

FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS AND GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION INITIATIVES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the implications of farmers-herder's conflicts on government economic diversification drives during the regime of President Muhammadu Buhari between 2015 and 2023. Since discovery of oil in Nigeria, the country has continued to rely on revenue from the oil sector while other sectors like agriculture which hitherto to the oil discovery serves as the mainstay of the country economy suffers reckless abandonment. However, with the dwindling of oil revenue in recent years, the country's economy has been affected. Hence the need to diversify. In order to achieve this, government has devoted a lot of energy and resources to deepening agriculture with various agricultural friendly initiatives and also encourage private individuals to embrace agriculture. However, the gains of investments in the sector have been eroded by the farmers-herders conflicts which has led to the destruction of farm land, loss of lives and destruction of properties worth billions of naira. The resultant effect is the high cost of food prices leading to hunger in the country. There is therefore the need by the government to show genuine commitment towards ending the conflicts. The study suggested that open grazing should be banned by the government, and adopt modern ranching to reduce or eliminate cattle rustling and the destruction of farm land.

Keywords: Economy diversification, Agriculture, Open grazing

INTRODUCTION

Economic diversification has been identified as the major solution to the developmental challenges facing mono-economy countries like Nigeria. Over the years, Nigerian economy has largely depended on oil sector making the country development vulnerable to crude oil crisis in the global market. The country has been described as the largest exporter of crude oil in Africa with the sector contributing the highest to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), though with fluctuating figures in recent times. The latest GDP figures for the second quarter of 2022 released by the National Bureau of Statistics show that the oil sector contributed 6.33% down from the figures recorded in the corresponding periods of 2021 and preceding quarter, where the sector contributed 7.42% and 6.63% respectively (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics/ NBS. 2022). This sharp decline has been attributed to the fall in crude oil price, global response to Covid-19 containment measures and low oil production output occasioned by the activities of oil theft. Despite the decline in oil production and earnings, the oil sector still contributes 90% to the country's foreign exchange earnings (Thisdaylive, 2022).

Crude oil which was first discovered in 1956 in Oloibiri area of Bayelsa State had since been contributing and assisting Nigeria's economic development immensely. This discovery has however been described by many researchers as a potential mixed blessing for some oil producing countries like Nigeria as the gains from the oil boom has been grossly mismanaged by

the political class. The country is presently facing the reality of crude oil gains mismanagement and over dependent on the sector as the current dwindling in oil price, the America's reduction in crude oil importation and continue divestment by oil majors and their focus to clean energy have immensely affected most oil exporting countries, Nigeria inclusive. Being a mono economy country, these ugly development have created a bad market for the country as the economy is presently shaking and experiencing worsening development scenario. For instance, the consistent dwindling oil price in the international market has resulted in the consistent reduction in the country revenue generation making provision and maintenance of existing infrastructural facilities including payment of workers salary difficult. The government has resorted to both internal and domestic borrowings in order to finance its budget leading to inflationary pressures on the economy while the major percentage of dwindling revenue generated is being used for debt servicing (Umeji, 2019).

As developed countries of the world embrace cleaner energy such as solar, gas among others as alternative sources of energy to address the challenges of global warming, Nigeria economy has become susceptible to both internal and external shocks. These development has lend credence to the call for economy diversification in the country for sustainable economic development. This need was also acknowledged by the former President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari in an interview with the China Television in Beijing when he said that the increasing utilisation of shale gas and other alternative sources of energy by the United States and other advanced oil-importing nations of the world was a matter of concern for Nigeria. "That is why we have to increase the pace of diversifying our economy and move our country away from dependence on the oil and gas industry," the President said. "We must work towards greater industrialisation; add more value to our agricultural products; develop our solid minerals potentials and other sectors of our economy before the time comes when crude oil may no longer be dominant as a global source of energy," (Suberu, Ajala, Akande & Olure-Bank, 2015).

