

Farmer- Herder Conflicts and the Socio-Economic Predicaments of Women in North Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Farmer-Herder conflicts in North Central Nigeria have been rife since 1999. The emergence, development, and intensity of these clashes are underpinned by socio-economic, religious, and political undertones. Majorly, the area is endowed with fertile land, abundant water, and mineral resources attracting peasant farmers and herders for sustenance. The study made use of both primary and secondary sources. The study discovers that women are a powerful force in agricultural production, processing, and utilisation, and were seriously affected by these conflicts. This is because women have been killed, displaced, raped, and maimed, while their farming activities were truncated leading to joblessness, abject poverty, and food insecurity. Against this background, the study suggests that the government and other humanitarian bodies should focus on women empowerment programmes in North Central Nigeria. While anti-open grazing laws should be enforced in a manner to ensure that both farmers and herders live a symbiotic, resourceful, peaceful, and harmonious life in Central Nigeria.

Keywords: Farmer-Herder, Conflict, Women, Central- Nigeria, and Socio-Economic

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the 'giant of Africa' has witnessed virtually all forms of violent conflicts since her political independence in 1960 to the present day 21st century. The genesis of these conflicts started with a political tussle in the Western Region in 1962. The violent conflict emanated in the leadership of the Action Group (AG) party and led to the revocation of the Region's Premier, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola. This created heated conflict in the region leading to displacements and death of people with grave consequences on womenfolk [1]. Shortly, the 1962-1963 population census crises emerged. The rationale for this crisis was the centrality of the census figures in the allocation of values amongst the tripartite regions. This among other factors stimulated coups and counter-coups in the military with a great impact on nation-building. For example, the coups led to suspicion and ethnic chauvinism. In the North, the May and July 1966 pogroms particularly on the Igbo race did not exempt women and children [1]. These contradictions in the final analysis galvanised into a three-year civil war in 1967-1970. The civil war also known as the Biafran War led to the death of over three million people which represented 20% of the total population at that time [2] [3], while pregnant women and nursing

mothers suffered from food starvation and neglect. No wonder, Claude Phillips [4] described the Nigerian civil war as; 'the most notorious conflict ever witnessed in Africa'.

Other major violent conflicts that heated the polity of the country are the *Maitatsine* conflicts in Kano in the 1980s. The movement which later on created violent conflict was spearheaded by Muhammadu Marwa (alias Maitatsine), a Camerounian who resided in Kano [5]. Marwa gradually built up a closely-knit local community of followers, united by their belief in the doctrines of Maitatsine, and later engaged in violent attacks upon Muslims in Kano. Militancy in Niger Delta Region provides a bleeding ground for arms proliferation, illegal oil bunkering, sea piracy, oil theft, kidnapping for ransom, pipeline vandalism, armed robbery, cultism, and political violence with grave implications for the peaceful existence of the vulnerable groups. The activities of *Boko Haram* insurgency, Banditry, and farmers-herders conflicts also pose a lot of security challenges. In all these conflicts, women bear all sorts of consequences including the death of their loved ones, rape, torture, psychological trauma, displacements, and economic disarticulation.

One silent aspect of these conflicts is their impact on the socio-economic life of the most vulnerable groups in the society-women, girls, children, and the aged. This aspect has not been given adequate attention in the existing literature. For example, the works of Ndubuisi [6], Adekunle & Adisa [7], Okoli & Atelhe [8], Abugu & Onuba [9], among other numerous works discuss the causes, as well as the socio-economic, political and religious implications of farmers-herders attacks for sustainable development. While Muhammed, Ismaila, & Bibi [10] specifically articulated competition over land as the major cause of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria. This position gain general acceptability in scholarship. The underpinning argument is that competition over the scarce land resources (water, grasses, forest, fishing ponds) as a result of increasing population, desertification or climate change, banditry, cattle rustling, terrorist activities among other factors in the northern enclave pushed the herdsmen to other parts of Nigeria and this has stimulated constant farmers-herders squabbles. Therefore, this study is a radical departure from the numerous extant literature on the subject matter. This is because the congeed or thrust of this work is to look into the socio-economic implications of women in farmer-herders conflicts in Central Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that the study of this nature becomes timely. Women have played pivotal roles in the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria but critical issues that concerned them are always downplayed in academic discourses.

