

# Addressing the Challenges of Herders-Farmers Crisis in Nigeria through Intercultural Leadership in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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**Abstract**— Agricultural products for both crops and animals are essential commodities worldwide, and the issue of food security is one of the major global challenges that demands serious concern and attention. This paper focuses on ways of addressing the farmers-herders crisis through the use, support, and cooperation of all village heads and community leaders in the farming communities of Adamawa State. This is because the village head knows all the caliber of farmers within their territories, and the majority of farmers listen to and give maximum respect to their community leaders. The paper reveals that Nigeria has experienced the highest number of farmer-herder fatalities in West or Central Africa over the past decade. The crisis has resulted in a large number of deaths among farmers, low agricultural productivity, and high prices of food items across West African countries. The paper recommends that village heads should organize regular meetings with farmers to enlighten them on the consequences of crisis on social, cultural, and economic aspects. The government should encourage, motivate, and support community leaders and engage them in decision-making. Additionally, the provision of infrastructural facilities is of paramount importance to support all cultural and community leaders to do the needful, in order to address the challenges of the farmers-herders crisis in Nigeria and ensure economic sustainability.

**Keywords**— Farmer-herder conflict, Nigeria, Adamawa State, Intercultural leadership, Conflict resolution, Community leadership, Pastoralism, Food security.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The herders-farmers conflict has emerged as one of the most pressing security challenges facing most West African countries, including Nigeria, with far-reaching implications for peace, social and economic stability, and food supply in all affected regions (Okoli, 2019). Resulting in continuous competition for scarce resources such as farmland, water, and other social and infrastructural facilities, this conflict has been worsened by other factors including environmental degradation, climate change, and socio-economic pressures (Adeoye, 2017). The clashes between pastoralists and farmers have resulted in massive loss of life, displacement of several productive farming communities, and destruction of millions of valued assets and properties, further expanding the humanitarian crisis in all affected areas (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020). These undesirable activities happening in the farming communities seriously threaten Nigeria's agricultural productivity, food security, rural development, and social cohesion, making it imperative to address the primary causes and find permanent resolutions for sustainable growth and development (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018).

Furthermore, no society or nation can develop without peace and security; ensuring security is of paramount importance for any nation to attain sustainable development in both human and material resources. Addressing the security challenges can be done through collaborative efforts between government, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and religious groups. There is a need for continued dialogue and creating more awareness among youth and other members of society.

## II. IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY

Due to the nature of multi-ethnicity, the impact of herder-farmer conflict on the Nigerian economy cannot be overemphasized. The incidents are recurring, and the effects on human lives and livelihoods, as well as the resulting negative economic consequences, are worrisome. Studies show that since 2016, more than 3,600 lives and millions of naira have been lost as a result of the farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. Also, no fewer than 62,000 people have been displaced in the Middle Belt region where the conflict is mostly concentrated. Many farmers and herders, including women and children, have lost their homes and lives as well (Nweze, 2005), while experiencing serious declines in crop production and herd productivity. The crisis has reportedly cost the country over \$2.3 million (47 percent) of its internally generated revenue, which could have been used for improving the economic and social well-being of the citizens (Assessment Capacities Project Thematic Report – ACAPS, 2017).

## III. EFFORTS OF THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT IN TACKLING THE FARMERS-HERDERS CRISIS

There have been several efforts by past and present government administrators in handling and tackling the menace of the farmer-herder conflict. Before the collapse of the First Republic, the government introduced the Grazing Reserve Act of 1964, which provided adequate grazing areas and paths for the passage of livestock. However, after 1966, the paths became moribund and were overtaken by other anthropogenic activities (Relief Web, 2018). More recently, bills have been presented by lawmakers such as the National Grazing Routes and Reserve Bill 2012 and the National Grazing Reserve Bill 2016, which sought to establish new grazing reserves and routes in each State of the Federation. However, these bills have been unsuccessful. This is largely due to criticisms and distrust of the outcomes by different regions. For instance, southern leaders and groups fear that the bill is an attempt to seize power and colonize the region. Similarly, in mid-2019, Nigeria's executive branch proposed to establish Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements all over the country in a bid to check the conflicts and improve agricultural productivity. The RUGA program sought to settle migrant pastoral families and other animal farmers in an organized place with provision of necessary and adequate social amenities (Daily Trust, 2019). This too met a dead end and was eventually shelved as different ethnic groups accused the process of being a plan to "Fulanize" the country.