In order to diversify the country's' economy, the Buhari led administration devoted a lot of energy to deepening agriculture with various agricultural friendly initiatives. The administration increased funding to the sector as report from Nigeria Bureau of Statistics shows that bank credit since the renewed focus on the sector has risen consistently since 2015, from 1.9trillion naira to 2.7trillion naira in 2019, a feat that Buhari led administration was applauded for by experts (Okojie, 2021). All these initiatives were taking in an effort to diversify the country economy through agriculture.

However, the conflict between the farmers and the herders is underpinning the investment gains in the sector, thereby affecting the government economic diversification plans. Apart from the of Boko-Haram and banditry crises in the Northeast which have displaced thousands of agrarian communities, farming activities have also come under heavy attack in the Middle Belt which is the food basket of the country and other regions in Nigeria due to the escalating conflicts between the farmers and herders. The crisis has forced many farmers to abandon their farmlands and this is impacting the country's national output in the sector thereby creating a shortfall that is leading to a surge in food prices and famine in the country. This paper seeks to examine the impact of farmers-herders conflicts on the government economic diversification initiatives in the agricultural sector with a view to come up with practical suggestions that could nip the conflicts in the bud.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Economic Diversification

Development scholars have conceptualized economic diversification in different ways. Despite numerous attention that has been given to the concept over the years, the concept will continue to receive attention in mono-economy countries like Nigeria. Economic diversification has been described as the process of creating new avenues and opportunities for economic growth and development. To Eluogu, (2017), economic diversification entails using the right strategy to boost

revenue generated from other sectors of the economy by facilitating growth of other sectors of the economy. It is the process of expanding the range of economic activities both in the production and distribution of goods and services, the widening of the economy to create opportunities for diverse economic activities and to create a broad-based economy (Anyaehe and Areji, 2015). It can also be seen as the process of investing in various sectors of an economy so that a failure in one sector, or an economic slump affecting one sector, would not have an adverse effect on the rest of the economy. Focus Magazine (2017) categorised economic diversification into horizontal and vertical. To focus, horizontal diversification is a transformation in the primary export combination which indicates that the number of export areas has increased, on the other hand while vertical diversification involves arranging further uses for old and new innovative products by means of value added projects such as processing and marketing.

The importance of economic diversification to sustainable development cannot be overemphasized as it has the capacity for poverty reduction and employment generation opportunities through the development of industries that are export oriented. A lack of economic diversification is often associated with increased vulnerability to external shocks that can undermine prospects for longer-term economic growth. Diversification helps to manage volatility and vulnerability and provide a more stable path for equitable growth and development. Economic diversification is very important for long-term growth and development, there is therefore the need for any country that craves for a long term growth and development to pay genuine attention to economy diversification as it has the capacity to meet the basic requirement for sustainable development in the areas of job creation, food security, basic healthcare, clothing and shelter by opening diverse avenues of economic activity which accommodates broad spectrum of people (Umeji, 2019; Anyaehe & Areji, 2015). Over the years, Nigerian government has been making frantic effort to diversify economy, but these efforts have not yielded any desirable result due to macroeconomic orientation, poor infrastructural facilities, weak economic institutions, poor corporate governance, poor educational orientation, endemic corruption and insecurity among other challenges (Ijeoma, Ezeamama and Ebisi, 2018).

Economic Diversification in Agricultural Sector

Economy and sustainable development watchers have over the years been advocating massive investment in the agricultural sector by both government and private individuals as the sector has the capacity to fill the vacuum the global oil market crisis might expose the country to in the future. The agricultural sector has the potentials of providing unequal opportunities for Nigeria's speedy economic growth and development as it shares linkages with virtually all the sectors of the economy with demonstrated multiplier effect on Nigerian economy (Okoroafor, 2014). In the past, the Agricultural sector has been an important and major pillar of Nigerian economy as it provides employment opportunities, eradicates poverty and contributes to the growth of the country economy. Giving its importance and capacity for employment generation, revolution in the agricultural sector is fundamental for any nation yearning for economic development

