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Herders-Farmers Conflict: Interrogating the Causes, Dimensions and Dynamics in Northern Tivland of Benue State, 1999-2025

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Abstract

The paper examines the reoccurring causes, changing dimensions and dynamics of the conflict between livestock herders and crops farmers in Northern Tivland of Benue state the conflict escalated into a full-blown armed confrontation. Interactions between the groups has endured for decades, characterized by consensus, compromise and conflicts. However, in the last three decades, in has become increasingly important to reexamine the causes, interrogate the dimensions and dynamics of the conflict as focused researches on this aspect has remained near fallow. This paper therefore, served as a detailed attempt to bridge the gap by interrogating these aspects that have not been sufficiently studied and documented. The study adopted and deployed the historical approach in data gathering, interpretation and presentation. Primary and secondary sources were used. Primary sources were obtained from oral interviews with survivors, community leaders, politicians, youths, women, religious and traditional leaders across the epicenters of the conflict in Benue state particularly the local government areas of Guma, Makurdi, Gwer-East and Gwer-West. Secondary sources included a review of published and unpublished works relevant to the subject matter. Findings revealed that recurrent challenges of open Grazing resulting to encroachment/Destruction of crops, contamination of water sources, hardening of the land and raping of women and girls. It also revealed that criminality and desperation has been the reason for continued cattle rustling, overcharging for destroyed crops, killing of cattle for sale and consumption, maiming/intimidation (using SALWs), advance fee fraud for land allocation and youth involvement as spies and colluders. In a similar vein, acquisition of grazing space, unlawful sale and acquisition of land for grazing as well as questionable social investment in communities by herders have also being one of the major reasons fueling the conflict. the conflict, as revealed by the paper is also fueled by lack of commitment by the government resulting to porous borders which is an opening for free movement of SALW and Mercenaries, near unhindered attacks and reprisals as well as climate change through desert encroachment. Over the past two decades, the paper also revealed that dimensions and dynamics of the herder-farmer conflict has evolved from herders-farmers clashes to genocidal invasion and land grabbing and stakeholders now see it as an opening to anchor their campaigns through politicization of the conflicts instead of providing

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solution. The paper also affirmed the position of imposition of a ban on open grazing to entrench ranches, youth empowerment and inclusive dialogue as the way forward.

Keywords: Harder, Farmer, Conflict, Dimensions and Dynamics

Introduction

Interaction between herders and farmer has been in existence since time immemorial. Across time and space this relation is at times cordial and complimentary, while at other times, the relation is antagonistic and hostile. However, in the contemporary times, population increase coupled with increased farming together with exponential increase in the number of cattle has brought about an unhealthy competition for available arable land between crops cultivators and pastoralists which more often than not, has resulted to violence in many parts of Africa. For instance, in the East African Region for instance, incidences are recorded where nomadic herdsmen had been invading and unleashing mayhem on local farming communities around the Embroi Murtangosi Forest Reserve.[2]

Similarly, in the Central African Region, conflict between sedentary farmers and nomadic cattle breeders have gone beyond national boarders because the migration of Peul Mbororo herdsmen from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Central African Republic (CAR) has recorded more conflict situations than cooperation.[3] Indeed the situation is these region parallels what is obtained in the West African region and Nigeria in particular. In Nigeria, the conflict has been witnessed in several parts of the country. The conflict is most visible in the middle belt region as a result of the good vegetation and the friendly climate. The hotspots of the conflict include Southern Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Nassarawa and Taraba states. This is not to say that other parts of the country have not have their fair share of the conflict. The Eastern and Southern part of the country too has had their fair share of the conflict as there have been series of conflict between farmers and herdsmen in states like Enugu, Delta, Abia, Oyo, Imo, Ondo, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi and Ekiti just to mention but a few.

In the Northern Tivland, herders-farmers have occurred in the following Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue State: Guma, Gwer-West, Makurdi, Gwer-East, Agatu, Logo, Ukum, Katsina-Ala, Tarka, Kwande and Buruku. The particular communities affected are; Mbalom, Mbasombo, Mbaviur communities in Gwer-East Local Government Areas. In Guma LGA which is the epicentre of the conflict in Benue state, the communities affected include; Mbagune, Gbajimba, Tse-Torkula, Mbilawa, Ukpam, Kaseyo, and Umenger just to mention but a few. The conflict has been transforming and evolving from a communal conflict into a very dangerous one as the two groups have resorted

[2]Inter Press Service News Agency, News and Views of the Global South, Thursday, April 21, 2021. Retrieved from http://www.ipsnews.net/africa.aspx Retrieved on Thursday, April 21, 2021

[3]http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/215-the-security-challenges-of-pastoralism-in-central-africa.aspx Retrieved on Thursday, April 21, 2021

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to arming themselves with dangerous and sophisticated weapons to cause maximum damage and carnage.

