmental degradation, harsh, weather conditions, among others have created misfortunes for pastoralism in the far northern part of Nigeria which the original home of the cattle breeders, and hence need to migrate to more favorable places that can support their cattle (Blench, 2004; Okoli and Ateihe, 2014). Okelce (2014) has particularly argued that due to desertification and overgrazing, lands in the home States of the Fulani herders have geometrically deminished. Consequently, they have found it expedient and rewarding to move southwards in search for good pasture for their cattle. In the process of this, they come in contact with farming communities who in defense of their farm lands repel the herders and their herds from destroying their arable land which serves as the means for their survival. Obviously, this increase competition of pastoralists for a grazing land has created imbalance in the eco-environment between the Fulani herders and the crop farmers of various ethnic groups in the country (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012; Okoli and Ateihe, 2014; Luka and Erunke, 2016).

The inability of the herders and crops farmers to strike a balance in the eco-environment thus precipitating eco-violence can be attributed due largely to the inability of the Fulani herders to "build up exchange relations with their host communities, particularly farmers" (Odoh and Chigozie, 2012, p.1 13). Instead, they resort to intimidation, hostility and acquisitive tendencies with their host communities aimed of displacing them and taking over their lands. This practice is iti sharp contrast to the known norm whereby the herders and farmers mutually established a relationship that warranted the herders to visit such places when crops are harvested and leave during new cropping season or at best limit their grazing to places where farmers have no interest. This deteriorating relationship between herders and farmers often make migrants to arrive farming communities in search for pasture and water without seeking the consent of the farmers and their community leaders. This situation is made worst when the herder's cattle resort to the destruction of farm lands and crops. The farmers on the other hand have a thinking that they are the rightful owners of these lands, and any attempt to take over their land by the herder migrants and destroy their crops which is their means of livelihood must be resisted with all sense of commitment at any slightest provocation.

Ayih (2013) cited in Okoli and Ateihe attributes the high wave of farmers/herders clashes to the problem of population explosion that has hit Nigeria. This situation is further complicated by the issues of resource scarcity, livelihood crisis, and resource competition. This picture is painted thus; People tend to move from northern and Southern Nigeria into the Middle Belt region where population is relatively low and where there is availability of vast arable land. The consequent rapid growth in

population has caused the farmers to struggle for farmland which is becoming scarce by the day. With this development, grazing areas that were hitherto abundant are being taken over by scattered small farms, making grazing in these areas difficult..... that create the situation of land scarcity and hunger, which in turn, precipitates the herders farmer conflict (Okoif and Ateihe, 2014 p. 51).

It implies therefore that the population of both the farmers and the herders (including their cattle) has geometrically increased over the years, thus, increasing competition for land and water to make ends meet. Consequently, grasses and water available to the Fulani herders can no longer support their occupation and hence the need to expand and capture more places. On the other hand, the population of the farming communities has largely increased because of lack of birth control measures and polygamous marriages and hence, the need to expand their farm sizes - a situation that leaves no free land for the herders to graze their cattle as hitherto done.

One other factor that has tremendously contributed to the continuous conflict between the farmers and herders in Nigeria is the cultural and religious configuration of Nigeria (Luka and Erunke, 2016) and of course the ethnic and religious consciousness among Nigerian. The geographical and social divide of Nigeria is such that the northern part is Hausa/Fulani who double as Muslims while the southern part and to some extent the middle belt region is made up of other ethnic groups who are mostly Christians. Apart from this, the country has over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with diverse cultures who want to affirm total control over their land and resources. These cultural differences have made it quite difficult for these groups to peacefully co-exist, coupled with the fear of domination by one group over the other. In this case, there is always the fear among the farming communities of other tribes that the Fulani herdsmen would eventually suppress them and take over their lands and impose an alien culture and religion on them.

Other factors attributed for the farmers-herders impasse in Nigeria has been the desire by the Fulani herders to fatten their herds close to their markets, accounting largely for why they graze large proportion of their cattle in central and Southern Nigeria (Okeke, 2014). Relatedly, the pastoralists practice of cattle breeding that warrants the herders to freely graze their cattle where there is abundant pasture is far more economical in terms of cost than the sedentary method of breeding livestock whereby herders are made to establish ranches and in turn acquire hay and foliage for their livestock. The Fulani herders have therefore seen this, as an imperative as they bear less or no cost at the detriment of the crop farmers:

The Challenges of Managing Farmers/Herders Induced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) In Nigeria

Apart from the dreaded Boko Haram insurgency in the northern part of Nigeria, there is no other factor that has produced large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country like farmer/herder clashes. This coupled with the insurgency in the north-east has produced quite a large number of IDPs, throwing a big challenge to government and other stakeholders. Reports indicate that Nigeria has over 1.5 million displaced persons who are camped in various IDPs camps across the country (Odonmorayo, 2015). It is surprising to note that out of this number, 53 percent are women while 56 percent are children (Premium Times, December, 2015). These IDPs however, live in very poor conditions as their welfare and security is threatened.