The work is divided into several themes with an introduction, followed by research aim and objectives, research methodology, and geographical demarcation, and characteristics of the study area. The next theme focuses on the conceptual explanation of key variables that constituted the thrust of the study. The proceeding is the historical survey of farmer-herder conflicts in the study area. The paper also examines the dynamic causes of the conflicts as another important section where the economic, socio-cultural, and political dimensions were explored. The crux of this work navigates the impact of the conflicts on womenfolk putting into consideration various states in the study area. The work attempts an appraisal and critique of the Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Religious Bodies, Stakeholders, individuals among others efforts in cushioning the impact of these violent conflicts on women in Central Nigeria. The last part is the conclusion and some proposals on the way forward.

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to access the socio-economic predicaments of women in farmer-herder conflicts in North Central Nigeria. The broad objectives of this study anchors on identifying the root causes of Farmer-Herder conflicts in Central Nigeria. The effects of these conflicts on women, and ways of empowering them. Lastly, a thoughtful policy recommendation that could reduce the spate of farmer-Herder clashes in Central Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts historical-cum- qualitative method. Data was sourced from both primary and secondary sources. Interviews were conducted with key informants such as women, farmers and Herders, government officials, Non-governmental Organisations, and other victims of these conflicts. Extant literature was used for corroborative evidence and proper investigation.

MAPPING THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTOURS AND CHARACTERISATION OF THE STUDY AREA

The term Middle Belt or Central Nigeria would be used interchangeably in this work. This is because the two concepts convey similarly or the same meaning. Therefore, Central Nigeria is a geographical, political reality, and ideology [11]. First, as a geographical zone, Central Nigeria is an area located in between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria on the coordinate of latitudes 7°30' North and 11°15' North and longitude 4° and 12° East of Prime Meridian [12]. In terms of landmass, it covers an area of approximately 342,390 km² or 37 percent of the total land area of Nigeria [12]. The area is made up of six states of the Nigerian federation namely: Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kwara, and Plateau together with a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja [11] [13]. Together, these states form a belt of minority ethnic groups sandwiched between the larger Hausa/Fulani belt of the North, and the Igbo and Yoruba of the South. This means the peoples of the Middle Belt occupied a contiguous territory within predominantly Muslim North and Christian South. Very importantly, the area has great agricultural and mining potentials. For instance, Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Niger are food baskets of the nation as a result of their fertile agricultural land which accommodates all varieties of food and cash crops. The River Benue and Niger together with their tributaries serve as constant sources of water supply for human and animal consumption, as well as dry season farming [13]. Furthermore, Central Nigeria is blessed with various economic and mineral resources including tin, columbite, kaolin, limestone, salt, precious stones, and barites among numerous others. As a result of these factors, the area has become a source of serious pressure on resources by Southern and Northern dominant groups.

Secondly, as a political reality, the area is mapped on the historical, cultural, economic, political experiences, and characteristics of the people. S. Egwu rightly observed that: 'The major dominator of the middle belt is a share collective minority identity to the Northern power system and the larger Nigerian state, who also see themselves as lacking in power' [14]. The minority agenda, therefore, forms the basis for middle belt formation to emancipate themselves from oppressive, exploitative, and marginalising tendencies of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, especially the Hausa/Fulani hegemony.

Thirdly, as an ideology whose significance in national politics has acquired immense clout over the years arising from the tortuous historical experiences of the peoples of this region. The middle belt ideology encompasses the concept of equity, fairness, and social justice, all of which

are vital components of the national question in Nigeria. These three variables underscore the geographical location and character of Central Nigeria as a national nomenclature. For this study, the area is known as Central Nigeria or Middle Belt anchors on those states centrally located in Nigeria. One of the major characteristics of this area is a composition of minority ethnic groups whose political influence has been undermined by the major ones. For political and economic reasons Central Nigeria becomes a battlefield, a war for the survival of the fittest.

Conceptualisation of Key Words

Farmer

Traditionally, farmers were conceived as those who ‘plough and plant’ and undertake agricultural production. This frame of mind has been in existence till the present day. *Dictionary of Economics* succinctly look at farmers as: “labourers who directly conducted agricultural production”, not including agricultural workers” [15]. This has been reinforced by E. M. Rogers that:

Farmers are producers of agricultural products and traditional countrymen, who tend to be relatively modest, and most of them are autarkic (although not in complete need). That is to say, most of the foodstuff and other things they produce are consumed by themselves. Therefore, farmers are autarkic agricultural producers [16].