The agricultural sector has the potential and capacity to be the industrial and economic springboard from which a country's development can take off. Nigeria's economic aspirations have remained that of altering the structure of production and consumption patterns, diversifying the economic base and reducing dependence on oil, with the aim of putting the economy on a path of sustenance, all inclusive and non-inflationary growth. Despite Nigeria's vast agricultural resources both human and natural, it is still faced with acute food crisis, the intensification of poverty and massive suffering of the overwhelming majority of Nigerians. This situation is however typical of all third world countries operating within the neo-colonial capitalist system (Akor, 2009).

It must be noted that pre-oil era in Nigeria economy was dominated by agricultural and mining activities. Cash crops such as groundnut, cocoa, timber, palm-oil, rubber among others were the primary products of the country which were exported in large quantity. Agricultural sector before



oil boom in Nigeria contributed 60% GDP, 70% to export, and 95% to food needs (Chidiadi, 2009). The reckless abandonment of the sector and refusal to look inward to evolving areas of opportunities while relying majorly on the oil sector has stunted the country economic development. Agricultural sector has for long suffered neglect, mismanagement, policy inconsistency, poor infrastructural investment and poor attention to the needs of the farmers by the successive administrations. The deliberate relegation of the sector due to the oil boom has led to rural-urban migration, high level of unemployment, inflation and poverty as Nigeria that was a major exporter of agricultural products hitherto oil windfall became a chief importer of food (Umeji, 2019). There is consensus among experts that the Nigerian economy can survive without oil if the right policies and actions are taken by the government to boost the agricultural sector.

Government Agricultural Initiatives

The President Buhari led administration came up with difference agricultural initiatives with the aim of boosting the sector as one of the alternative areas of economic diversification. The government saw these initiatives as necessary giving the challenges in the oil sector as revenue from the sector is not sufficient to meeting the financial needs of the country. The president repeatedly clamor for Nigerians being able to produce what we eat and eat what we produce. Few month after assuming office, the government launched various agriculture initiatives with the aim of boosting agricultural production and reverse Nigeria's negative balance of payment on food (Premium Times, June 5, 2021). The government through the Aso Rock Newsletter published by the Presidency office of Digital Engagement in 2018 listed the major five agriculture initiatives which will help enhance the sector as alternative to the oil sector. The following are the five agriculture initiatives by the present administration;

- a. **Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP):** The Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP), established by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), was launched by the President Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR) on November 17, 2015. The initiative was intended to create a linkage between anchor companies involved in the processing and small holder farmers (SHFs) of the required key agricultural commodities. The ABP which is targeted at farmers cultivating cereals (rice, maize, wheat etc) cotton, roots and tubers, sugarcane, tree crops, legumes, tomato and livestock provides farm inputs in kind and cash to small holder farmers to boost production of these commodities. At harvest, the SHF supplies his/her produce to the Agro-processor (Anchor) who pays the cash equivalent to the farmer's account (CBN, 2021). Since commencement of the programme in November 2015, the CBN in partnership with state government and several private sector groups have disbursed a cumulative sum of 55.526billion naira to over 250, 000 farmers who cultivated almost 300,000 hectares of farmland for rice, wheat, maize, cotton, soybeans, cassava among other crops. Two years into the implementation of the programme, it has contributed to the creation of an estimated 890,000 direct and 2.6 million indirect jobs (Toromade, 2018).
- b. **Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI):** This initiative launched in December 2017 was the outcome of a partnership between the Governments of Nigeria and Morocco, and implemented as a public-private partnership in Nigeria, led by the Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority (NSIA) and the Fertilizer Producers and Suppliers Association of Nigeria (FEPSAN). Since it was launched, is has produced over 60 million bags of 50kg fertilizers (Osinbajo, Vanguard, December, 2022). Through this initiative, the country's fertilizer blending plants have increase from seven to over 50 functional plants located at the different regions of the country. However, while Nigeria has recorded progress in boosting the production of affordable fertilizer necessary for agriculture activities through the PFI, efforts to increase the supply and reduce the cost of the commodity were in some cases undermined by middlemen. This development has prevented a large number of farmers from getting the products at the government approved rates.

