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# States on edge over 'killer herders'

By Nathaniel Bivan (Abuja), Andrew Agbese (Kaduna), Ahmed TahirAjobe (Minna), Magaji Isa (Jalingo), Hop | Publish Date: May 20 2017 2:00AM

From the beginning of 2017, clashes between farmers and herders across some Nigerian states have been on the rise, particularly in Kaduna, Edo, Taraba, Benue, and Niger states. Many killings have also been perpetrated against Fulani herders by other groups. With the latest cases, the affected states, and those surrounding them, remain on edge.

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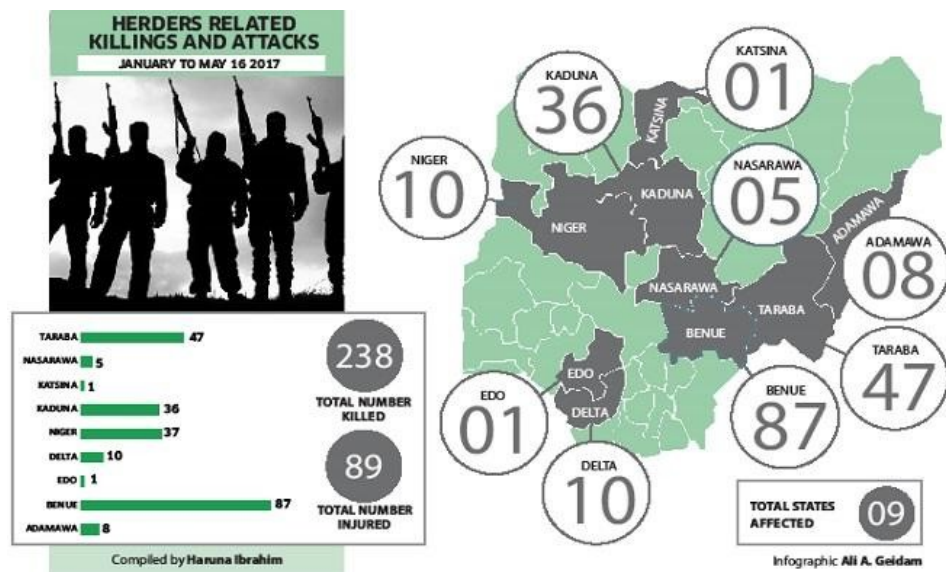
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- **238 killed in Kaduna, Benue, Edo, Taraba, Niger, others**
- **'Criminals disguised as herders commit crimes'**

Niger, like many states, especially within the North Central, has been an epicentre of crisis involving herdsmen - and even rustlers - who are mainly of Fulani extraction. Within three weeks, such attacks with consequent death and destruction have been on the rise. No fewer than 33 lives were lost with many natives sustaining various degrees of injuries, while dozens of houses were torched. Two people were reportedly killed by herders in Kodo community, Bosso Local Government Area (LGA) about three weeks ago. Also, clashes between natives and herders last Sunday in Tungan Malam, Paikoro LGA, claimed four lives with casualties on the part of herders.

#### River Niger runs red

However, it was the attack on the sleepy, riverine community of Epogi in Mokwa LGA last Saturday that left a sour taste in the mouths of many across the state, mainly due to the sheer number of casualties. Twenty-seven people lost their lives when herders attacked the community. Twenty-one were murdered in the operation, while four bodies were reportedly recovered floating on the river the next day. It was gathered that out of the seven people injured in the clash, three died at the Federal Medical Centre, Bida.

Most of the natives were said to have been observing the dawn Muslim prayer in the mosques when the attackers came. Some of them, including the Imam, were dragged out of the mosque and slaughtered before family members.

The attackers were reportedly led by sons of one Tanko Yuguda, the head of a Fulani settler in the area. According to the natives, the sons identified those murdered in the carnage. They also allegedly pointed out the residents that were looted and torched during the crisis. Men and youths were targeted. The only woman killed in the crisis, one Zainab Suleiman, was said to have refused to volunteer information on the whereabouts of her husband.

After the killing in the mosque, they allegedly went from house-to-house, demanding for money and shooting those who could not meet their demands, at close range. A businessman, Alhaji Abdulkahi Yanda, for



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instance, was allegedly shot dead in front of his wife after they had collected N3million.

Among the households which suffered losses, that of Baba Nda was most devastating. The marauders murdered him, his wife and six children, leaving behind three-year-old Mohammed as the only survivor. Natives said several children who ran towards the river for safety are still missing. "They have probably drowned," 52-year-old Alhaji Abubakar Tahir, a community leader said.