The above definitions underscore the production of farm goods for human consumption, and this forms the congee aspect of the traditional farming system. The modern concept of a farmer is a radical departure from the traditional view which sees a farmer as someone who earns a living through agriculture production and rearing of animals for food or raw materials. Against this backdrop, Business Dictionary (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/farmer.html>, 21-05-2020), defines a farmer as: ‘an individual whose primary job function involves livestock and/or agriculture. He/she takes all the necessary steps to ensure proper nourishment of the items that he/she raises and then sells the items to purchasers’. A farmer in its strictest sense earns his living through farm proceeds, for consumption, and sale. In Western societies, farmers are people with literacy, technology, and capacity of operation with an emphasis on agro-business [17]. In the context of this work, the conception of peasant farmers is more appropriate. This is because farmers in Central Nigeria mostly produce on small scale using crude farm implements. The proceeds from these farms are consumed and sold to make a living.

Herder

A herder is a worker who lives a possibly nomadic or semi-nomadic life, caring for various domestic animals, in places where these animals wander pasture lands. This phenomenon of pastoral lifestyle was not only found in Africa but other parts of the world especially in South America in Bolivia and Peru, the Andean herders in llama and alpaca [18]. A herder of sheep is a shepherd, goat is a goatherd, cattle is a herdsman, pigs and hogs is a swineherd. In Nigeria and West African Savannah at large, the Fulani people are known for herding business. They are commonly addressed as the Fulani herdsman in Nigeria. They move with their cattle and sheep from the Northern part of Nigeria to the Southern part especially in October when there is the cessation of rain generally in Nigeria. They, in most cases, returned to the North in May when the rain has fully resumed. This practice is known as transhumance [19]. In recent times, pockets of the Fulani herdsman have settled permanently infertile areas of North Central

Nigeria in agreement with the indigenous people of the host communities, and therefore go out with their normal business throughout the season or year.

Conflicts/Clashes

The term conflict/clashes would be used interchangeably in this work because they convey a similar meaning. The terms centre on the incompatibility of goals, beliefs, needs, ideas, and values between and amongst people or groups. In such a situation, conflict or clashes becomes inevitable. The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research stimulate our consciousness of conflict as a term when they assert that:

the clashing of interests (positional differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases [20].

Reinforcing this definition Coser postulates that conflict 'is a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources' [21]. By this definition, Coser belongs to the school of structural conflict theory known as liberal structuralism. Other members of this group are Ross [22], Scarborough [23], John Galtung Galtung [24], Simmel [25], Burton [26], Boulding [27], Dahrendorf [28], among numerous others. They opined that conflict is a societal problem that can be solved or managed through goodwill and reason. Their thought seeks to address the reactions of individuals, groups, cultures, institutions, and societies to change. Reinforcing the above polemics, Deutsch underscores that conflict 'takes place whenever incompatible activities occur. One party is interfering, disrupting, obstructing, or in some other way making another party's actions less effective'[29]. While Folger, Poole, and Stutman succinctly assert that conflict; 'is the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. Is a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources' [30]. Arising from the above definitions the submission of this study is that conflict is a struggle over limited goals, needs, values, and ideas in society. The struggle arises from the threat or perceived threat to goals, needs, values, and ideas. When conflicts are not properly handled they escalate into full-scale violence with grave consequences on human society.

CAUSES OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL NIGERIA

Numerous factors account for farmer-herder's conflict in Central Nigeria. Among these reasons offered by various scholars and researchers in contemporary times is the struggle over land resources. This factor has been accentuated on numerous other reasons including an increase in the population of the Nigerian State [19][18]. The argument is that the population of Nigeria has kept rising over the decades. For example, in 1960 the population growth rate was 1.60%, 1970 was 1.80%, 1980 was 2.00%, 1990 was 2.20%, 2000 was 2.40%, 2010 was 2.60%, and 2020 stood at 2.80%. However, the landmass of the Nigerian state is fixed (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nigeria-population>). Arising from population increase in Nigeria generally, Central Nigeria becomes a hotbed for contestation on land and water resources between farmers and herders. Also, the adoption of dry season farming in Central Nigeria in the 21st Century contradicts the common practice of transhumance and nomadism carried out by the Fulani herdsmen during the 19th and 20th Centuries. Amnesty International juxtaposed this factor from farmers and herders, the informants argued that: Both farmers and herders said ... the problem began when the farmers started practicing dry season farming (the specific time could not be ascertained), which meant the grazing area for

cattle started to diminish. Also, water bodies that the herders relied upon for their cattle became contentious, because the farmers needed them for irrigation. This was especially noticeable in Adamawa State. In addition, farmers now also rear cows and not just draught oxen, meaning their cattle need grazing areas too, making the competition stiffer [31].