- c. **Youth Farm Lab (YFL):** The Youth Farm Lab is an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in conjunction with State partnerships for agriculture. The Agriculture boot camp is to train Nigeria youths on livestock production and sustainable urban agriculture. It seeks Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are passionate about Agriculture and believe in its profitability potentials.
- d. **Presidential Economic Diversification Initiatives (PEDI):** Launched in July 2017, the Presidential Economic Diversification Initiative supports the revival of moribund industries, especially in Agro processing by facilitating new investments, reducing regulatory bottlenecks and enabling access to credit. PEDI has made breakthrough in the agribusiness sector in Imo and Ondo States.
- e. **National Food Security Council:** The council inaugurated on March 26, 2018 has the President, General Muhammadu Buhari as the chairman. The council objectives are to develop sustainable solutions to the farmers-herdsmen clashes; climate change and desertification and their impact on farmland; grazing areas and lakes, rivers and water bodies; oil spillage and its impact on Niger Delta Fishing Communities; piracy and banditry; agricultural research institutions and extension services and the problem of smuggling. The council will also take interest in regional and global policies and trends that bear implications for food security in Nigeria.
 The Council has as its members State governors, ministers, Secretary to the Government of the Federation; Chief of Staff to the President and security chiefs. The essence of the national food security council has been put to question as the council is barely head of, while the country's food supply and security challenges worsen. In markets across the country, the cost of food items has risen far beyond the reach of the citizen, majority of who live on less than 1USD a day (Otuchikere, Business Day, March 17, 2021).

While all these initiatives are laudable and capable of boosting the agricultural sector, thereby reduce the importation of agricultural produce in Nigeria and improve Nigeria economy, the inability of the Buhari led administration to tackle farmers-herders conflicts particularly in the country's food belt regions has been a major underpinning factor affecting the sector. The conflict has kept many farmers off their farms and has destroyed the heavy investment in the sector. The government failure to address the attack of farmers by the marauder herdsmen has been a biggest failure of the government in the sector.

Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria

The persistent conflict between herders and farmers has a long and complex historical background. The disputes on land related matters among the herders and the rural farmers is nothing new. However, the conflict has transformed by time and turned into a destructive and violent conflict since the beginning of 21st century (Egbuta, 2018). The increase in farmers-herders conflicts in the last decade has been a source of concern. The conflict between these major actors in the agricultural sector is one of the Nigeria's most persistent security challenges threatening the peace and stability of the country as it has left many people dead in recent times. Destruction of lives and properties has almost become a daily activities in most agrarian communities from the Northern to Southern parts of the country. These developments have discouraged both local and foreign investors from investing in the country agricultural sector and also impacting the government economic diversification initiatives negatively thereby threatening the fabrics of the country's economy.

Different factors range from the environmental to political, religious, and ethnicity have been identified as driven forces driving farmers-herders conflicts, but at their center is the problem of land scarcity. The challenge of climate change and desertification have forced herdsmen down South from the North to feed and sell their cattle. In the process of searching for food for their cattle, the herders encroached on farm lands, destroying crops thereby leading to violent conflict.

Corroborating this assertion, the umbrella body of the cattle breeders in Nigeria, the Mayetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), agreed that the effect of climate change and desertification was a major causal factor leading to trans-human movement from Northern part to the South annually which has resulted in a lot of conflict between the farmers and herders (Ugwumba, 2018). Also, Shehu (2018) attributed farmers-herders conflicts to infrastructural development, cattle theft and change in pastoralist system. He assert that farmers are losing vast arable of lands to government infrastructural development causing them to look for new land for farming and growing business sector building on grazing routes for animal.