Scope and Efforts at the Herder-Farmer Quagmire Across the Nation

Since 1999, an unending cycle of violence has continued to characterized relations among the two groups without any solution in sight. Indeed, it was these killings and destruction that a human right activist in Nigeria, Femi Falana out of frustration once threatened that if the Federal Government fails to do the needful by discharging its constitutional duty to stopping the continued killings and destructions of properties caused by the conflict, he will approach the Federal High Court to compel the federal government to act responsibly in the ensuring circumstance.[4] Relatedly, Roger Blench a leading scholar in conflict studies with bias in Herder-Farmer conflict had pointed out that though bloody conflict between farmers and herders are reported in the newspapers almost on a daily basis, no effective action is ever taken by the government to analyse or resolve the quagmire.[5] This also confirmed the concerns expressed by Otegwu Odu on the approach by the Nigerian state in handling conflict within her territorial boarders:

> The history of conflict in Nigeria shows that there has always been a preference for repression i.e. whenever and wherever conflict erupts, the state is always quick to dispatch heavily armed military personnel to the conflict area to quell the crises. Even though government usually resorts to the panel of inquiry to look into the immediate and remote causes of the crises, the reports and subsequent recommendations of such committees never see the light of the day. Hence, governments approach to conflict management in Nigeria can at best be described as palliative. Unaddressed issues always lead to the recurrent and lethal nature of conflict and crises in Nigeria.[6]

It is therefore, obvious that the basis or causes of the conflict is not established by the government or its relevant agencies and that explains why wrong approaches are always adopted. This in part explains why, even though the government and other relevant agencies would sometimes appear to be working hard in resolving this conflict, these efforts normally yield little or no results basically because the right measures and approached are not deployed. This in part, explains why the two groups have resorted to self-help hence the continued circle of violence between them. The scope of the paper is limited to the communities across the LGAs of Gwer-East, Gwer-West, Makurdi, and Guma. The reason behind delimiting the area for the purpose of this study is firstly

[4] *The Nation Newspaper*, (Tuesday, 29th October, 2015), 19
[5] Roger Blench, Conflicts between Pastoralists and Cultivators in Nigeria in: *Reviewed Paper for DFIDNigeria,* Cambridge: Kay Williamson Educational Foundations, (2010), 9
[6]Otegwu Odu, The Nigerian State and the Rise of Radical Islam: Interrogating the Boko Haram Insurgency in: *VUNA: Journal of History and International Relations,* Vol.2, No.1, (June, 2014), 196

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informed by its strategic location as the epicenter of the conflict Benue and second, to have a manageable area to conduct fieldwork in order to gather raw data for the research given the short notice for the presentation. 1999 was carefully chosen as the advent of the paper because it signifies the country's return to civilian democratic rule marking the beginning of the liberalization of the political space with all its attendant challenges.[7]

Causes of the Conflict

Human wants are insatiable and coupled with the fact that resources such as land and water are limited in supply, farmers and herders are in recent times faced with more conflict situations than consensus as they go about their means of livelihood. Perhaps, the accumulation of unresolved misunderstandings, suspicion and government action/inaction has gradually increased the likelihood of aggressive behaviour on both divides. Be that as it may, escalation of the conflict to widespread armed confrontations in Benue state particularly Northern Tivland is in part, as a result of the following reasons/causes.

Recurrent Challenges of Open Grazing

The relationship between herders and farmers in Benue state having become strained, encroachment into farmlands resulting to destruction of crops in recent times is more often than not, greeted with violence than dialogue. Encroachment into farmlands and destruction of crops either deliberately or accidentally has been one of the major reasons/causes of the conflict between farmers and herders escalating to armed confrontation.

Additionally, most rural communities in Northern Tivland depend on stream water for cooking, drinking, washing and bathing while herders also need water for their cattle to survive and in an event where the animals make use of such streams; such communities more often than not react violently because such streams become so contaminated in such a way that it becomes near permanently unclean for human consumption. However, farmers in rural communities cannot phantom the situation of having to share the same water source with the cattle hence, the conflict.