At the centre of the unfortunate crisis is a floodplain owned by members of the community but which serves as a grazing point for Yuguda. The community members, who were said to be predominantly fishermen, had allocated the disputed floodplain for use to Yuguda (who had resided in the area for years) until there was need for it.

Yuguda was said to commute between Agaie LGA, where part of his family resides, especially during rainy season.

With the dry season farming initiative of the state government, the community decided to use part of the land for farming. But Yuguda did not welcome the idea and had informed the leaders that he wants to move his cattle for grazing on the land. The situation was said to have resulted in serious disagreement necessitating intervention by the Etsu Nupe, who prevailed on the community to allocate an alternative land to Yuguda, which he refused.

The community went further to suggest he wait till harvest, but he was said to have been adamant. Saturday's attack was said to have targeted all those who, in one way or the other, raised their voices against Yuguda over the disputed land.

As the surviving community members count their losses, the state government and security agencies in the state have vowed to end the incessant herders-related crises across the state by bringing the perpetrators of Saturday's carnage to book to serve as deterrent to others.

### Terror in Taraba

In Taraba State, between December 12 last year and May 16 this year, clashes between farmers and herdsmen were recorded in four LGAs with several deaths on both sides and over 3,000 cows rustled. Such areas include Lau, Gashaka, Gassol, Ussa and Takum. In Lau, for example, a herdsman was accused of allowing his cows destroy animal feed stored by a farmer belonging to Mumuye community. The matter was reported to the ward head of the village who in turn invited the herdsman for reconciliation with the offended farmer. It was gathered that the herdsman pleaded guilty of the offense and agreed to pay for the feed his animals destroyed, but hours after, all Fulani settlements came under attack, allegedly by Mumuye



farmers. Many herdsmen were killed while several herds of cattle were either killed or rustled, and when the herdsmen retaliated, it resulted in the killing of many farmers.

Mumuye and Fulani elders, who have been living together peacefully for decades, had to intervene with the support of the Taraba State government and peace was finally restored.

Unfortunately, then came the attacks in Dananacha in Gassol LGA and in a remote village in Gashaka LGA which targeted farmers. Several persons were killed and many displaced. In reprisal, all Fulani settlements were attacked and many herdsmen and their children killed, while hundreds of cows were either killed or rustled.

The chairman of Miyetti Allah in the state, Alhaji Sahabi, in a release denied any role of herdsmen in the Mumuye attacks. He said in Danancha and Gashaka area, over 29 herdsmen were murdered and their animals rustled, adding that criminals in some parts of the state disguise as Fulani to commit atrocities.

Two weeks earlier in Ussa and Takum LGAs, several people of a community called Kutep, and herdsmen, were killed in a clash. A source said the problem started on 30th April at Tati Kumbo village when a Fulani man while cutting the leaves of a tree to feed his animals in a Kutep man's farm, was allegedly attacked and killed by the owner.

But another source said the clash started when a Kutep farmer was killed by a herder at a stream in the area. It was gathered that Kutep youths went on rampage and attacked all herdsmen settlements in both Ussa and Takum LGAs, killing over 19 herdsmen, injuring about 70, with about 320 others missing in the bush.

The chairman Miyetti Allah Association, Takum LGA branch, Alhaji Mustapha Adamu said in a letter he addressed to security heads in the state (a copy of which was made available to Daily Trust) that on 30th April, a Fulani man was killed at Tati Kumbo when a Kutep man saw him cutting leaves off a tree in his farm. He said from there people of Kutep went inside the bush and attacked herder settlements, killed several, and rustled their cows, adding that they ordered all herdsmen to leave Takum and Ussa, and it was while the herdsmen were leaving the area that they were attacked and killed.

### Carnage in Kaduna

Deaths have also occurred in Kaduna State, of not less than 42 persons due to clashes between suspected herders and farmers between February and April 2017. Crises between herders and farmers was rampant in the northern part of the state a few years back, but lately it appears to be concentrated in the southern part of the state. In the last three months



there have been two major attacks by suspected herdsmen on Southern Kaduna villages where two Fulani herdsmen and two policemen were killed.

In February, three villages in Kaura and one in Jema'a LGAs were attacked with a death toll of 26 persons. Two policemen were also killed at Bakin Kogo village in Jema'a LGA.

Chairman, Caretaker Committee of Atakad Development Association (ADA), Enoch Andong named the villages attacked in Kaura as Mifi, Ashim and Zilan, all under Atakad Chieftdom. He said, "We found Mrs. Josephine Francis, thirty-five, almost burnt to death. She had escaped from the village and hid in the grass. The attackers then set the grass ablaze and left. She was taken to Jos University Teaching Hospital, where she was pronounced dead. Her son, Nathaniel Francis, just five-year-old, was also killed. We found his corpse yesterday, late in the evening. We also recovered the corpse of Thanko Kuliati, 46, Amos Yashim, 67, and Adamu Kambai, 4.