Furthermore, while the farmers accused the herdsmen of destroying their crops by failing to control their animals, at the same time the, herdsmen alleged that the farming communities were rustling their cattle. Another driving reason for the conflict between herders and farmers is the changes in pastoralist system as some pastoralist herders have changed to sedentary lifestyle. This led to the using of underage and younger herdsmen who are not experience in grazing and negotiation techniques with the farmers like the elderly herders for grazing and walking of animal. To Olaniyan & Yahaya (2016) impunity and Poor governance are the major factors aggravating the conflict, because the armed groups who attack farmers and villages most of the time do not face any penalties and charges. They are not even arrested by the police leading to farmers and other victims resulting to self-help.

Since the emergence of President Mohammadu Buhari, the conflict between the farmers and herders took both religious and ethnic dimensions. There were allegations must especially by the Southerners who are mostly Christians that the conflict is more than a mere struggle for scarce resources but an attempt to extend the Fulani dominance to other parts of the country and to Islamise the country. There were allegation that the president body language is encouraging the killer herders and has always been supporting them. For instance, in 2000, there was a report that the president visited the then governor of Oyo State, Alhaji Lam Adesina and asked for compensation for the Fulani herders over a conflict between them and the farmers. Also in 2021, the president announced that his government would reclaim all the grazing routes across the country to allow the Fulani herdsmen move their cattle freely. The statement by the president does not go down well with the Southerners which they claimed it was a deliberate attempt to encourage his Fulani people to disobey the ban on open grazing by the Southern governors.

Prior to the violent conflict between the farmers and herders leading to loss of lives and properties, for decades, there has been a cordial, peaceful and harmonious relationship among famers and herders across communities in Nigeria, except for few cases of disagreements which never led to the destruction of lives and properties nor affect economic activities which would later be solved by negotiations and usually the heads of villages and herder communities agreed on simple solutions such as a herder must compensate the damage in a farm if he couldn't control his animals and prevent them damaging the growing crops (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). However, the collapse of the old traditional approach to settlement through negotiation between the two groups has led to violent conflict as the one with more sophisticated weapon try to get what they want without negotiating with other and this has led to the loss of many lives and others have been displaced from their homes.

Report from the Nigerian Security database shown that, from 6274 conflicts recorded from January 2014 – December 2020, 309 were farmers-herders conflicts related leading to the death of 3087 people across the country which represent about 5 per cent of violent conflicts in Nigeria (Adigun, 2022). Also, data from the Nextier Security, Peace and Development Violent Conflict Database shows that from October 2020-September 2021, conflict between farmers-herders occurred 71 times, accounting for 406 deaths across the country. The North-Central remains the worst hit region of the farmers-herders conflicts followed by the North-West, Southwest, South-

East and South-South respectively in terms of incidents and casualties (Nextier SPD Violent Conflicts Database, 2021).

Over the years, successive government have put in place measures to mitigate the farmers – herders conflict, but have not yielded any positive results, as most of the measures were either alleged to be in favour of the herders or farmers, this allegation from both sides makes efforts at resolving it by both state and non-state actors difficult. For instance, the Goodluck Jonathan led administration in 2014 inaugurated an inter-ministerial technical committee on grazing reserve. The committee recommended the recovery and improvement of all grazing routes encroached by farmers across the country. It further recommended the immediate release of a sum of N100 billion by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) for ranch construction. However, the failure of the Goodluck Jonathan government to win the 2015 general election led to the non-implementation of the committee reports. Also in 2016, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) advised the president Buhari government to set a short, medium and long term strategic plan which will encourage the development of grazing route across the country. This proposal was vehemently rejected by most states in the middle belt and southern parts of the country, they alleged that the plan was an attempt to handover their land to the Fulani herdsman.