The root cause of conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria is the natural tension between herdsmen struggling to find rich pastures to graze their cattle and farmers struggling to convert and maintain productive farmland without the interruption and destruction that can be caused by migratory grazing [32].

Pressure on land and water resources has stimulated farmers-Herders conflicts in Central Nigeria. This is because the agriculture sector has accounted for about 70% of employment in Nigeria amidst a teeming population of over 198 million people in 2018 [33][31]. The estimated total population of Nigeria in 2020 according to World Bank (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>), stood at 206.14 million people.

Furthermore, with the influx of herders from other parts of West Africa into Nigeria in face of daunting challenges like desertification and activities of terrorist groups (Boko-Haram, al Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Bandits, Cattle rustlers), Central Nigeria has become a hotbed for competition and struggle for land resources between farmers and herders. Statistics have shown the increase of cattle in Central Nigeria at a rate of 3% – 4% annually and 1.5% – 2% leaves the valley every year while 0.5% – 0.8% is consumed as meat in abattoirs, in the slaughterhouses [34]. This simply implies that a large percentage of Fulani livestock has permanently settled in Central Nigeria every year and these herders found their way into Nigeria through porous borders. According to the erstwhile Honorable Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Chief Audu Ogbeh affirmed that:

In Nigeria, the majority of modern Fulani live in the north-central region of Nigeria, mainly in Benue and Plateau states, and are the main producers of meat and milk... pastoralists own approximately 90% of the national herd, estimated at 19.5 million cattle, about 975,000 donkeys, 28, 000 camels, 72.5 million goats, and 41.3 million sheep. Livestock represents between 20% and 30% of total agricultural production and about 6% to 8% of overall GDP [35].

Other reasons for Herder's settlement and the struggle for space in Central Nigeria arise from the type of grass, and soil that encourages and supports vegetation cover which in turn creates an enabling environment for them to live. Thus, the number of cattle Fulani herdsmen continues increasing in Central Nigeria just like the population of the farmers already demonstrated in this work. The clash of interest between settled farmers and nomadic pastoralists has changed the thrust and cordiality which shaped harmonious peaceful existence in Central Nigeria. For instance, it has been observed that before the eruption of these violent conflicts, Fulani herdsmen were known with the tradition of carrying sticks and homemade rifles to defend themselves and cattle against the wild beast. But hence competition over land resources has intensified; herdsmen carry along with them assaulted riffles and sophisticated small arms, and also leave their families behind in their home states (Oral Interview with Terseer Adugu, 13-06-2020). Although herders have anchored their defensive mechanism on deteriorating security situation in rural areas which led them to begin migrating alone with their herds, leaving women and children behind in towns for their safety [36].

Another crucial factor that led to Farmers-herders conflicts in Central Nigeria is linked to the dubious activities of some traditional rulers who received money from herdsmen on a promise to give them grazing right in their territory. The Fulani people have this misconception because it is a common practice in Northern Nigeria where traditional rulers have rights over land in their territory. Whereas, in North Central Nigeria especially among the Tiv, Idoma, Iggede people's of Benue State land is a private property of family groups which traditional rulers have no exclusive rights over it. S.B. Morgen notes:

There are indications that many of the new-breed Fulani herdsmen typically do not know the lay of the land and assume that the structure of land ownership is the same as in the North where land belongs to the traditional rulers ... The native farmer ethnic groups cultivate their lands - these lands and the crops on them constitute one of their most important assets as a people. Working on the assumption that the land belongs to traditional rulers, these new-breed herdsmen come in and pay some traditional rulers for leave to graze on lands and some of the chiefs take money without informing their people. There are allegations that some of the Fulani herdsmen have given some of the indigenous chief's money to allow them to graze [37].

The situation whereby traditional rulers receive money and give grazing rights to Fulani herdsmen to intrude on native's farms who in the first instance are not beneficiary from the stipends collected by their rulers is an invitation for war.

The herdsmen also alleged cattle rustling in some parts of North Central Nigeria as an important factor for reprisal attacks. Alhaji Sale Bayari, the then, National Secretary of the *Miyetti Allah* Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), in an interview with Tajudeen Suleiman captioned: 'The Cattle Mean More to the Fulani' justifies such attacks arising from cattle rustling that:

This is a hostile environment in which the Fulani man lives. You have to be as hostile as your environment for you to survive. There must be a balance of terror for you to survive in the jungle. The Fulani herdsman is a man that believes the entire world is after him and what he has. He believes he has to arm himself to the teeth...[38]

Such brutal words that come from a very standing man like Alhaji Sale Bayari is a strong indication that the Fulani herdsmen wherever he suspects theft, attack, and death of his cattle in any community must come back for brutal attack hence he feels everyone is against him in the society.