The management of Internally Displaced Persons' camps in Nigeria has been a joint responsibility of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the States Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) and non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In spite of this collaborative efforts, there has been daunting challenges in the management of IDPs in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of welfare, security, rehabilitation, administrative bottleneck, funding, corruption, the role of the host communities, bad terrain, among others (Eweka and Olusegun, 2016; the Nation July 23 2015).

In the area of welfare, because of lack of an articulate way of handling the IDPs, most of the camps if not all, have problems of adequate basic amenities like kitchen, water, electricity, clinics and shelter. In view of this, the IDPs live in environmental conditions that are unfit for human habitation (The Nation July 23, 2015). They live miserable lives as if they were slaves in their own father land. Poor living

conditions, poor sanitation and poor medical facilities have exposed IDPs in various camps to various infectious diseases due largely to poor sanitation, the growth of infections bacteria, fungi and virus in their bodies. Also poor feeding exposes them to malnutrition, which in turn result to many deaths in camps on almost a daily basis (Premium Times December 28, 2015). This development is made worst by the increasing number of these IDPs.

The frequency of these farmers/herders conflicts which cut cross almost all the geo-political zones of Nigeria, coupled with the magnitude of the destruction caused by it Ha s created a related problem of funding. These clashes occur spontaneously, government never envisage the occurrence of such crises and therefore never budget for such. Even in an event where the budget of the emergency management agencies covers this, the frequency with which such crises occur makes it quite difficult for such finds to adequately carter for this ever increasing population of the IDPs. This therefore makes adequate provision of infrastructure to the IDPs at these respective camps quite impossible in view of government's competing needs. Connected to this is low budgeting -by government for emergency management (Eweka and Olusegun, 2016). The issue of paucity of funds is further compounded by corruption and of course, negative perception by government officials saddled with the responsibility of catering for IDPs. Most often when money is made available to the camp administrators to properly and adequately take care of the needs of the IDPs in the Camps, they normally siphon it for personal use not minding the plight of these people who have become refuges in their own land The tendency to make money often takes prominence over the welfare of the people. Suffice it to say further that even when physical items are supplied by government or humanitarian organizations and even well meaning individuals, such items are in most cases diverted to homes of camp officials or to points where they could be sold. Invariably, while government continue spending so much money on these IDPs in the wake of other competing needs, the money ends up in enriching some few individuals at the detriment of the IDPs, who are caught -up by humanitarian challenges (Olagunju, 2006, Eweka and Olusegun, 2016)'.

One other challenging area in the management of IDPs in the country is that the government in Nigeria seems not to have adequate machinery in place to' address IDPs' issues. And even the organizations created by government such as NEMA/SEMA do posses only minimum capacity to handle IDPs related issues (Olagunju, 2006). There is generally lack of trained staff among these agencies, most of them do not have competent and sufficient staff to implement government polities for the IDPs (Lomo, 2000; Olagunju, 2006; Eweka and Olusegun, 2016). The inability of these agencies to train enough manpower to handle these assignments has much to do with inadequate funds (Eweka and Olusegun, 2016).

Another challenge posed by the management of IDPs is that of social integration by the IDPs into their new found environments in which they have virtually no means of livelihood but depend solely on support from government and other humanitarian bodies. Related to this is how to make the IDPs cope with the psychological trauma from loss of family members, friends and properly destroyed by the clashes.

Managing the quantum of internally displaced persons in the wake of the current economic downturn and in view of the multiplicity of issues at the disposal of government is quite challenging for both federal and state governments. This development no doubt greatly undermine the development drive of government as resources meant for development are often channeled to management of IDPs in various camps across the federation. This is apart from the insecurity of lives and property created.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Based on the above, we make bold to conclude that the increasing cases of farmers/herders clashes in Nigeria over the years has not just threatened the peaceful co-existence of the diverse groups in the polity but has seriously created humanitarian crisis in the country for government to contend with. This has no doubt; further deepened the identity problem and the already deteriorating relationship among groups that make up the Nigerian federation. Today the farmers (of various ethnic groups) and their brother herders (majorly of the Fulani origin) who hitherto lived together in pursuance of their common wealth live a life typical of Thomas Hobbes state of nature where life was brutish, nasty and generally short.