Other government initiatives to tackle the crisis include:

- 1) **Ranching System:** The Federal Government has proposed establishing ranches to reduce conflicts between farmers and herders. This approach aims to provide a more organized and sustainable way of managing livestock, reducing competition for land and resources.
- 2) **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** The government has recommended conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mass orientation and dialogue, to promote peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders.
- 3) **Piloting Ranching Initiatives:** It has been suggested that the government pilot ranching initiatives in affected states to assess their potential and effectiveness.
- 4) **State and Local Government Involvement:** The government has involved state and local governments in addressing the crisis, recognizing that a multi-level approach is necessary to resolve the complex issues involved.

Despite these efforts, the crisis persists, and there are concerns about the government's response, including:

- **Inadequate Response:** Critics argue that the government's response has been inadequate, failing to effectively address the root causes of the conflict.
- **Lack of Consensus:** There is a lack of consensus between the Federal Government and affected state governments on the best approach to resolving the crisis.
- **Need for Community-Led Solutions:** Some argue that community-led solutions, rather than top-down approaches, may be more effective in addressing the crisis.

Overall, the government's efforts to address the farmers-herders crisis are ongoing, but the complexity of the issue requires a multifaceted and inclusive approach.

## IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERCULTURAL LEADERSHIP

This study is grounded in the concept of intercultural leadership, which refers to the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of organizations or communities across cultural boundaries. In the

context of conflict resolution, intercultural leadership involves the capacity to bridge cultural divides, facilitate dialogue between different ethnic and occupational groups, and build trust and understanding across communities (House et al., 2004; Northouse, 2018).

Intercultural leadership is particularly relevant to the herders-farmers crisis because the conflict involves two distinct groups with different cultural practices, livelihood strategies, and historical grievances. Effective intercultural leaders—such as village heads, traditional rulers, and community elders—possess the cultural competence, local knowledge, and social capital needed to mediate between these groups and foster peaceful coexistence (Okoli, 2019). By leveraging their influence and respect within their communities, these leaders can facilitate dialogue, build trust, and promote sustainable solutions to the crisis.

The application of intercultural leadership to conflict resolution is supported by the work of scholars such as Goleman (1998) on emotional intelligence, Heifetz (1994) on adaptive leadership, and Hofstede (2001) on cultural dimensions. These frameworks highlight the importance of empathy, cultural awareness, and adaptive capacity in leading diverse groups through conflict and change.

## V. THE ADAMAWA STATE CONTEXT

Adamawa State, located in the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is one of the states most affected by the herders-farmers crisis. The state shares borders with Borno, Gombe, and Taraba States, as well as the Republic of Cameroon. Its diverse ethnic composition includes Fulani, Hausa, Gude, Bata, Bachama, and numerous other groups, creating a complex social and cultural landscape (Adamawa State Government, 2021).

The state's agricultural economy is characterized by both crop farming and livestock herding, making it a microcosm of the national conflict. Farmers in Adamawa State cultivate crops such as maize, sorghum, millet, groundnuts, and rice, while pastoralists move their cattle across the state in search of water and pasture. Competition for land and water resources has intensified due to population growth, climate change, and environmental degradation, leading to increased conflict (Blench, 2010).

The crisis in Adamawa State has been particularly severe in areas such as Girei, Yola South, Demsa, and Numan Local Government Areas, where incidents of violence have displaced thousands of people and disrupted agricultural activities (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020). The state government has implemented various initiatives to address the crisis, including the establishment of peace committees and the promotion of dialogue between farmers and herders. However, these efforts have been hampered by limited resources, weak institutional capacity, and the complexity of the conflict dynamics.

## VI. MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE HERDERS-FARMERS CRISIS IN NIGERIA

- 1) **Dialogue and Mediation:** Facilitate dialogue between herders and farmers to resolve conflicts peacefully (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Use mediation and negotiation to address grievances and find mutually beneficial solutions.
- 2) **Sustainable Land Use:** Promote sustainable land use practices, such as agro-pastoralism, to reduce conflicts over land (Blench, 2010). Implement land reform policies to ensure equitable access to land for both herders and farmers.
- 3) **Ranching and Livestock Management:** Establish ranches to provide a more organized and sustainable way of managing livestock (Audu, 2013). Promote modern livestock management practices, such as vaccination and breeding programs.
- 4) **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Establish conflict resolution mechanisms, such as community-based dispute resolution committees (Okoli, 2019). Provide training and support for conflict resolution initiatives.
- 5) **Economic Empowerment:** Provide economic empowerment programs for herders and farmers, such as access to credit and markets (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Promote economic diversification to reduce dependence on agriculture and livestock.
- 6) **Community Engagement:** Engage communities in peacebuilding initiatives, promoting social cohesion and cooperation (International Crisis Group, 2018). Foster partnerships between herders, farmers, and government agencies to address the crisis.
- 7) **Policy and Legislative Frameworks:** Develop and implement policy and legislative frameworks that address the root causes of the conflict (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018). Ensure policies are inclusive and responsive to the needs of both herders and farmers.