Furthermore, open grazing activities also hardens the land thereby making it near impossible for tillage, especially for the rural farmers who use local implements like the hoe. The farmers in rural communities are therefore not happy over the situation that herders have been bringing upon them – the resultant effect becomes a paranoid attitude towards herders in their midst.[8]

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[7]Mike Odey, "Economic Dimensions of Conflicts in Post-Colonial Nigeria" in: Olayemi Akinwumi et al (eds), *Historical Perspectives on Nigeria's Post-Colonial Conflicts,* Lagos: Unimark Limited for Historical Society of Nigeria, (2007), 249

[8] Timothy Tor, *A History of the Conflict Between Herdsmen and farmers in the Benue Valley, 1999-2018,* Published for Catholic Diocese of Makurdi Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace (FJDP) in collaboration with BSU Centre for Peace and Development Studies by Aboki Publishers Makurdi (2021), 52

Another challenge associated with open grazing since late 90s is that herders rarely carry-out open grazing with their families. They leave their wives, children and siblings behind and most of them are between the ages of 20 and 25 which, connotes that they are sexually active. Meanwhile, there are two challenges to this, firstly, in the event where herdsmen have sexual urge, they usually approach female members of their host communities but due to language barrier (which happens in most cases), they only communicate through gestures (offer to give money to have sex). Sometimes, it is only when such offers are refused or misunderstood that they resort to raping to quench their burning desire for sex. Conversely, there are several stories of instances where herdsmen lay ambush and rape unsuspecting female members of their host communities. However, the youths in their host communities have also raped some female members of the pastoralist's community for revenge. Sexual assault in most cases is a remote cause of the conflict but we cannot dismiss its potential to ignite immediate violence. For instance, on 17th March, 2003, Udoo Gbertyo from Mbadwem in Guma LGA was sexually assaulted on her way from Rukkubi Market and the husband, Kengkeng Gbertyo ambushed the suspected herdsmen that same evening in a bloody encounter, which almost claimed the life of two herdsmen.[9] This is just one amongst many similar instances.

Acquisition of Grazing Space

Acquisition of grazing space is one of the most prominent causes of herders-farmer conflict in the state in the sense that, some Traditional Rulers and other highly placed persons have struck secret deals with herdsmen through their representatives or leaders a deal which grants herders the right to graze in such communities. In a personal interview with the Paramount Ruler of Gwer-West LGC, Chief Daniel Abomtse lamented that greed has made some Traditional Rulers and other highly placed persons to aid and abet the influx of the herders and their cattle into Benue state for pecuniary motives above the carrying capacity of their communities.[10] Three things constitute the challenge here; firstly, the consent of the larger community is not sought in the agreement. Secondly, the beneficiaries of such deals do not own all the land. Finally, herdsmen end up bringing more than the number of herds in the said agreement thereby making matters more complicated even as they (herders) go all out to protect their so-called grazing rights.[11]

Conversely, herders have also made sacrifices and committed huge resources in various communities to win the support and understanding of their host communities in Benue state. They have been able to use informants to identify the needs of their host communities and acted appropriately on the positive. These needs include, funeral expenses, construction of culverts and wooden

[9]Nomshan Kuve, 56, Farmer, Ukpam village, 28-08-2021
[10]Daniel Abomtse, 52, Ter Nagi II, Ter Nagi II Palace, 03-09-2021
[11] Timothy Tor, *A History of the Conflict Between Herdsmen and Farmers in the Benue Valley, 1999-2018,* Published for Catholic Diocese of Makurdi Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace (FJDP) in collaboration with BSU Centre for Peace and Development Studies by Aboki Publishers Makurdi (2021), 56

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bridges, monetary contributions to build healthcare centres, classroom blocks, building of bungalows for some elites in their host communities, donation of vehicles, motor cycles, GSM phones, Wrappers, etc. The Peace Meeting held on 24th February, 2000 at the Palace of the Traditional Ruler of Sengev community in Gwer-West LGA, Zaki Nyege also nicknamed *Sarki Shano* (King of Cow) due to his closeness to herdsmen was so revealing. During the meeting, Alhaji Sani, Alhaji Dooka, Alhaji Mamman and Alhaji Bojua who attended the Peace Meeting in their capacity as Leaders of pastoralists in the various communities variously maintained that they have invested heavily in the wellbeing of their host communities and they cannot be evicted unceremoniously like that there should and must be refund or an alternative arrangement.[12]

