

AGRO – PASTORALIST CONFLICTS IN BENUE STATE NIGERIA: HAZARDS AND IMPERATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT

In recent times the relationship between agro-farmers and pastoralists have taking a twist from what existed decades ago were the droplets from herds served as manure for crops and were the later provided food for the herds. That twist which is informed by the competition and struggle over ecological scarce resources for survival by the two groups has contravened certain fundamental human rights provisions which needed to be promoted, preserved and protected. Relying on qualitative analytical methodology anchored on eco-violence orientation, the paper observed that the situation has been characterized by killings of farmers and pastoralists, clashes between public and private security forces and local militias resulting in deaths also, destruction of farmlands and farm produce as well as displacement of citizens from their homelands and exposing them to sever lack of basic necessities for survival – adequate shelter, food, water, healthcare, sanitary conditions and human rights abuse – with women and children being the most vulnerable. This paper submits that the conflict situation is inimical to the protection of the inalienable rights of the citizens of Benue State and therefore calls on governments at all levels including community based organization, civil society organizations, the International community and well spirited individuals to initiate and implement appropriate laws, peacebuilding and human rights protection strategies, that will bring about sustainable peace and protection of the remaining lives of the citizens of Benue State and other States in North Central Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict, Resource Conflict, Agro-farmers-Herders, Human Rights, Peace building, Development.

Introduction

Conflict is inherent in every society and this occurs as a result of differences in opinion, views and sentiments; and has been pivotal to social engineering and development. In fact any society that has not experience conflict situations does not seem to be a normal society. Conflict is not evil or essentially dangerous or an isolated event and also not the fault of one party, but a natural, inevitable, necessary and normal phenomenon (Mavalla, 2016; Mayer, 2000). In explaining the positiveness of conflict, Reychler (2001) contends that it “acts as a

strong motivation for modernization such as leading people to scientific discoveries that are positive to human development.” Conflict becomes negative when it results in quarrel, fighting, sever anger, aggression, violence and bloodshed; involving the use of arrows, knives, cutlasses, guns, missiles, bombs, leading to loss of life and property (Dzurgba, 2010).

Indisputably, conflicts occur in every social interaction between individuals and groups in a given society. But violent conflicts are outcomes of specific situations that individuals or groups find themselves in their struggle for survival and continuity. The conflicts involving the farmers and herders in the Benue belt are violent in nature. According to Ugwumba (2018), struggle over grazing land and scarce resources have over the years resulted in perennial and growing violent conflicts in terms of frequency, intensity and geographic scope. The competition between the farmers and herders has been over the use of land and water resources for survival. Ahmadu (2011) and Muhammed, Ismaila & Bibi (2015) observed that the population of the country is rapidly increasing and at the same time, there is massive movement of farmers into new migrants farmers syndrome. This has eaten deep into statutorily and customarily reserved grazing lands, water points and stock routes for herders; now herders and their herds are seen on high-ways posing a risk to the herds and road users.

Historically, there are indications that the farmers and herders have had a symbiotic relationship for decades co-existing for mutual survival. The majority of the populations in Benue are predominantly Christian farmers who are considered as indigenes, while the herders who are minority Fulani Muslims are considered non-indigenes. These two communities have been farming and rearing cattle in Nigeria for centuries, benefiting from mutually beneficial relationships – farmers benefit from cattle manure to fertilize their crops and herders benefit from crop refuse to nutritionally feed their herds. This symbiotic practice tied the wellbeing of the farmer to the wellbeing of the herder and allowed for most disputes between the two groups to be resolved non-violently, through traditional mediation mechanisms (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017).

