

THE WORLD NEWS II

Lost innocence: Katsina Fulani now sleep with one eye open

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Fulani settlements in Katsina have come under attack by heavily armed men who make away with women and cattle. Our correspondent visited some of the settlements and reports on the anxiety and other challenges facing the Fulani in Katsina.

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'Life is becoming unbearable for the Fulanis in some parts of Katsina State.' This is the assertion of a Fulani leader in Guzurawa village of Safana Local Government Area, Alhaji Idi Mai-Saja Guzurawa. "Our wives and daughters are being raped in our presence by gunmen. They sometimes kidnap our wives and daughters after raping them," he further told Sunday Trust.

Alhaji Idi Guzurawa added that the Fulani in the state had lost thousands of cattle, sheep and goats worth millions of naira to gunmen, who usually storm and attack their villages in their dozens with sophisticated weapons.

"About 40 to 50 gunmen could storm a village with guns, attack and rob the peasants and just disappear. They have killed and injured many Fulanis in the state. In fact, the Fulani now sleep with only one eye closed in their respective villages for fear of unexpected attacks by the gunmen," he said.

He lamented that the frequency of the attacks is worrisome, stressing that life has not been easy for the over 1, 000 Fulani that are residing in Guzurawa village. Guzurawa explained that about three days ago, the gunmen captured a woman and about 200 cattle in a nearby village called Kafai.

"Once they admire your wife or daughter, that is the beginning of trouble because after they have selected the cattle they want, they will just bolt with your wife or daughter," he added.

He said that recently, some gunmen killed a Fulani man in Batsari and went away with his wife and cattle. He said that if not because the robbers were armed; they would not dare to attack the Fulani, as according to him, the Fulani would have repelled their attack no matter.

Asked whether they have lodged complaints to the police or traditional rulers, Guzurawa said, "We have lodged several complaints to the police and traditional rulers, but nothing has been done so far. The gunmen still attack us from time to time."

"From our findings, some of these robbers are residents of this area," he revealed.

Our reporter who visited some Fulani communities in Batsari Local Government found out that the Fulani in those areas are facing similar challenges. "Early this year, about 40 gunmen stormed a village, Tashar-Modibbo at 2am, killing one person and injuring another before carting away 21 cattle, a resident of the area" Da'u Lawal said.

Lawal said the injured person was lucky to have been rushed to a hospital where he was treated and discharged the next day. "Residents of the area have embarked on fervent prayers against future occurrences of such incidents, and since then it has not happened," he added.

Alhaji Salihu Modibbo, a Fulani leader in Tashar-Modibbo told Sunday Trust that the major problem in the village is armed robbery. He said some gunmen have been terrorising them for many years, adding that animals worth millions of naira have been stolen by the gunmen.

He therefore appealed to the government to address the issue of armed robbery in the area. He also emphasised the need to provide adequate grazing sites and water ponds for animals in the area, because according to him, the Fulani need more grazing sites and water ponds for their animals.

In Galadima village, also in Batsari Local Government Area, a borehole constructed by the former Minister of Agriculture, Alhaji Abba Sayyadi Ruma, has remained a source of conflict, Sunday Trust gathered. The entire community relies on the borehole as a source of water for people and animals. A resident of the area, Malam Sama'ila Sani confirmed that many Fulani in the area had, on several occasions, fought over the borehole. Sani, who is the custodian of the borehole and a grazing site adjacent it, said he had quarreled with so many herdsman over the use of the borehole.

Sunday Trust gathered that recently, Galadima's brother, Malam Ahmadu, was accused of masterminding the murder of one Alhaji Yusuf Na-Hamidu. Narrating the incident, Ahmadu's mother, Malama Laraba said he was nearly killed over this issue.

"My son Ahmadu was arrested by the police for an alleged involvement in the killing of Alhaji Yusuf, but because he was innocent he was later released even though he was seriously beaten by the police."

Sunday Trust observed that the former Minister of Agriculture, Alhaji Abba Sayyadi Ruma, had drilled about 20 solar boreholes across the state and established some grazing sites in the state. The former minister also constructed five milk processing centres in the state. While the boreholes and the grazing sites are serving the purposes they were meant for,

the milk processing centres were not put into use by the Katsina State Government after it was taken over from the Federal Government, our reporter gathered.

According to Galadima, the grazing sites and solar boreholes are greatly helping the Fulani in the area. He therefore appealed to the Katsina State Government to establish more of such facilities, saying that villages around Galadima are expanding, hence the increasing demand.

Galadima said: "We need at least two additional grazing sites here, a school and three more boreholes because all the surrounding villages depend on these facilities for their survival and the survival of their animals. The Fulani from far and near come here to fetch water and feed their animals."

Similar challenges were also noticed in Funtua zone. The Fulani are migrating to major towns like Faskari, Malumfashi, Funtua and Bakori because of the increasing cases of armed robbery. Recently, some Fulani from Fankama, Zamfarawa, Unguwar-Tsamiya and Unguwar Mai-Goro villages, migrated to Faskari town due to the increasing rate of armed robbery in the respective villages.