Enquiring further what they meant by investing heavily, they revealed many names of the people whom they (herdsmen) have bought motorcycles, cell phones, built houses, paid their hospital bills; paid school fees as well as the names of various communities in their host communities where they have donated money for renovation and construction bridges, schools and healthcare centres; Sani and Muamman particularly went further and boasted of sponsoring some politicians to elective offices in the state.[13] This show of mutual commitment on the part of herdsmen has made them conflict prone at the slightest perceived attempt of eviction by their host communities in Benue state.

Criminality and Desperation

Due to desperation, farmers and herders have engaged themselves in various forms of criminalities to the detriment of each other, which includes cattle rustling, overcharging for destroyed crops, indiscriminate killing of cattle for sale and consumption, intimidation and advance fee fraud. Conversely, a network of cattle rustling believed to be sponsored in the state by abattoir owners have been using people (especially youths) to carry out its operations. It is estimated that herders loose at least one thousand cows annually to cattle rustlers in the area.[14] Meanwhile, even though pastoralists have admitted that their relatives spearhead this criminality; they do not dismiss the fact that their relatives do it in connivance with the youths of their host communities in the state. This alone, has been generating tensions and urge for revenge on the part of the pastoralists.

In recent times, some rural farmers more often than not, overcharge for compensation when their crops are destroyed by cattle and if the herders end up paying, they do so with resentment and at the event where they refused to pay in the circumstance, such farmers feel slighted as well. Equally, herders in their desperation to get Grazing Rights in the communities across Benue state, fall prey to fraudsters who collected huge sums of money from them in the

[12]Ernyi Silas, 50+, Evangelist, Mbadwem community, 30-07-2021| Shimbe Ben, 42, Civil Servant, Sengev community, 08-09-2021| Terhemba Ugbir, 40+, Politician, Udam hamlet, 04-09-2021
[13]Ernyi Silas, 50+, Evangelist, Mbadwem community, 30-07-2021
[14] For obvious reasons, the source for this information is not provided.

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name of allocating grazing land to them. Upon realization that they (nomads) have been swindled, they unleash their aggression to the entire community for revenge.

And finally, in recent times, pastoralists go about with dangerous weapons intimidating rural farmers on their farmlands, encroaching into farmlands with impunity and causing unimaginable damages, sexually assaulting female members of their host communities with impunity, stealing farm produce that are stored up in the farms, etc. However, some of the communities hosting pastoralists have also been organizing raids especially in the night to steal and kill cattle for consumption and sale. The farmers and herdsmen have therefore, perpetrated acts of criminalities against each other which has since become a source of conflict in Benue state.

Needless to say, in most cases, farmers kill cows when they stray into their farmland and destroy their crops. This also aggravate the anger of the herdsmen. However, the insatiable want for beef of some Benue indigenes sometimes pushes them to indiscriminate killing of cows for consumption and/or sale. This singular act is intolerable to herdsmen hence, their violent reaction in most cases. Confirming this notion, Iorwuese Hagher recaptured a statement made during a Tiv-Fulani Peace Meeting in Government House, Makurdi (2012) by Sa□ad Abubakar III in which the Sultan of Sokoto who also doubles as the Patron of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) asserted that the Fulani are trans-border peace-loving people who are so attached to their cattle; they (herdsmen) can kill in order to defend their cattle and are easily provoked because they are courageous fighters who do not easily forgive adversaries.[15] In as much as we should not conclude so soon, the opinion expressed by the Sultan is apt because and it has played out variously in Benue state since the conflict escalated to widespread armed confrontation.

Finally, the relatively rich pastoralists have variously used their financial muscle to win their cases at both community level and the police. This unsatisfactory verdict breeds hatred and urge for revenge on the part of the relatively poor farmers. In addition, illiteracy has made both the farmers and herders prone to violent acts. This is because; any misdemeanour against their only source of livelihood propels their desperation to a violent reaction. This is in part because; uneducated people have fewer opportunities to upward social mobility. In this wise, the herders and farmers have since seen each other as a potential threat to their source of livelihood, which explains in part, their violent behaviour at the slightest provocation.