Awogbade (1987) reveals that in 1965, the Northern Region Government indicated an interest in establishing land rights for cattle rearers because they did not (and still do not) have right to land even though at the time, they controlled over 90% of national herd. On that premise, one parcel of land measuring about 121,762 hectares in Ruma-Kukar-Jangari in Kaduna State, was acquired. The land received significant investment on demarcation, fire protection and water development. In 1976, under the auspices of the National Livestock Project Department, six grazing reserves were established at Kachia and Kukar-Jangari (Kaduna State), Gujba (Bornu), Udobo (Bauchi) and Garkida and Sorau (Gongola). These reserves were provided with physical infrastructure, access roads, fire-breaks, water and pasture development. Adeoye (2017) further reveals that Nigeria officially has 415 grazing reserves, but only one-third is being use while the remaining 270 have been built on or farmed, and this is one of the triggers of the agro-pastoralist conflict in Benue State. Under the grazing reserve system, government provided space, water and vaccinations for the livestock while the herdsman reciprocated by paying taxes to the government. But the discovery of oil in commercial quantity and subsequent exploration and export made Nigeria an oil economy, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, the grazing reserve system was abandoned due to the neglect of the agricultural sector as the mainstay of the country's economy. Ake (1981)

observed that Agriculture was once hugelocal and foreign earnings for Nigeria, with large exportation of cocoa, cotton, groundnuts, etc.

Recently, environmental and sociological dynamics – climate change, shrinking natural resources (especially around the Lake Chad basin and other parts of North Africa), desertification, rapid urbanization, industrialization, political manipulations – alongside the complexities of poverty, unemployment and reduced livelihood opportunities have deepened the confrontations between the two communities and have defined the interactions between them. Since 2014, the violence between the herders and farmers has escalated, and what hitherto were unplanned attacks have become deliberate and calculated campaigns in which marauders have taken over villages by surprise at night. This has resulted in deaths of scores of people, raping of girls and women, and the burning of villages and farms (see table 1). Benue State has been mostly hit in the violence (Osumah, 2018).

Conceptual Clarifications

Resource Conflict

Conflicts involve a tussle over values and claims to scarce resource, status and power, in which the intentions of the parties are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate every form of opposition. Resource conflict has to do with discontent about equity and justice in the distribution of the benefits and costs of resource exploitation, mis-governance in resource management, and the associated issues of deprivation, exclusion, marginalization and neglect in developmental infrastructure (DappaTamuno-Omi, Nebeife & Onwuanibe, 2020; Ikelegbe, 2010). The conflicts between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Benue State, North Central Nigeria can simply be described as resource conflict. Examples of other resource-induced conflicts are those found in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, with devastated impacts on the environment, economy, social and public health of the people of the area (Osah, Ogundiwin & Eti, 2017; Bello & Olukolajo, 2016). While the source of the conflict may be struggle over land and water resources, associated factors which political, social, economic or religious have characterized the conflicts in which the individuals in conflict must expressly fight for their position within society.

Human Rights

Human rights are referred to as legal rights. They are fundamental natural and inalienable rights that are supported by law and mainly directed towards providing a minimum standard of decent living worthy of man as a human being (never as an animal). They constitute peoples' freedom to live a life of dignity and peace and should be enjoyed by all human beings irrespective of colour, status, race, religion or sex. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, lists these rights as;

right to life, right to dignity of human person, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to private and family life, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to freedom of expression and the press, right to peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of movement, right to freedom from discrimination and right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria (The Constitution of the FRN, 1999:34 – 42).

There is need for all societies to develop a cultural consciousness of human rights. By this, human rights should become a cultural value that is immersed into spirit of every society, which is viewed from a collective responsibility point of view. This is will embolden every human being to respect the other and not treat them as non-humans.

Peacebuilding

DappaTamuno-Omi, Nebeife&Onwuanibe (2020) assert that peacebuilding has to do with measures of preventing violent conflict and promoting lasting and sustainable peace. It entails providing tools for resolving conflict without resorting to deadly violence. Peacebuilding implies mechanisms for achieving durable peace; reconciling opponents; preventing conflict from restarting and addressing underlying structural and societal issues. For this paper, peacebuilding demands efforts to manage, mitigate, resolve and transform central aspects of the conflict through diplomatic and informal dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. It involves efforts aimed at addressing environmental, economic, social and political root causes of violence in order to foster reconciliation and prevent return of violence.

Theoretical Underpinning – Eco-violence Theory

This paper adopts the theoretical framework of *eco-violence*. It is an emerging theory that explains the causal relationship between ecological factors and violent conflict. The theory propounded by Homer-Dixon (1999) states that:

Decline in the quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and resource access; act alone or in various combinations to escalate the scarcity (for certain population groups) of cropland, water, forests, and fish. This can shrink economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. The affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999:30).