A resident of Unguwar-Tsamiya, Aliyu Muhammad told Sunday Trust that the robbers had carted away hundreds of cattle, sheep and goats as well as raped many women. "They usually come on bikes and with dangerous weapons. They usually rape our wives and daughters and cart away cattle, GSM phones, money and other valuables at gunpoint," he said. Also, in Barebari village in Funtua Local Government, cases of animal theft are on the increase. A resident, Aminu Isa told Sunday Trust, "Even last week Monday, about 30 cattle had passed through this village, with four people following them; but three hours after we received a call from the neighbouring village that the animals were stolen from some Fulani herdsmen. But because the thieves had guns we could not go after them."

"The trend is portending serious danger. You can imagine a Fulani man that has over 100 cattle being left with none. How can he continue in life? I am sure that he would join a group of armed robbers if he sees the opportunity," he lamented. However, it was observed that there is less conflict between the Fulani and farmers in the state.

Why Katsina records less Fulani/farmers conflict: A section of the Fulani interviewed by this reporter revealed that Katsina State is recording less Fulani/farmers clash because the state has enough forests, dams and a number of grazing sites that are serving the Fulani in rearing of their animals. Unfortunately, they added, such conflicts are gradually resurfacing in the state due to lack of maintenance of the facilities by the government.

Although the FG has five grazing sites in the state, Katsina State government 20 and the 34 local governments have quite a number of similar sites, most of these sites were taken over by development, according to Alhaji Idi Guzurawa.

He also said of the over 20 dams spread across the state, only few are functioning, as according to him, grasses and other plants have taken over them due to lack of proper maintenance. Ja'e Aliyu, a herder, told our reporter in Safana Local Government that "lack of adequate water in most of the dams situated inside the Rugu and other forests in Katsina State forced us to come out with our animals even before the harvesting period and sometimes this early outing is leading to clashes between us and the farmers."

The role of Miyatti-Alah Koltalhore Association is saving the Fulani, Alhaji Hassan Kuraye, chairman of the Katsina State chapter of Miyatti-Alah Koltalhore Association told Sunday Trust. He said the association is doing its best towards improving the wellbeing of Fulani in the state, adding "on the issue of nomadic schools, the Katsina State Primary Board has constructed some nomadic schools across the Fulani villages and more are to be constructed by the state primary board."

Kuraye explained that the association has embarked on a sensitization tour to all Fulani villages with a view to educating them on the need to enroll their wards into western schools, adding that "we have noticed that illiteracy among Fulani was responsible for the increasing rates of crimes in their villages. He explained that an educated Fulani can never take a weapon against his fellow Fulani over a minor misunderstanding.

He added that on the security issue, the association will soon invite the state police commissioner to visit some Fulani villages to hear from them their major complaints about security, noting that "the association is also planning to visit all the neighboring local governments of Zamfara and Kaduna that share border with Katsina with a view to sitting down with the authorities to map out strategies of tackling the insecurity in the affected areas."

Reacting to the issue of drug addiction among Fulani youths, Kuraye said preparations have reached an advanced stage to invite officials of the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to partner with Fulani associations to sensitize the Fulani on the danger of drugs abuse, saying this will greatly help in reducing drug abuse among Fulani youths.

On the drying dams, the chairman confirmed that "quite a number of dams need dredging. Some were dredged during the regime of late Umaru Musa Yar'adua while he was the governor of the state. We are appealing to Governor Ibrahim Shehu Shema to also come to our aid by de-silting some of these dams so that our people can have access to water for their domestic use and for use by their animals."

When contacted for comment, the police public relation officer, Katsina State command, ASP Aminu Sadiq Abubakar said police will never relent on its efforts in combating crimes in the state, saying joint patrol between Katsina and Zamfara States police commands were intensified around the forests that linked the two states.

ASP Abubakar said patrol was also intensified within and around the forest with a view to protecting Fulani and their animals, adding that "this was in addition to the joint foot patrol between the police and vigilante groups within the forest. More vigilante personnel are to be mobilized by the police for that purpose. "The day before yesterday, we had discovered about 30 stolen cows in Kogo forest in Faskari local government and the cows are still under our custody. We are appealing to the general public to always inform the police of movement of suspicious persons or group of persons so that the police can take necessary action," he concluded.

Sunday Trust observed that some of the communities visited by our reporter in Batsari and Safana local government areas respectively lack social amenities such as schools and hospitals. And where there was provision of these facilities, it was

discovered that they were in bad conditions. The nomadic primary school at Tashar-Madibbo has been taken over by reptiles, while in Galadima village there was no school at all.

At Guzurawa, there was no school and the only dispensary located in the area was only rendering skeletal services. Alhaji Idi Guzurawa told our reporter that they only take patients to either Dutsin-ma or Katsina whenever the need arises.

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