And lastly but not least, is lack of political will by the government to arrest and punish the offenders of crimes adequately is one of the factors fuelling farmers-herders conflicts in contemporary Nigeria society. This challenge has been compounded by the inability of government at national, state, and local levels to respond quickly to distress calls and early warning signs. This negative attitude has made it difficult to stop crises that would have been prevented if the government had responded quickly and have taken action to nip the conflict in the bud. These hydra-headed factors, in the final analysis, account for incessant farmer-herder violence in Central Nigeria. The proceeding segment of this paper examines incidences of such attacks on women who are among the vulnerable groups in Nigerian society.

INCIDENCES AND MODES OF ATTACKS ON WOMEN BY FULANI HERDSMEN IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

Beginning from 1999 when Nigeria regains its democratic governance after a long military interregnum (1983-1999), the challenge of farmers-herders conflict has been on board. This problem has been the headache of policymakers, academia, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, religious bodies, and concerned stakeholders among others on how to dislodge this menace. Most especially, from 2011 and beyond it has become a very lucrative business for Nigerian media houses with such headlines like ‘Herdsmen Kills 19 in Plateau Midnight Attack’ [39], ‘Fresh Bloodbath in Benue, 2 Catholic Priests, 17 others Killed by Herdsmen’[40], ‘Investigation: Herdsmen Attacks Claim 1,269 Lives in Benue’[41], ‘Many Killed as suspected Fulani Herdsmen raid Agatu Community’ [42], ‘Hundreds Feared Killed as Herdsmen attack Benue’ [43], ‘Farmers/Fulani Herdsmen’s Clashes in Benue: 40 killed, scores injured, 2,000 displaced’[44], ‘Fulani Herdsmen: Attacks threaten Nigeria’s existence’ NASS [45], *et cetera*. These reports contain incidences where herdsmen attacked and killed women, raped, kidnapped, tortured, and displaced thousands of women. Table 1. Document specific instances where women were killed in North Central Nigeria by cruel herdsmen.

Table 1: Women That Were Attacked and Killed by the Fulani Herdsmen, 2014-2020

S/N	PLACE OF ATTACK	MODE OF ATTACK	NUMBER OF VICTIMS	Date
Benue State				
1	Tarkende Village, Guma LGA	Slaughtered	1 pregnant woman together with her husband	07-05-2020
2	Yelwata, Guma LGA	Shot	2 woman	11-05-2020
3	Agasha, Guma LGA	Shot	2 women	12-05-2020
4	Omusu Edimoga, Okpokwu LGA	Shot	16 Women	16-03-2018
5	Mbalom, Gwer-West LGA	Shot	8 women	24-04-2018
6	Logo, Guma LGA, Benue State	Machetered	2 Women	17-01-2018
7	Ipiga, Ohimini LGA	Shot	8 women	24-01-2017
8	Mbahimin, Gwer LGA	Machetered	1 woman	02-03-2017
9	Mkovur, Buruku LGA	Shot	13 women	12-03-2017
10	Ikyoawen, Moor, Alaba & Mzaav, Kwande LGA	Shot/Slaughtered	2 women	04-04-2017
11	Tse-Akaa & Tse Orlalu, Logo LGA	Shot	2 women	08-05-2017
12	North Bank, Makurdi LGA	Shot	2 women	16-06-2017
13	Adam Village, Kwande LGA	Machetered	1 woman	10-04-2017
14	Utonkon, Ado LGA, Benue State	Slaughtered	2 nursing mothers	24-12-2017
Plateau State				
15	Bokkos	Slaughtered	1 pregnant woman	27-01-2020