By leveraging cultural leadership, Nigeria can develop context-specific solutions to the herders-farmers crisis, promoting peaceful coexistence and sustainable development.

## VII. THE ROLE OF CULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN ADDRESSING THE HERDER-FARMER CRISIS

Cultural leadership can be utilized to address the herder-farmer crisis through:

- 1) **Promoting Dialogue and Understanding:** Cultural leaders need to be involved to facilitate community dialogues to foster understanding and cooperation between herders and farmers (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Leaders can organize peacebuilding initiatives, such as workshops and conferences, to promote peaceful coexistence in the farming communities.
- 2) **Mediation and Conflict Resolution:** Cultural leaders are in a position to mediate conflicts between herders and farmers, leveraging their influence and knowledge of local customs (Audu, 2013). Traditional justice systems can be utilized to resolve disputes and promote reconciliation.
- 3) **Encouraging Sustainable Practices:** Cultural leaders can promote sustainable land use practices, such as agro-pastoralism, to provide adequate grazing areas in order to reduce conflicts over land (Blench, 2010). Leaders can encourage environmental conservation practices, such as tree planting and soil conservation.

### 7.1 Benefits of Using Cultural Leadership in Tackling Herder-Farmer Crisis:

- **Local Ownership:** Cultural leaders understand local dynamics, ensuring solutions are context-specific.
- **Trust Building:** Leaders can build trust between herders and farmers, tackling the existing tensions between the two groups.
- **Community Buy-in:** Cultural leaders can gather community support for peace initiatives.

### 7.2 Examples of Cultural Leadership:

- Traditional rulers, such as emirs and obas, can play key roles in mediating conflicts and promoting peace (Okoli, 2019).
- Community leaders can facilitate dialogue and promote peaceful coexistence.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) **Empower Cultural Leaders:** Government should provide continuous and effective training and support for cultural leaders to effectively address the crisis.
- 2) **Collaborate with Government:** Cultural leaders should collaborate with government agencies to develop comprehensive and permanent solutions.
- 3) **Community Engagement:** Engage communities in peacebuilding initiatives, leveraging cultural leaders' influence.
- 4) **Provide Adequate Grazing Areas:** Government should provide adequate grazing areas as well as cattle routes in all the farming communities.
- 5) **Collaborate with Community Leaders:** Government should collaborate with community leaders, village heads, and prominent farmers in decision-making.
- 6) **Provide Adequate Water Supply:** Government or relevant agencies should help in providing adequate water supply for farmers and their animals. This would help in reducing farm destruction as well as crisis with the farmers.
- 7) **Develop Inclusive Policies:** Develop inclusive policies that address the root causes of the conflict and promote peaceful coexistence.
- 8) **Provide Support for Conflict-Affected Individuals/Communities:** Provide support for conflict-affected individuals and communities, including rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.
- 9) **Strengthen Institutions:** Strengthen institutions responsible for conflict resolution and management.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The conflicts that emanate from pastoralist and farmer interactions in Nigeria have assumed unprecedented violent dimensions and have far-reaching impacts on the people and the country as a whole. While the policies, interventions, and negligence of colonial and post-colonial administrators, among other factors, have been blamed for instigating and escalating the conflicts, lessons can nonetheless be drawn from the past for transformative solutions. It is imperative that workable measures be put in place by the government to check the conflicts. This can be in the form of a framework for peaceful coexistence between local farming communities and pastoralist groups supported by legislation, such as the traditional Ruga (rural grazing area) administrative system once practiced in the pre-colonial era. However, the lack of efficient social amenities like water supply, good marketing systems, schools, and roads also contributes to community unrest.

The engagement of community leaders and traditional rulers in conflict resolution offers a promising pathway for addressing the herders-farmers crisis in Adamawa State and beyond. By leveraging their influence, cultural knowledge, and trust within their communities, these leaders can facilitate dialogue, build bridges between conflicting groups, and promote sustainable solutions. With the right support from government and other stakeholders, intercultural leadership can play a transformative role in resolving one of Nigeria's most intractable conflicts and ensuring peace, security, and economic sustainability.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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