"The body of the Fulani man that was shot and killed by the Nigeria Army in Ashim, when the armed herdsmen invaded is still at the Kaura Police Station. We thank the soldiers for coming just in time to Ashim. More lives could have been lost."

He added that in Zilan, more than a hundred homes were totally razed down, leaving an estimated 10,000 homeless.

Kaduna's case is unique, as even Fulani settlements are attacked, with innocent inhabitants suffering untold hardship.

In March, Two Fulani herdsmen were killed Saturday afternoon while herding cattle in Anguwan Yashi village in Jema'a LGA. National Assistant Secretary of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Ibrahim Abdullahi identified those killed as Anas Shuaibu, 20, and Yahaya Musa, 14. Another community known as Zauru in Zangon Kataf LGA, however did something strange as it rescued 30 persons who were attacked by hoodlums in a similar clash.

The community in Bajju Chieftdom resisted a group of hoodlums who stormed their community with intent of attacking some settlements. They alerted security agencies who were able to evacuate 30 persons, mostly children, women and aged men to Kafanchan.

In April, there was another attack on Asso community in Jema'a LGA of the state where 12 persons were killed while four others were injured by a group of yet-to-be identified gunmen suspected to be herdsmen. They were dressed in similar attire and were said to have launched the attack on the community at about 8:00pm.



Kaduna State Governor, Malam Nasir El-Rufai has repeatedly condemned all the attacks, and has been to the affected areas several times. He has also vowed to prosecute those behind the clashes.

### Benue's river of tears

In Benue State a similar recurring crises has claimed at least 71 lives from various locations in the past three months. Daily Trust compiled figures from reported killings by villagers between March and May 17, this year, some of which were earlier confirmed by the police.

A breakdown of the compilation occasioned by several affected rural communities in nine LGAs showed that 19 people were killed in March with 23 deaths recorded in April and a total of 29 others killed in May. The March incident happened in four council wards of six LGAs while by April five council wards in two LGAs came under attack and in May, eight council wards in four LGAs recorded the highest number of casualties within the period under review.

Foremost in March, the locals alleged that three people were killed in an attack by unknown gunmen suspected to be herders on Tse-Chia village of Ukum LGA. The Police in Benue State had confirmed the death of the trio at that time and spokesman of the command, Moses Joel Yamu, also confirmed that suspected herders killed a prison inmate at Jato Aka in Kwande LGA of the state. Yamu gave the name of the victim as one Tersoo Agidi, who was shot dead by the suspected herders while he was taken out of confinement by a warder to fetch water.

Similarly, the police admitted it recovered three more dead bodies following fresh crisis between herders and farmers in Buruku LGA. But villagers said the crisis which erupted on a Saturday claimed the lives of at least 15 people in Tombo-Mbalagh community of Buruku and parts of Logo LGA. This happened barely one week after Sultan Sa'ad Abubakar III, vowed that everything possible would be done to restore peace between the Tiv people in Benue and the Fulani cattle breeders so that they can live together once again.

The royal father who spoke during the coronation ceremony of Tor Tiv V, Prof. James Ayatse, in Gboko area of the state, had expressed optimism that the enthronement of the new king offered a new dawn to rekindle the lost love between the Fulani and Tiv people.

In another incident in March, five people were allegedly killed in a renewed farmers and herders clash at Mbahimin community in Gwer East LGA. The State Command Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Yamu confirmed that they included a Fulani man and four villagers who were ambushed. He said that the killings were done in reprisal, adding that three people were arrested in connection with the development.



At the wake of April, the police confirmed six persons killed in a fresh farmers and herdsmen crisis in Gwer East LGA.

Yamu had said that some suspected herders attacked Tse-Igba Uke village and killed one Sunday Kachuwa while they injured Zongu Alaide over alleged attacks on their cattle. But as the crisis snowballed later that day evening, six persons lost their lives when youths from Ikpayongo village blocked the road in protest of an earlier attack during which passengers on transit were killed.

In a similar development, locals alleged that suspected herders killed at least 15 villagers in Yaav council ward of Kwande LGA. However, Yamu confirmed the death of two people, namely Keemo Anumen, 65, and Tavershima Dabo, 46. The affected communities in that incident (which lasted for two days) were Alaba, Ikyowen and Manda-Ordue in Yaave council ward of Kwande. Villagers added that death toll rose by two the following day, bringing the number to 17.

