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HOME / FEATURES / NIGERIA: THE GRAZING ROUTES TO ETHNIC BLOODSHED



## Nigeria: The Grazing Routes To Ethnic Bloodshed

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*This report highlights political, tribal and cultural influences and practices that continue to fuel the perennial herdsman/farmer clashes. The situation is typified by a vicious circle of violence and mutual vendetta which has ravaged large swathes of the country's north. **EDEGBE ODEMWINIGIE** reports from Nigeria's North Central states of Nasarawa, Benue and the country's capital, Abuja.*

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In Alingani, the stench from burnt, decaying carcasses – of both human and cattle – was still fresh on a recent visit. Remnants of burnt houses were the only signs of human life in this settlement once inhabited by herdsman. A reprisal attack by farmers aided by Ombatse, the militia of the dominant Eggon ethnic group of Nasarawa State, sacked the Fulani nomadic settlers in August.

Although ethnic differences are often given as the reasons for similar clashes, access to land is at the root of these confrontations.

Triggered by desperation to protect and advance an ever-shrinking ecological space, characterized by resource-scarcity, population explosion and climate change-induced migration of pastoralists from the far North to the North-Central region of Nigeria in search of grazing fields, the country has recorded deaths by the thousands from clashes between predominantly Fulani herdsman and local farmers.

In communities visited, the feeling of frustration, suspicion and government abandonment is palpable. Our reporter is not spared. He is treated as a potential foe and a possible spy.

The villagers later relax and open up after our identities and intentions are disclosed.

"Komai na Allah ne. ko wonai fili na Allah ne, ba naku ba" (In Hausa, this translates as "Everything belongs to Allah. Every piece of land belongs to Allah and not yours". These words from a Fulani herdsman to a farmer were enough to spark renewed fighting between farmers from the Eggon ethnic group and Fulani at Alingani in Lafia local council of Nasarawa State on **August 14, 2014**,

In one account, a Fulani herdsman, Najid Muhammad Dan-Auta, 27, said crisis broke out at Alingani when an Eggon farmer accused a Fulani herdsman of grazing his land. At the end of the attacks and reprisals, the death toll stood at 60 according to Police accounts, with over 80 houses and properties destroyed.



**11 children between the ages of two and 10, drowned in Guyaka River while trying to flee the violence that began at a farmland in Fadama Bauna, Nasarawa Eggon local government.**

Dan Auta speaking in Hausa language, recounted the episode at his herdsman settlement. "I don't know what happened. We were just