The assumption of this theory is that struggle over limited environmental resources causes conflict, more specifically violent conflict. Ikelegbe (2010) expands this view by adding that “poor governance, economic decline, disparities in opportunities and access to resources, state repression, socio-economic inequalities among groups, low education and low income levels, social service decay, huge unemployment and deep poverty are associated with social uprisings, political tensions, civil unrests and intra-state conflicts”. These are evident in resource rich regions of the world.

Eco-violence theory therefore applies to the present study by offering insights into the nature and dynamics of the agro/pastoralist conflict in Nigeria and particularly so in Benue State. In this regard, it is observed that the conflicts have been driven by the desperation of the affected groups to protect and advance their livelihood interests in the context of an ever shrinking ecological space, characterized by resource-scarcity, livelihood crisis, population explosion, and resource competition (Al Chukwuma & Atelhe, 2014).

Nature and Dynamics of the Conflict in the Benue Belt

Benue State was created in 1976 by the government of General Murtala Mohammed. It is located in the middle belt zone (north central Nigeria). Benue State is bordered by Nassarawa to the north; Taraba to the east; Cross River to the south; Enugu and Ebonyi to the south-east and Kogi to the south-west. The state also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon on the south-east. Benue state lays between latitude 60 1/2 north and longitude 7 1/20 - 100 east. The the state has a total population of 4,219,244 spread across the 23 local government areas which include: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya with Makurdi as the state capital. the state has a multi ethnic configuration which comprise the Tiv, IdomaIgede, Etulo, Abakpa (Abakwariga), Jukun, Hausa, Akweya and Nyifon, withthe Tivbeing the foremostethnic group accounting for over half of the entire population (Ikoyiove, 2019; Lyam, 2005; NPC, 2006 &Shaminja, &Orkar, 2016).

Benue State is regarded as the 'food basket of the nation'. It is an agrarian state because of its fertile soil and this makes agriculture very important for their livelihood and survival, even though they also engage in fishing as secondary occupation especially for the population who reside in the riverine areas. Although the state produces many crops such as; yam, cassava, rice, fish, sugar cane, maize, beans, potatoes, soybeans, sorghum, millet and cocoyam, but yam is the main food they produce and is available for consumption and market, especially during the harvesting season. Yam plays a crucial role in the social-cultural and economic wellbeing of thousands of the people not just in Benue alone, but all over Nigeria and elsewhere in the world (Ikoyiove, 2019 &Verter&Becvarova, 2014). Suffice it to say that the yam farmers in Benue state have suffered most human rights violations – loss of live and livelihood.

The fertility of Benue State inevitably attracted Fulani herdsmen to the state; and due to the peculiarity of the activities of these herdsmen, they move from one place to another in search of pasture. In this process, they frequently trespass farmlands owned by locals in their host communities, destroying crops and valuables. Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured and killed, while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking advantage of the opportunities to steal, rape, burn houses and kill innocent people of the communities they pass through (Akinkuolie, 2018; Blench, 1984 & World Bank, 1989).The herdsmen were perhaps more security conscious than the farmers. More than the farmers, herdsmen 'prepared for the worst', 'tightened security', and 'used charms' (Adisa, 2012). This view is also corroborated by Adeoye (2017) when he asserted that a combination of charms, spears, swords and guns are mostly used during the confrontations.

So, the farmers lament about the wanton ravaging of their lands as it destroys of their source of livelihood. In February 2018, as a result of a clash between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State, 40 people were killed, about 2,000 displaced and not less than 100 were seriously injured. Over the last 2 years, more than 92 Nigerians were massacred by suspected Fulani Herdsmen in Benue and Niger states. Before this time, there have been reported attacks by the Fulani Herdsmen in southern states of Nigeria, including Enugu, Ekiti and Ondo States (Daniels, 2006).Unfortunately, between September 2017 and June 2018 the Nigerian herders and farmers conflict have resulted in the death of over 1500 people, and the displacement of

over 300,000 people who are now living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in various camps, settlements and communities. These Internally Displaced Persons camps are in deplorable conditions, with women and children suffering severely from a lack of basic necessities for survival – adequate shelter, food, water, healthcare and human rights abuse.