The first week of May this year recorded the killing of 10 people in a raid by suspected herders on several villages of Logo LGA. The Logo council security secretary, Tor JijiAluur, said the attack was the first of its kind in the affected rural settlement of TseAkaa, Tse-Abiam and TseOralu, all in Ugondo community of Yonor ward in Mbanar District.

A list obtained from the Logo council security office identified the deceased victims to include; Tersoo John, Ornguga User and Terlumun Ityokyaa, as those killed in Tse-Akaa while Ayange Yooxo, Mvendagalornenge, Tyolumun AbuurDajoh were hacked to death at Tse-Abiam village.

Others are KandeBeji, Teryila Chia, Tersoo Nongu and Mde Abiam, killed by the suspected herders in Tse-Oralu village while missing persons are yet to be identified.

By the second week of May, villagers alleged 13 people were killed by suspected herders in several communities of two LGAs of Logo and Buruku, while at least four people, including herders, were killed in Agbugbe village of Agatu LGA after trouble broke out between farmers and herders.

However, the latest in the series of crisis between herders and farmers in the state began with the killing of a 33-year-old mother of four children, Iyaji Ode by gunmen suspected to be herders in Omaga village in Adiko council ward of Obi LGA. In what is suspected as reprisal, a herder was reportedly killed, bringing the number of death in Obi so far to two. At the moment, many people have been displaced from their homes while others are missing on both sides of the divide.

Edo on edge



In the past, in Edo State, herdsmen were not known to dabble in criminal activities in their host communities while grazing, but this has changed. Among the crimes they are accused of, are rape, armed robbery, kidnapping, and others. The recent incident was the rape of a married woman in the presence of her husband while he was beaten to a pulp penultimate Sunday at a farm in Ubuneke-Ivbiaro community in Owan East LGA.

A member of the community, Yakubu Ibrahim, said the armed herdsmen have laid siege on the community, thereby preventing them from carrying out farming activities.

"Life in the community has become unbearable and inhabitable as a result of the activities of the armed men who have constantly kidnapped, raped women and physical assault on residents," he said, adding that over 50 women have been raped, about 50 persons kidnapped, while several persons have been assaulted. Millions of naira have also been paid as ransom. "Our people are now living in perpetual fears both in the farm and at home."

Ibrahim called on state and federal governments to deploy more security personnel to the communities to save the people from herdsmen.

Another community leader, Yusuf Adamu, said following the unabated activities of the herdsmen, the community vigilante combed the forests in the community last year, arrested some of them and handed them over to the police. He alleged that they later heard that the arrested men were granted freedom by the police authorities in Benin for alleged lack of evidence.

Speaking on the development, the Head of Local Government Administration (HOLGA), Owan East local government, Akeens Ade-Akhani said the council has been mobilizing men of the Nigeria police, as well as vigilantes to Ivbiaro-Auchi road. "We've also empowered the council vigilante group with the necessary incentives and manpower to provide security to our people."

Still in the month of May, it was alleged that herdsmen killed a man at Ibie-IYakpi community in Etsako West LGA, who was protecting his wife from being raped by them. A source who only identified himself as Abdulrahman, said, "as soon as he arrived, they pounced on the man who tried to stop them from raping his wife. As the man was fighting them, the wife escaped, but he later died from the injuries they inflicted on him."

Early this month, at Ibie-Ugieda community still in Etsako West, a man was also beaten to a pulp for stopping the herdsmen from raping his wife. They allegedly inflicted machete cuts on him, but he succeeded in saving his wife from being raped.





In February, it was reported that many women were raped in Ovia North East, Ipoba Okha and Uhumwode and LGA by herdsmen while their farmlands and crops were destroyed. In April, some herdsmen carried out a robbery operation along the Benin-Ekpoma-Auchi road where they killed the former chairman of Etsako East local government council, Suleiman Afegbua, while he was trying to flee.

When will morning come?

All attempts by Daily Trust to speak to Professor Oshita O. Oshita (the Director-General of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution), who is Chairman, Presidential Committee on Farmers/Herders Clash, proved unsuccessful as he did not pick his phone, or respond to text an SMA.

Some traditional rulers have called on the Federal and State Governments, as well as security agents, to come to the aid of the affected communities, to save them from the killer herders.

Residents in the affected areas, too, pleaded with government to look into the disturbing, deadly trend. "It may be beyond Fulani herders, as we've heard that foreigners come into Nigeria to perpetrate violence while disguised as herdsmen," said Malachai Shara, in Jere, Kaduna State. "A lot of all this herder attacks don't add up, and government should do something, and fast," he said.

David Ugolor, who is the Director, African Network for Environment and Economic Justice, said it was part of the challenge of governance and corruption in the country.

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