16	Rubio, Bokkos LGA, Plateau State	Slaughtered	1 pregnant woman	28-01-2020
17	Maiyanga, Bassa LGA	Shot	1 pregnant woman	16-04-2020
18	Zemadede and Tanlang, Lantang LGA	Shot	1 woman and her two kids	16-06-2020
19	Ancha and Tafigana, Bassa LGA	Shot	6 months pregnant woman and old woman	25-07-2019
20	Hukke, Bassa LGA	Shot	2 women	18-09-2019
21	Barkin Ladi	Shot	2 women	12-02-2015
22	Riyom	Shot/Slaughtered	Over 20 women	09-05-2015
23	Barkin Ladi	Shot	3 women	17-07-2015
Nasarawa State				
24	Mante village	Shot	1 woman	04-01-2019
25	Ibuan, Adudu, Obi LGA	Machetered	2 women	25-07-2019
26	Awe, Keana, Obi, and Doma LGA	Shot	Over 15 women	16-04-2018
27	Arikyia Soni, Nasarawa Eggon/Lafia LGA	Shot	Over 8 women	16-11-2014
Taraba State				
28	Angai, Dashole, Dori, and Mesuwa villages of Taraba State	Shot/slaughtered	Over 15 women	10-04-2016
29	Jandeikyula village in Wukari L G A	Shot	Over 15 women	12-04-2018
30	Yorro LGA	Shot	2 Women	24-05-2018

Source: Compiled from Newspaper Publications by the Researchers, 25-06-2020. Fieldwork by the Researchers, May-July, 2020

The above table captures a good number of instances where women became prey in the hands of Fulani herdsmen. The herdsmen used guns, machetes, and knives on their female victims hence evidence of machete cuts, bullets, and knives were found all over on the bodies of the dead women. They also disembowel pregnant women, to ensure that both mother and baby were killed [46]. It has also been established that the attackers used various types of small arms and light weapons including AK-47, G3 rifles, Beretta and Browning pistols and various types of ammunition, homemade rifles, handguns, and Molotov cocktails, knives and machetes to cruelly murder vulnerable and defenseless farm women in Central Nigeria [46]. The herdsmen as gathered from various sources adopted different attacking strategies including guerrilla warfare style, open combat, abduction, rape, and other forms of assault on women and children, while the use of power bikes and speed boats was their most convenient mode of transportation in accessing the interior areas of Central Nigeria.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN THE CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL NIGERIA

The 2010 Report by the West Africa Network for Peace Building [47] establishes that women in times of violent conflicts are affected in all ramifications being it economically, socially, politically, and psychologically *et cetera*. Economically, the conflict destroyed the means of livelihood of women in Central Nigeria. Bukola et al were more forthcoming when they

observed the economic implications of farmer-herder conflicts on women in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State, thus:

Female farmers due to a high level of insecurity are unable to go to the farm and thus lose the potential product of the farming season. Secondly, during attacks, women often flee leaving behind cultivated farmland, which they are often unable to access to harvest produce because of insecurity. In many cases women who were able to access their farms after the violence found out that the crops were spoilt, harvested by other people ... or destroyed by cattle [48].

Fieldwork surveys in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Kogi states corroborate the above findings. The responses of informants show the kinds of economic activities truncated arising from these clashes as table 2 projects:

Table 2: Economic Activities carried out by Women in Central Nigeria

S/N	States	Economic Activities Affected
1	Benue State, Taraba, and Nasarawa	1. Dry season farming (pepper, tomatoes, and vegetables). 2. Cassava processing (gari, cassava chips, and akpur). 3. Farms (yam, sweet potatoes, groundnut, soya beans, maize, guinea corn, cassava, and rice) 4. Domestic animals (hens, ducks, goat, sheep, pigs) 5. Earthwork (clay pots and plates) 6. Fishing activities 7 Selling of dairy Products (Milk, Butter, Cheese), and fura
2	Plateau State	1. Dry Season farming (carrots, onions, cabbage, and vegetables) 2. Farms (acha, millet, yam, sorghum, potatoes, cowpea, and sugar cane) 3. Domestic animals (goats, sheep, hens, and cattle) 4. Mining activities 5. Selling of Dairy Products (Milk, Butter, Cheese), and fura
3	Kogi State	1. Dry season farming (vegetables, melon, pepper, and tomatoes) 2. Farms (coffee, cocoa, palm oil, cashew, groundnut, maize, cassava, yam, and rice). 3. Domestic animals (goats, sheep, hens, ducks) 4. Fishing activities 5. Selling of Dairy Products (Milk, Butter, Cheese,), and Fura

Source: Fieldwork by the Researchers, June 2020

The above table shows the kinds of economic activities carried out by farming women in Central Nigeria. Fulani women on the other hand engaged in processing and marketing milk, fura, and obtaining grain for family consumption. While others engaged in small-scale farm production. Farming women interviewed all agreed that the conflicts paralysed all these farming activities hence farms were unsafe. Farming women alternatively engaged in petty trading, hawking, and

prostitution to survive. Prostitution often results in sexually transmitted diseases (HIV/AIDS, Syphilis, *et cetera*), vesicovaginal fistula, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, child neglect among other vices (Oral Interview with Hembadoon Felicia Tordue, 22-06-2020). From 2011-2020, they have been an increase in cases of women giving out their children as paid domestic house help in Central Nigeria as a survival strategy in some displaced homes (Oral interview with Bridget Bem, 22-06-2020). Table 3 captures the total percentages of displaced women in North Central Nigeria in the year 2019.