The sanctity of life among these groups is today completely lost. There are brutal killings and maiming of fellows brothers and sisters at any slightest provocation because of the natural resources that were given to us free by God. It is common practice today for the Fulani herders to take arms against their host farmers destroying their lives, property and farm crops. On the other hand, the farmers often take arms against their brother Fulani cattle breeders killing them and their cattle. This development therefore amounts to sheer display of barbarism and is highly condemned. It is actually uncivilized and ought to be stopped forthwith, considering the negative implications it has on our economy and national life as a united people in diversity.

In view of the above, if Nigeria's corporate existence must survive, we as a people must take decisive steps to end these divisive tendencies. We must learn to live in harmony irrespective of our ethno-religions or cultural difference, Nigerians must also recognize the fact that our being together in one country is not by accident but by providence, and therefore Nigerians must eschew all forms of negative tendencies but instead live complementary lives if the desired peace must be achieved.

The challenged faced by government in managing the ever increasing large number of internally displaced persons in the country can however be best tackled if a permanent solution is sought instead of a mere palliative measure(s). It is therefore the position of this paper that the establishment of ranches remains the only permanent solution to this problem since the population of Nigeria has over the years grown to an appreciable level that has put much pressure on land and other natural resources in the environment. The era of open grazing of cattle is no longer tenable. The so-called grazing reserves and routes earmarked by the colonial masters have been overtaken by farmlands and houses due to population upsurge. Therefore, as it is the practice in advanced countries of the world like the United States of America and Israel, Pastoralism must be stopped, and in place ranches be established by cattle owners who could liaise with the crop farmers to ensure massive production of feed for the cattle. To this regard, the effort by the federal and some state governments to enact a legal framework to support that is quite commendable.

In the interim, if we are to reduce the number of conflict induced IDPs, then, Nigerians must learn to imbibe the culture of tolerance. The long standing relationship between farmers and herders which was mutually established even before independence in 1960 up to the 1990s must be restored. Farmers must remember that they cannot live without the herders, just like the herders cannot live without the farmers. Farmers need meat from the herds just like herders need food from the crops grown by farmers. Therefore they must live complementary lives protecting each others means of livelihood as hitherto done.

The elite cannot be left out of this confusion, thereby unnecessarily increasing the number of IDPs. The elites in Nigeria on both sides have largely contributed to aggravating this deteriorating relationship by fueling it for their political motives. The level of sophistication of weaponry used by both the farms and herders in events of conflict leaves much to be desired. The Nigerian elites are usually behind the scene sponsoring these clashes so as to create acrimony among groups and destabilize the unity of Nigeria, a part from destabilizing groups for the purpose of taking over their places of abode. Therefore, the Nigerian elites and traditional rulers have a duty to continually educate their ethnics on the need to eschew violence but imbibe peace through dialogue, as it is only in a peaceful atmosphere free of rancor that development can thrive. As such, they should endeavor to withdraw all forms of support and sponsorship they give to these crises in the interest of peace and for prosperity.

In as much as we are to tackle this menace from the roots, it is equally expedient for government to take concrete measures to cater for the welfare of the IDPs in an event such happens. This is borne out of the fact that conflict and conflict resolutions are part of life. Government must to this end endeavour to make adequate budgetary provision yearly to cushion the plight of the IDPS in an event such occurs. This is in addition to empowering the emergency management Agencies technically to have the capacity to render valuable services to the IDPs in camps. Also, government must establish standard IDPs camps

in all the States of the federation with state of the art facilities that can support human living instead of the current practice whereby IDPs are camped in schools and uncompleted buildings with no or limited facilities.

Last but not the least, corruption in the administration of IDPs camps must be tackled headlong. Working for the IDPs must be seen by the staff of emergency management agencies and the political class as a call to service – a service that is humanitarian in nature, and not an avenue for personal aggrandizement. Their work must be guided by compassion and the driver to save lives who are predominantly women and children. So, any emergency management staff or politician caught in the act of siphoning funds meant for the IDPs or diverting items for their welfare must be seriously dealt with to serve as deterrent to others. Finally, more corporate bodies and well-meaning individuals must endeavor to complement government's efforts by coming to the aid of the IDPs when the need arises in order to save lives as government all alone cannot do it.

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