In April 2018 at least seven children were said to have died from an outbreak of measles at the Abagena camp, Markudi, and some others have been reported to have died of malaria and diarrhea (International Crisis group, 2017). According to the International Crisis Group, in 2018 the conflict between herders and farmers was six times deadlier than Boko Haram, with a death toll of 1,949, almost double than what it was the year before (ICG, 2018).

Ayih (2003) have identified four crucial factors which tend to be driving the conflict situation these factors include,

- i. population explosion,
- ii. desertification of the (northern) region;
- iii. indigenization of the nomadic grazing communities;
- iv. legalization of farming or grazing rights (through land use laws/legislation);
- v. the rise in indiscipline and crime wave.
- vi. politicization of native/nomad differences through mobilization of clannish, ethnic, religious, or other primordial sentiments;

The abovementioned factors are inter-twined to some extent. For instance, the factor of desertification of the northern ecological belt aligns with that of population explosion (as a result of influx of migrant farmers/herders) to create a condition of land scarcity and hunger. Also, indigenization of herding communities correlates with legalization of farming/grazing rights to stimulate land (ownership) disputes. The whole variables interact to produce the wave of rising conflicts and contestations between the farming and herding communities.

Given that the conflict in the Benue belt is clash over land use and water resources, it must be noted clearly, fresh escalation is the result of three more immediate developments: the rise of militias, the persistence of impunity and the passage of grazing bans that are anathema to herders (International Crisis Group, 2018). Again, recent developments have exposed the culpability of politico-primordial variables in influencing the conflict. In this regard, the politicization of the already conflictive farmer/herder relations in that context has contributed in complicating the situation. This politicization is achieved through subtle mobilization of clannish, ethnic, religious, and other parochial sentiments in prosecuting group struggles (Adogi, 2013). This view has been concisely clarified by Nchi (2013) that:

...the parties in a conflict may be carrying or expressing different religious identities. A simple argument between a Fulani-herdsman and a farmer from a community that is predominantly Christian over land, for example, may take a tenor of a sectarian crisis since the Fulani herdsman almost always is a Muslim.

Table 1: Incidence of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Benue State 2016 – 2020

S/N	Place	Date	Immediate Cause (s)	Death toll/Casualties/Degree of Destruction
A	Year 2016			
1	Agatu,	February 2	Reprisal attack	7 people were killed and the community was thrown into mourning
2	Tom-Anyiin and Tom-Ataan communities, Tombu in Buruku LGA	February 7	Clash between Fulani herdsmen and farmers	10 persons were killed and the community was raided
3	Agatu	February 24 & 28		Some people were wounded and residents were forced to flee their homes as houses were destroyed
4	Mbaya-Tombo	March 7,8 13 & 17	Dispute and destruction of farm crops	Over 35 persons died and properties were destroyed.
5	Agatu	April 20	Policemen attacked	Some persons were injured and a policeman was declared missing.
B	Year 2017			
6	Ipiga village in Ohimini LGA	January 24	Grazed cattle and destroyed farmlands	15 persons were killed. A bloody fight that took the lives of two of the herdsmen and about 13 of the villagers.
7	Mbahimin community, Gwer East LGA	March 2	Renewed hostilities between herdsmen and farmers in Mbahimin community	No fewer than 10 persons were killed.
8	Tiv community, Mkgovur village in Buruku LGA	March 11		7 people were killed.
9	Adam Village, Kwande LGA	March 27	Herdsmen farm attack	1 killed, 1 injured, women raped in their farms.
10	Tse-Akaa village, Ugondo Mbamar District of Logo LGA	May 8	Clash with herdsmen	3 persons were killed.
C	Year 2018			
11	Logo and Guma LGAs	January 1-7	Attacks on Farm lands	Over 80 people were killed
12	Benue	February 10	Herdsmen ambush Police officers	2 Police Officers killed
13	Omosu-Okana Villages in Okpokwu LGA	March 5	Herdsmen reprisal attack	24 persons killed, many wounded and many missing