Table 3: Total Percentage of Displaced Women in Central Nigeria, 2019

S/N	State	Total Individual	Displaced	% of men	% of Women
1	Benue	81, 132		46 %	54%
2	Plateau	14, 521		46%	54%
3	Nasarawa	19, 748		46%	54%

Source: DMT Nigeria Displacement Matrix North Central and North West Zones, August 2019

From the above table, DMT establishes displacement of women in Central Nigeria which stood at 54%. This clearly shows that women were the most affected group in the various conflicts in Central Nigeria. Some of the displaced women were camped in various IDP camps found in different locations of the states. The IDP camps also pose daunting challenges for women as observed by Nigerian Crises Group, thus:

Thousands of pregnant women and nursing mothers in IDP camps have little or no health and sanitary facilities. As most camps have no perimeter fencing and sleeping spaces are not gender-segregated, girls and women are exposed to the risks of sexual harassment, assault, and rape, both by outsiders and by fellow IDPs, and vulnerable to desperate survival mechanisms involving sexual exploitation. Many women and children are traumatised by the killings, raising concerns for their mental health, with possible long-term effects [49].

In IDP camps, women faced a lot of difficulties including dislocation of families, loss, uprooting, poverty, destruction of the normal pattern of living, worsened economic status, trauma arising from loss of loved ones, and uncertainties about loved ones, food, and shelter. Women also suffer along with their children and were also exposed to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), especially rape, during and after the attacks.

Furthermore, women who have experienced these conflicts are cut off completely from joy and happiness. The trauma of losing a husband or children is the greatest psycho-social effect on women. Judith Anule whose husband Anule was captured and killed by Fulani herdsmen in Adaka village of Makurdi LGA, Benue State narrated her ordeal. Her story of pain and psychological trauma was narrated to S.B. Morgen and has been captured here:

My name is Judith. On Monday morning, my husband took me to the hospital and after we saw the doctor, the doctor told my husband not to go back to his homestead (in Adaka) ... John replied that he could not leave his home unguarded... My husband sat around Tionsha and called me to say that Fulani had killed many people...one of our neighbours was around there and was calling to say he saw the militia who were fighting and shooting the attackers. After a while, he told them to tell me to try John's number. Once he said this, I called and then I started crying. I knew the Fulani had gotten him. Someone else took the handset from me and called and it was the Fulani who picked it up. And it is them (Fulani) who have been speaking every time on the

phone. Every time I call, it goes through but I cannot speak Hausa so someone else takes the phone from me to speak to the Fulani. When we ask them where John is, they say John went to look after the cattle or they will say John was caught trying to rustle their cattle and that is why they caught him [37].

Similarly, Amnesty International gives an account of another traumatised woman of farmers/herder conflict, thus:

When they left, I dragged myself out of the pit and went home. My thoughts were that my children were already burnt to death in the house but I needed to confirm. When I got home, everywhere was on fire. They had set the house ablaze and everything was on fire and still burning. I saw my husband's corpse on the floor and his leg was on fire, so I moved him from the fire. I dragged myself back to the pit to continue hiding. Another group of attackers came and met me there. I pleaded with them to spare me and said that their colleagues had seen and left me there. So they said okay, but that I should come out and go hide in the river so that another group would not kill me. I told them I was not leaving the pit. They said okay and left me there. One of them came back and stared at me for some time, shook his head, and left," she narrated [31].

The above testimonies depict a state of being traumatised which sometimes leads to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The symptoms of PTSD include poor mental and physical health, decreased life span, and challenges in managing work and family life among others. The loss of a husband often entrusts women with new complex roles like decision making and breadwinning for the family. These unprepared roles often bundle women out of their comfort zones and keep them in a perpetual state of struggle for survival. Women who especially lack the skills and competencies to manage their home as new heads are pushed into permanent poverty, while children are compelled to assist by picking up menial jobs which exposes them to social vices like prostitution, drug abuse, gangsterism, cultism, kidnapping, and so forth.