Lack of Commitment by the Government

The primary constitutional duty of any responsible government is to guarantee the security of lives and properties but this seems not to be the case here because, the porous nature of Nigeria□s borders has been enhancing many heinous and trans-border crimes. For instance, smuggling and proliferation of

[15]Iorwuese Hagher, *Beyond Hate and Violence: Understanding the Tiv Struggle for Citizenship Rights and Social Justice in Nigeria,* Ibadan: Caltop Publishers, (2013), 6

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Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs)[16], transportation of mercenaries from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Libya and others to Nigeria is to a larger extent a dangerous failure on the part of the Federal Government (FG). Needless to say, the FG seems not to understand the magnitude of the armed violence in Benue state. This has in part, dawn on herders and farmers that they have to and must take responsibility for their own security.

Another consequence of the Government insincerity is attacks and reprisal attacks which have since become a major impetus for the escalation of violent armed confrontations. The conflict has become widespread because of certain attacks or reprisal attacks and largely or partly as a result of its magnitude the magnitude of damage and devastation, that has to do with loss of lives and properties. This in part, explains the nature and dimension of the conflict as it relates to government insincerity.

Climate Change

Climate change has been causing the aridization of the far north thereby forcing southward migration of itinerant cattle breeders. Confirming this notion, Sunday Audu maintained that the desert has been advancing 600 meters in about ten northern states, Nigeria land of about 3500 square meters turn to desert every year thereby forcing southward migration of herdsmen and their cattle.[17] Meanwhile, Benue state has not been adversely affected thereby making the area one of the best options for cattle rearing. Chief Daniel Abomtse also argued that every pasture or shrub in Benue state is edible by cattle and still the best in the country.[18] This, coupled with availability of water sources has made herdsmen not wanting to leave even when it appears the whole area is no longer comfortable with their presence and activities.

In additional, due to population growth, there has been an attendant shortage of arable land for farming activities in Benue state. Even the existing portions have become infertile due to continuous usage therefore, having the populations in the rural communities compete for arable land (which is limited in supply), with the supposedly invading cattle breeders in the area has since become a source of conflict in the state.

Activities of Criminal Groups

Pastoralist have been using youths of their host communities the state as spies for financial and other benefits. This has contributed in no small measure to

[16] Elijah Ikpanor and Timothy Tor, *Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons Factor in Herders-Farmers Conflicts in Benue and Nasarawa States, 2010-2019,* Published for Catholic Diocese of Makurdi Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace (FJDP) in collaboration with BSU Centre for Peace and Development Studies by Aboki Publishers Makurdi (2021), 26

[17]Sunday Audu, Freshwater Scarcity: A Threat to Peaceful Co-existence between Farmers and Pastoralists in Northern Nigeria in: *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol.3, No.1, (2014), 245

[18]Daniel Abomtse, 52, Ter Nagi II, Ter Nagi II Palace, 03-09-2021

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heighten tensions between the two groups because such spies leak or reveal very damaging information to the herdsmen such as level of preparedness of their communities for defense or attack, names of strong opinion leaders or warriors who herdsmen should bribe for support or subdue to achieve their aims, the kind of charms that their people possess, time and place of attacks or reprisal attacks, etc.[19]

However, available evidence during data gathering for this research revealed that some youths after collecting huge sums of money from herdsmen, serve as informants or spies against the herdsmen. These set of youths spy on herders and leak vital information to farmers as well as to cattle rustlers. This, in part, helps their communities better prepare for eventualities as well as cattle rustlers strategize more efficiently to carry out their criminality in such communities. On the part of their communities, they do it to help save their communities from total annihilation while on the part of cattle rustlers; such informants perpetrate this act for financial benefits. Spies have aggravated conflicts on both sides through their activities.

Dimensions and Dynamics

Since the conflict escalated to full blown armed confrontations, the modus operandi has continued to evolve and in the opinion of the current paper, HRM Orchivirigh Professor James Iorzua Ayatse, Tor Tiv V was unequivocally clear when he addressed the President and Commander-in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Bola Tinubu during his condolence visit to the state at the wake of massacre of over 200 persons in Yelwata, Guma LGA believed to have been carried out by herdsmen. The paper shall therefore, only dwell on parts of the Speech text that aligns with the present conversation. It reads in part:

> We do have a grave concern with the misinformation and misrepresentation of the security crisis in Benue State. Mr President, it is not herders-farmers clashes, it is not communal clashes, it is not reprisal attack. It is this misinformation that has led to suggestions such as, remain tolerant, negotiate for peace, learn to live with your neighbours. What we are dealing with here in Benue State is a calculated, well-planned and full-scale genocidal invasion and land grabbing campaign by herder terrorists and bandits. This has been on for decades and it's worsening every year. Wrong diagnosis will lead to wrong treatment. We are dealing with something far more sinister than we think about. It is not learning to live with your neighbours it is dealing with the war.