14	St. Ignatius Quasi Parish Ukpom-Mbalom in Ayar-Mbalom Community, Gwer-East LGA	April 24	Herdsmen attacked Church	2 Catholic Priests and 17 worshippers killed. Over 100 houses burnt down and people displaced
15	Tse Shan, Tse Nyamkyume in Saghev, Guma LGA and Tse Ngo Jov Tombo Logo LGA	June 6	Herdsmen attack on civilians	9 Persons killed, over 45 houses set ablaze and several persons missing
16	Katsina-Ala LGA	August 8	Attack against civilians	
17	Yogbo village in Guma LGA	October 26	Herdsmen attack on returning IDPs	3 persons killed, several others displaced from their homes
D	Year 2019			
18	Tom-Atar in Guma LGA	February 4	Armed Clash between Military Forces and Herdsmen	3 persons killed
19	Makurdi in Makurdi LGA	February 20	Armed Clash between Military Forces and Herdsmen	2 persons killed and burnt
20	Gbajimba in Guma LGA	February 22	Herdsmen attack against civilians	2 persons killed and several others missing
21	Agagbe in Gwer West LGA	March 2	Herdsmen attack against civilians	16 Farmers were killed
22	Gbajimba in Guma LGA	March 19	Herdsmen attack against civilians	10 persons killed
23	Gaambetiev in Logo LGA	April 2	Herdsmen attack against civilians	5 persons killed
24	Kwande in Kwande LGA	April 16	Herdsmen attack against civilians	
25	Gbajimba Village in Guma LGA	October 13	Herdsmen attack women	Cut off the arm of woman attacked
E	Year 2020			
26	Igumale in Ado LGA	January 29	Herdsmen attack on civilians	1person killed, 1 person abducted
27	Gbajimba in Guma LGA	February 24	Herdsmen attack on civilians	Injured many and displace many others
28	Waya in Kwande LGA	March 3	Herdsmen attack on civilians	4 persons killed and several others missing
29	Chongu, Tyohambe & Ayeve	March 13	Herdsmen attack on civilians	3, 2 & 5 persons killed respectively and several others injured

	communities in Guma LGA			
30	Makurdi in Makurdi LGA	April 16	Herdsmen attack on Farmers	1 Farmer killed, several others injured
31	Agasha village in Guma LGA	May 13	Herdsmen attack community	2 people killed
32	Ayilamo in Logo LGA	July 6	Armed clash between herdsmen and private security guards	2 people killed
33	Chambe village in Logo LGA	July 10	Herdsmen attack on community	2 persons killed
34	Tse Apera village in Guma LGA	September 20	Herdsmen attack on community	2 persons killed and 5 injured
35	Tor Donga in Katsina-Ala LGA	December 19	Armed clash	
36	Logo LGA	December 21	Herdsmen attack on farmers	4 persons killed
37	Gwer West LGA	December 24	Attack on community	

Source: Authors' compilation from different sources, 2020.

Linking Human Rights to the Discourse

Human rights at both global and local law constitute a category of rights that are intricately derived from being a human being. In this sense, these rights are not outcome of legislations; rather they are rights that have accrued from the basic needs of man as human. It would appear as though certain rights are very essential and that is because of the high premium that is placed on them. Such rights include; right to life, right to dignity of human person, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to private and family life, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to freedom of movement. These rights are neither borne out of contract as espoused in the Hobbesian conception of rights, nor are they creation of the state. They are innate to the nature of humanity, so intrinsically knitted as part of humanity that they have been recognized as non-negotiable norms. Nigeria and other countries of America, Canada, India, Ghana and Israel have domesticated several of such human rights provisions as part of their local laws (Adam, Osah, & Alao, 2019). This study believes that the Agro-Pastoralist conflicts in Benue State have grossly violated several of such guaranteed rights. Some of the violated rights are examined below;

Right to life

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) provides that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” The right to life refers to a moral principle based on the belief that every human being has the inalienable right to live and should not be killed by another person or entity including the government(s). This also follows from one of the commandments in the Holy Book which say “Thou shall not kill”, (Exodus 20:13). Some of the gravest violations of the right to life are massacres, the starvation of entire populations, and genocide. So far, Benue State has witnessed a high level of massacre suffered by farmers

and herders. But the farmers have been the most hit. International Crisis Group (2017) reports that more than 14,000 people have lost their lives as a result of the herders-farmers' conflict and clashes between public and private security forces and other local militias in Benue State since the onset of the violent conflict in the State and other parts of the North Central.

Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, Environment and Health

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 provides that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." Sources of livelihood have been destroyed as a result of the conflict in the State. Subsistence and commercial farm products and cattle have been destroyed. Several persons have been displaced, with women and children exposed to inadequate food and shelter and rape and at risk of communicable diseases arising from poor sanitary conditions. About 176,000 persons are displaced, out of which several children died from an outbreak of measles at the Abagena IDP camp in Makurdi, and several others dying of malaria and diarrhea (ICG 2018).

Right to Education

Article 26 of the UDHR of 1948 states that "Everyone has the right to education." And ever since then, the right to education has been reaffirmed in numerous international treaties including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Children's education has also been badly hurt according to International Crisis Group (2018). In April of 2018, the Executive Secretary of the Benue State Teaching Service Board, reported that persistent violent conflict between the farmers and herders have forced about 300,000 children out of school; and 12 out of the State's 24 nomadic schools (special schools for pastoralist children) were shut down. The distortion of education is also caused by the rate of displacement caused by the crisis as many parents are left without jobs and relying on the benevolence of humanitarian assistance.

Right to Live Free from Torture and Intimidation

In 1984 the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT) was adopted for the purpose of preventing torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the globe. Torture can either be physical or psychological, and aims at the humiliation or annihilation of the dignity of the person. Physical torture might include mutilation, beatings, and electric shocks to the body while in psychological torture, people are sometimes deprived of food and water for long periods, kept standing upright for hours, deprived of sleep, or tormented by high-level noise. There were incidences of torture reported in the several communities in Benue State by both the Nigerian Army and the Fulani pastoralist on farmers. There were gory sites of beheaded person, some had their arms and legs amputated and others had their bodies lacerated with machetes. Amnesty International (2018) reports that the Nigeria military carried out acts of torture on villagers across the communities in Benue State. A 28-year-old farmer and resident of Kwesati narrated his ordeal with soldiers when they came into his home. The man stated:

"I heard a knock at my door at around 3am and when I asked who it was, they said they were soldiers. So, I opened the door and they entered, searched the house and took me to where they parked their vehicles in the market square. They then asked me to bring out the gun I had, but I said I had no gun. They started to beat me. They told me to lie on the ground and one of them stepped on my back with his boots. They used a whip, stick, belt to beat me. As they were beating me, they kept asking for the gun and I kept saying I had no gun"

It should be noted that there are several more incidences of human rights violations on the account of the agro-pastoralist conflicts in Benue State. These rights are not conditional and negotiable and so it behooves on state managers to demonstrate capacity to bring these human right violations to an end.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

It is clear that human rights violations still persist in Nigeria especially in Benue State despite human rights laws. These rights have been violated with alarming frequency and without any justification or accountability. These violations have been majorly as a result of the farmers-herders conflict which is over scarce ecological resources; and has led to the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of millions, including the shutting down of schools and exposing citizens to unfavourable health conditions.

There is therefore the need for governments at all levels including community based organizations, civil society organizations, the International community and well spirited individuals to initiate and implement appropriate laws, peacebuilding and human rights protection strategies, that will bring about sustainable peace and protection of the remaining lives of the citizens of Benue State and other States in North Central Nigeria. In doing this, peace and conflict resolution experts should be employed in dealing with issues concerning herdsmen-farmer crises. This will enable effective dialogues, negotiations and of course a win-win resolution, while encouraging early warning mechanism. This is to prevent any further violent conflict between farmers and herders from erupting and leading to killings, restriction of people's movement, close down of schools, destruction of property etc. which are violations of the right to life, freedom of movement, right to education, right to security and dignity of life and right to own property.

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