The FMARD in March 2016 also announced the proposal to import grass from Brazil on the grazing reserve in order to increase the consumption of grass by cattle and boost their output. This pronouncement did not go down well with many Nigerian as it was seeing as a waste of public funds. In February 2018, highest policy making body in Nigeria, the National Executive Council (NEC), constituted a sub-committee to examine herder-farmer conflicts. Based on the recommendation of the committee, the NEC approved that open grazing of cattle in Nigeria should be banned. Also as part of the effort to arrest the herders-farmers conflict in their respective states, the 17 state governors in southern Nigeria and the governor of Benue and Taraba States in the North Central zone banned open grazing, but the federal government viewed the ban differently, and thus it does not exist in practice (Hyginus, 2022).

Herdsman-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023

The table below shows some of the media reported cases of herdsman-farmer clashes between 2015 and 2023 in Nigeria.

S/N	Date	Attack & Location	Immediate Causes	Casualties
1	January 28, 2015	Yangal-fadan in Zangong, Kaduna State	Reprisal attack	8 persons killed and many injured
2	March 20, 2015	Eke community, Enugu state	Disruption of farm land	1 killed
3	June 10, 2015,	Katsak village, kaduna State	Grazing on farmland	9 persons killed
4	June 17, 2015	Birnin Gawari	Grazing on farm land	5 persons killed
5	September 25, 2015	Ukwuamin in Delta state	Grazing on farm land	3 person killed, middle age woman raped
6	October 2, 2015	Ogun state	Grazing on farm land	Middle age woman raped in her farm
7	November, 13	Ulaja and Ojeh communities in Kogi state	Grazing on farm land	22 people were killed.
8	January. 6, 2016	Udeni Ruwa, Nasarawa state	Destruction of farm crops	38 people killed
9	January 17, 2016	Gereji village in Taraba State	Destruction of farm crops	3 people killed
10	January 23, 2016		Destruction of farm crops	60 people killed
11	February. 2, 3, 7, 11, 24 & 28, 2016	Agatu, Benue State	Reprisal attack	569 death recorded
12	March 2, 2016	Ossissa, Ndokwa, Delta State	Grazing on farm land	4 persons killed.
13	March 7,8, 13 & 17	Mbaya-Tombo, Benue state	Dispute and destruction of farm land	Over 30 persons died and houses were destroyed
14	March 26, 2016	Ugwunesi in Awgu LGA, Enugu State	Reprisal attack	18 persons Killed and several houses destroyed.