[19]Nomshan Kuve, 56, Farmer, Ukpam village, 28-08-2021| Ernyi Silas, 50+, Evangelist, Mbadwem community, 30-07-2021| Shimbe Ben, 42, Civil Servant, Sengev community, 08-09-2021| Terhemba Ugbir, 40+, Politician, Udam hamlet, 04-09-2021

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On the part of the herders, the Paramount Ruler of the Tiv nation was emphatic without mincing words as he explained efforts at concealing the conflict with the aim of justifying government's action/inaction which, has yielded little or no results in terms of addressing the conflict. The His Royal Majesty (HRM) further exposed what the present study termed the enemies within who have continued to politicize the conflict in order to score cheat political goals at the expense of the lives of the Benue people. According to the Tor Tiv V:

> The second apprehension we have, Your Excellency, it is the politicization of the crisis. Politicians in the state are busy politicizing the crisis, passing blames instead of joining hands to fight the crisis. We heard that there are some politicians who would even prefer that the crisis will worsen so that it will be a basis for the declaration of a state of emergency in Benue State. Your Excellency, this is unfortunate, and any politician that prays for more people to die, is against the wishes of the people of Benue State. Benue State has made a lot of sacrifices to keep this country united. Many of our people died during the Nigerian civil war. We paid the supreme price to keep this country united. Why should we be treated like this? What you have come to condole is just one of the series of several massacres in the state. What has Benue State done to merit what we are going through? We appeal to you to end the genocide going on in Benue State and the insecurity in all parts of Nigeria. We know you are capable of doing this Sir.[20]

From the foregoing, it has become necessary to first of all, acknowledge the complexity of the herder-farmer conflict in Benue state with the aim of understanding its actual phase or and state because the indices has clearly changed. By so doing, better approaches will be deployed towards finding short term ad long term solutions. It is also important, based on the modus operandi of the issues involved in the conflict in the state to begin a thorough search on the actual nomenclature of the situation which has resulted to displacements, mutual suspicion and land grabbing. Only then we will be on the right path to providing solutions instead of unending rhetoric.

Concluding Remarks

It has been established that the conflict is driven by a complex mix of governance failures and increasing criminality. Lack of sustained government commitment to reaching common grounds for both parties, the unlawful acquisition and sale of grazing spaces, and the persistent encroachment and destruction of farmlands. Added to these are the rising incidents of cattle rustling and the pervasive effects of climate change, which continue to strain

[20] Speech by HRM Orchivirigh Prof James Iorzua Ayatse, Tor Tiv V during the condolence visit of President Bola Tinubu at the wake of Yelwata Herdsmen attack. Accessed on 11th November, 2025 through the following link https://dailypost.ng/2025/06/18/benue-security-crisis-politicized-tor-tiv-opens-up-to-president-tinubu-full-speech/

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already limited arable land and grazing resources. Together, these factors intensify competition, deepen mistrust, and create fertile ground for sustained armed confrontation.

The dimensions and dynamics of the conflict reveal an alarming shift in both tactics and motivations. Attacks increasingly occur at night and are directed not only at farms or farmers but also at homes, market squares, and schools; spaces hitherto considered safe. This expansion of targets reflects a conflict that has grown more unpredictable and more devastating in its human and economic impact. More disturbing is the emerging trend of land grabbing, where violent displacement is used as a strategy to occupy land, further entrenching the conflict and undermining social cohesion.

Going forward, addressing the herder-farmer conflict in the state requires a comprehensive and sustained approach. Government must demonstrate genuine commitment by enforcing the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) and punish offenders. Entrench community policing, intelligence gathering, and rapid-response mechanisms to deter night attacks and protect vulnerable settlements. Finally, inclusive dialogue platforms, peacebuilding programs, and the revival of traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms can help rebuild trust between herders and farmers. If these interventions are pursued with consistency, transparency, and collaboration from all stakeholders, Benue State can break the cycle of violence and move toward a future where land, livelihoods, and lives are safeguarded.

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