EFFORTS CUSHIONING THE IMPACT OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS ON WOMEN IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

The government, NGOs, FBO's, stakeholders, individuals among others made attempts to cushion the effects of farmers-herders conflicts on women in various IDP camps in Central Nigeria. The Nigerian government at various levels had agencies (Local Emergency Management Authorities (LEMAs), State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs), Federal Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), the military, police, para-military, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) all played crucial roles in assisting victims of these clashes (<https://www.refworld.org/pdfile/5b3f84874.pdf>, 12-07-2020). The national responsibility to respond to displacement lies with the local governments, and only if they are unable to cope are state governments and in the final analysis, the federal government called in. From various reports by Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, an international body established by the Norwegian Refugee Council to monitor conflict-induced internal displacement), Research Directorate, the Director of the African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGSD, a United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) program) all show that government agencies at various levels could not cushion the effects of displacements on women or even reintegrate them with their various families (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e437de12.html>, 12-07-2020). It is also very important to

emphasize that those various agencies were not gendered sensitive hence there has not been in place a national policy on displacement in Nigeria, and the domestication of the Kampala Convention (2012) which has provisions for the protection and assistance of displaced women and children which enables gender-sensitive programs for social reintegration, rehabilitation, capacity-building and training of internally displaced persons would be implemented.

The NGOs, FBOs, and other International Bodies *et cetera* have played crucial roles, especially in refugee/ IDP camps. The Red Cross, for example, donated food items in refugee camps, and in certain instances made medical provisions for those who suffered various degrees of injuries from herder's attacks. While ActionAid International took a special interest in the lives of displaced women and children, ActionAid was particularly instrumental in cushioning the impact of these clashes by empowering small-scale female farmers, promoting girl-child education, and building the capacity of local groups. The Médecins Sans Frontières (French), or Doctors without Borders (English) was also known for the provision of free medical services for those who were in refugee/IDP camps. They also trucked clean water to camps, fixed existing boreholes, and even drill new ones. However, their activities were concentrated in very few camps. In Benue State for example, out of numerous IDPs, they focused on only four camps including Mbawa, Abagana, Ugba, and Anyiin (<https://www.msf.org/working-displaced-people-benue-state-nigeria>, 16-07-2020). While philanthropists also made donations materially, and in cash. No special attention was particularly paid to women hence they were not even segregated from their male counterparts in the camps.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS AS A WAY -FORWARD

The paper anchors on the contention that Farmer-Herder conflicts have a serious negative impact on the people of North Central Nigeria generally. However, those affected most in these conflicts were women, children, and the aged. This is because they are the most vulnerable segment of any human society. The impact of these conflicts on women was in diverse ways. Women are killed, displaced, tortured, and raped; while their major source of income (farming) is truncated thereby emasculate them to abject poverty. This is because most women in the affected communities became internally displaced and are camped in different locations together with their families when they are supposed to be working on their farms to earn a living. It is also observed that most of their farms and harvested produce were destroyed rendering them to all sorts of poverty and acute food insecurity. The psychological trauma arising from the death of their husbands, children, and loved ones streamlined most women from social interaction. Some occupied new positions as head of their families. This new responsibility carries other new challenges which further emasculate the lean economic status of women in the study area. In a nutshell, the conflict under review led to pauperisation of the mass of women in North Central Nigeria.

Against this backdrop, the study made suggestions that could take women out of their present economic predicaments in the aftermaths of the clashes on the one hand, and how the re-occurrence of such clashes can be averted or abridged on the other hand. Firstly; the government should establish intervention programmes targeted for empowering women in Central Nigeria. Such programmes should cover soft loans for small and medium scale businesses, provision of farm inputs, and monthly stipends for widows to help them take care of their daunting challenges as heads of their various families.

Secondly, humanitarian organisations that have focused largely on the North-East should devote part of their resources to IDPs in camps and communities in Central Nigeria. It was discovered that most camps in this part of the country were overcrowded and unattended by the government, NGOs, and other well-meaning Nigerians. Also, the international development agencies, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, World Bank, and African Development Bank, should offer intervention programmes for women in Central Nigeria. This will go a long way in empowering women in this part of the country.

And thirdly, the provision of humanitarian assistance and empowerment programmes alone cannot better the lives of women in central Nigeria unless the government must take security and peace-building measures with all sense of seriousness. On this note, the implementation of anti-open grazing laws should be straightened to ensure peaceful co-existence between farmers and herders in Central Nigeria.

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