15	April 3 & 7, 2016	Ohali-Elu, Rivers State	Clash with community	16 people were killed.
16	April 10, 2016	Dori and Mesuma villages, Gashaka Local Government, Taraba State	Grazing on farm land	15 person killed, razing of houses
17	May 2, 2016	Benue state	Grazing on farm land	39 people were killed
18	May 15, 2016	Buruku local government area, Benue State	Grazing on farm land	12 persons killed with several others injured
19	June 25, 2016	Koh community in Girei Local Government Area of Adamawa State	Destruction of farmland by a herder	8 people were killed
20	June 17, 2016	Logo local government area of Benue State	Grazing on farm land	10 persons and scores of farmers displaced
21	July 25, 2016	Tse-Adayol in Logo local government area. Benue State	Grazing right	10 person killed, 1 missing and 2 injured
22	August13, 2016	Golkofa in Jema'a LGA, Adamawa State	Grazing on farm land	20 persons killed
23	Sept. 24– 26,2016	Godogodo, Kaduna,	Grazing on farm land	8 persons slaughtered and wounded 8 others
24	October 15, 2016	Godogodo, Kaduna,	Grazing on farm land	40 persons were killed and several houses burnt.
25	November 25, 2016	Nimbo Community of Uzo-Uwani LGA, Enugu state	Reprisal attack	8 people were massacred.
26	Jan, 16, 2017	Rafin Gona and Gbagyi villages in Bosso LGA, Niger State.	Grazing on farm land	9 killed and at least 6,000 persons displaced
27	January, 24, 2017	Ipiga village Benue State	Destruction of farmlands	15 persons were killed.
28	February 21, 2017	Southern Kaduna, Kaduna State	Fulani herdsmen launched attacks on four communities	21 people were killed
29	March 11, 2017	Tiv community, in Buruku LGA, Benue State	Grazing on farm land	10 people were killed.
30	March 20, 2017	Zaki Biam in Benue state	Grazing right	50 persons were killed
31	May 5, 2017	Ussa and Takum Council areas of Taraba State	Clash between farmers and herdsmen	15 people dead, many sustained injuries
32	July 20, 2017	Kajuru village of Kaduna	Reprisal attack	33 killed and several properties destroyed
33	September 9, 2017	Ancha village, Bassa LGA, Plateau state	Reprisal attack by the herdsmen	19 persons were killed
34	October 27, 2017	Irigwe kingdom, Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State.	Destruction of farm land	75 people were killed, 23 injured, about 13,726 persons displaced and 489 houses burnt
35	November 21, 2017	Kikan, Kwadomti and Shefaran Villages of Numan LGA Adamawa State	A reprisal attack	52 herdsmen killed
36	December 4, 2017	Five villages in Adamawa state	Herdsmen reprisal attack	86 people lost their lives and properties destroyed
37	December 31, 2017	Gaambe-Tiev, Ayilamo and Turan towns in Benue state.	Fulani herdsmen invaded the communities	50 persons were murdered.
38	January 1, 2018	Guma and Logo local governments of Benue state	Reaction to the Benue state anti-grazing law	73 Farmers killed while dozens were injured.
39	March 5, 2018	Omosu Okana villages in Okpokwu LGA in Benue State	Herdsmen reprised attack	24 persons killed and many injured
40	April 12, 2018	Jandeikyula village in Wukari L G A of Taraba State	Grazing on farm land	25 persons killed and properties worth millions of naira destroyed
41	May 2, 2018	Iwoye area, Imeko in Ogun state	Clashed between herders and community	4 people were reportedly killed



42	June, 21 & 23-25, 2018	Riyom, Barikin Ladi Plateau state	Violence competition for land resource.	218 people killed with several properties destroyed
43	November 25 2019	Mubi in Adamawa	Grazing on farm land	19 killed several houses burnt
44	June 21, 2020	Guri town, Jigawa state	Violent clash between herders and farmer	3 persons killed
45	January, 13, 2021	Ijabe, Odo-otin, Osun state	Destruction of farm land	1 killed
46	January 8, 2022	Molege town Ondo state	Refusal of herders to graze on their farmland	3 killed, several houses burnt
47	June 22, 2022	Oke-Ogun area in Oyo state	Destruction of farm land	30 farmers injured
48	April, 25, 2023	Ago-oyinbo in Akure-North LGA area, Ondo state	Grazing on farm land	1 killed, 8 injured.

Source: Author's compilation from reportages of various online media and the work of Oli, Ibekwe, & Nwankwo (2018) and Okoro (2018).

Impact of Farmers-Herders Conflict on Economic Diversification in Nigeria's Agricultural Sector

The persistent conflicts between the farmers and the herders in Nigeria have continued to affect the socio-economic fabrics of the country. The efforts of the government to rejuvenate the country economic woes through diversification into agricultural sector have been thwarted by these conflicts. Due to the incessant attack by the herders, many farmers have abandoned their farms for fear of being killed. This ugly incident has become a threat to the country's food security. Food and Agriculture Organization/ FAO (2006) opined that, farmers-herders conflict could impact negatively the four main pillars of food security which are food availability, food accessibility, food utilization, and food stabilization. For instance, the conflict could impact the food availability dimension through their adverse impacts on agricultural labor supply (Verwimp and Muñoz-Mora 2018; Serneels and Verpoorten, 2015; Blattman and Miguel 2018), production decisions (Arias, Ibáñez, and Zambran, 2019), and outputs (George, Adelaja, and Awokuse 2021; Adelaja and George, 2019).

The conflicts could also affect food accessibility dimension through their harmful impacts on physical and economic access to food. For example, farmers-herders conflicts could lead to the destruction of infrastructural facilities such as roads, markets, and farms (Kah 2017). For the food utilization dimension, the adverse impacts of conflicts are usually captured through anthropometric outcomes (Martin-Shields and Stojetz 2019; Tranchant, Justino, and Müller 2014; Akresh, Lucchetti, and Thirumurthy 2012). Finally, for the food stabilization dimension, the adverse effects of conflicts appear to be captured through its impact on variability of food prices and the value of food imports (George, Adelaja, and Weatherspoon 2020). All these projections about the impact of the conflicts on food security has become a reality as the conflict has drastically reduced food production output, destruction of farms lands and led to the increase in prices of food as farmers have abandoned their farms.

Despite the investment in the sector by government and private individuals, growth in the agricultural sector slowed from 2.28 percent in the first quarter to 1.3 percent in the second quarter of 2021 as escalating conflict of herdsman and other security challenges continue to take a toll on farming activities. Report also showed that Nigeria loses about \$14bn annually due to incessant conflicts between farmers and herders which has increased the country's reliance on food imports to meet its needs (Adeniyi, 2021). Also, from 2001 to 2018, about 60,000 deaths were recorded in multiple conflicts, it is estimated that more than 300,000 Nigerians were displaced across states in Nigeria. It is estimated that the conflict has led to more than 400 billion naira losses resulting from destruction of properties in Benue state alone (Premium Times, March, 2021).

International Crisis Group (2020) reported that, farmers-herders conflict has taken the lives of over 1,300 people since January 2018 and crop production, which previously accounted for a

huge chunk of the agricultural sector, representing 88 percent of total activities, has declined due to the conflict. The contribution of agriculture to Nigeria's GDP dropped by 31 percent, from US\$113.64 billion in 2013 to US\$78.45 billion in 2017 (Hyginus, 2022). Many Nigerians are living in hunger due to the conflict. Sasu (2022) assert that, from 2018 to 2020, 21.4 percent of the Nigerian population experienced hunger and this led to the declaration of Nigeria the poverty capital of the world by the World Bank in 2021. The high poverty level in the country has been attributed to the farmer-herders conflict which has led to decline in food production, increase in prices of food, displacement of farming communities and destruction of farm land. As the conflict between farmers and herders persist, the government has become hapless as all strategies put in place to arrest the situation have not yielded any positive results.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria has become unabated bottleneck to Nigeria's economic rejuvenation. The efforts of the government since returned to civil rule in 1999 to address economic challenges through diversification in agricultural sector has been underpinned by this conflict. Studies have identified scarce resources exacerbated by the impact of climate change as a major driver of the conflict. Due to this incessant attacks, thousands of deaths have been recorded while properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. While the farmers accused the herders of destroying their farm lands, the herders accused the agrarian communities of rustling their cattle. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the Nigerian government to nip the conflict in the bud so that the investment in the agricultural sector by both government and private individual can yield desire economy results. The study therefor suggested that;

- There should be establishment of ranches across the country by the government so as to stop the movement of cattle from one place to another. Private individuals should also be encourage to invest in ranches and grass cultivation.
- The federal government must as a matter of urgency ban open grazing of cattle as suggested by sub-committee on farmers-herders conflict and approved by the Nigeria Economic Council in 2018 which must be backed by an act of the parliament.
- There must be a continuous community engagement of both farmers and herders communities.
- The Proliferation of small arms and light weapons has also been a source of concern, efforts should be made to mop-up arms across the Country.
- Government should also improve on the security architecture of the country, arrest any individual or groups ferrying illegals arms and ammunition.

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