

THE story of co-habitation between Tiv ethnic group and Fulani herdsmen is very interesting.

The story goes like this: Before now, the Tiv and the Fulani were close friends, they cohabitate and inter marry while the Tiv people are predominately farmers, the Fulani are cattle breeders.

One day a Fulani left some cattle with a Tiv to look after, but upon his return he did not see cattle, he asked the Tiv man and he replied: "Munchi" (meaning we have eaten it).

Since then, the Fulani have been grazing their cattle into Tiv farms and feed them fat as compensation for the cows which the Tivs once ate. The Fulani also mocked the Tiv by calling them "Munchi".

The Tiv on their part killed Fulani cows for grazing into their farmlands and destroying it; this is the ancient story between the Tiv and Fulani. Most Fulani speak Tiv frequently, same for Tiv people.

Mutual suspicions

Whether this story is a tale by moon light or not, it has gained grounds over the past decades. But from being friends, the Tiv and Fulani have become sworn enemies which culminated into bloody violence and resulted to the killings of many and lost property.

In Nasarawa, Taraba, Adamawa and Plateau states, Tiv people are at war with Fulani cattle breeders and there is no end or solution in sight.

Both of them accused each other, while the Tiv accused Fulani of grazing into their farmlands and destroying their farms, the Fulani accuse the Tiv of killing their cows.

In Benue State, bloody clashes between Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Logo, Guma, Makurdi, Gwer west local government area have erupted and recently the crisis extended to Agatu and Oturkpo local government area, in Benue South senatorial district, and the country home of Senate President David Mark, where seven soldiers were reportedly killed by suspected herdsmen last week.

Last week Sunday, the Tiv-Fulani crisis erupted right in the heart of Makurdi metropolis, in the area called Adeke Village, and spread fast to Adaka located on Makurdi-Naka road in

Inside story of Benue's Tiv-Fulani clash

Uja Emmanuel in Makurdi, Benue State writes on the incessant clash between two ethnic groups in the state

Makurdi, all within Makurdi local government area.

The attack on Makurdi residents by suspected Fulani herdsmen have sent fear into many residents of the metropolis, who stated that if they can attack Adeke, where Mopol 13 Barracks is located then, no one in the state capital is safe.

On the said Sunday, Andy Okpe, a Special Assistant to the governor told The Nation that at about 4am, he heard sporadic gunshots by Adeke village extension, after the gunshots which lasted for about two hours there was a deafening sound of explosion like dynamite.

"We did not sleep again until in the morning. We saw a detachment of policemen with 10 vehicles who drove past into the crisis zone, and later returned with some Fulani herdsmen in their vans and left to the Police headquarters," he said.

According to Okpe, they later heard that there was violence between Fulani and Tiv farmers. Many lives including cows were lost.

He said since last December when the cattle breeders arrived in the area, tension has been mounting. According to him, "We have been seen Fulani coming into this area day light grazing with automatic rifles on hand on their shoulders, we reported to the traditional ruler and security agencies but nothing was done. The Fulani continued to graze their cattle deep into homes of the residents and sometimes destroyed gardens."

Five Tiv farmers were reportedly killed in the latest attack and about 60,000 persons (Tiv farmers) displaced

from their houses are now living with other family members in Makurdi. Schools have been deserted even inside Mopol 13 Barracks located within the crisis zone.

The attacks on Tiv farmers which started in Adeke, Makurdi local government area spread to far away Guma local government last Thursday as the suspected herdsmen with their cattle invaded Anundu village, setting many houses ablaze and killing a young man.

Fire for fire

Tiv farmers in the process responded and the herdsmen abandoned 46 cows and fled.

The cows were taken to Akaakuma village and prominent sons of the community including the Benue State Commissioner for Land and Survey, John Tondo pleaded with the youths not to slaughter the cattle but hand them over to the police.

Reason prevailed and the 46 cows were handed over to the Benue State Police Command last Friday. At press time, the cattle were still in the custody of the police as no one had claimed ownership.

Tiv farmers are at the receiving end in the ongoing crisis with suspected Fulani herdsmen. Two council wards (Yandev\ Mbayer) in Guma local government council, one council ward (Mbalagh) in Guma local government and three council wards in Gwer west local government have been deserted.

In the last three years there has been no farming activities or school as the fear of suspected Fulani herdsmen has gripped the communities.

The people live in a sort of concentration camp. Nobody farms again.

Governor Gabriel Suswam in his reaction blamed the continued crisis between Tiv and Fulani on criminal elements among the Tiv who killed Fulani cattle. But his reaction did not go down well with some of his kinsmen who accused the governor of giving impetus to the Fulani to attack Tiv farmers the more.

Speaking to newsmen in his office, lawmaker, representing Makurdi-South in the Benue State House of Assembly, Benjamin Adanyi said Governor Suswam as the chief security officer of the state should be held responsible for the crisis between Tiv and Fulani.

According to him, each time Fulani attack Tiv settlements and kill people, the governor will attribute it to criminals. He accused him of not showing who the criminals are.

The lawmaker called on the governor to stop paying lip service to the bloody Tiv-Fulani violence but act decisively to save the life of his constituents who are mostly affected by the crisis.

But speaking through his media adviser, the governor advised the lawmaker to stop playing politics with the lives of the people, as he has done enough and still doing more to find a lasting solution to the lingering crisis.

Role of security

Another dimension has been added to the continued attacks on farmers and settlement with the sophisticated weapons the suspected herdsmen used against their harmless victims who are peasant farmers. Accord-

ing the member representing Makurdi North Avine Agbom, the attacks on Tiv farmers are so sophisticated that he is suspecting the involvement soldiers from 72 Special Forces Battalion and Nigeria Army School of Military Engineering (NASME), all located in Makurdi.

"He told The Nation that some of the suspected Fulani herdsmen who attacked Tiv farmers came with AK 47 and large catchment of ammunition and wondered why nomadic Fulani would acquire a weapon that cost more than N300,000 just to killed a Tiv farmer."

He called on the military high command to probe the activities of its men in the state as they have lost the confidence of Tiv farmers who they are deployed to protect.

Finding a solution

Governor Suswam in his effort to tackle the Tiv-Fulani crisis has set up the Benue-Nasarawa Peace Committee and another committee comprising second class tradition rulers in the affected local government area to find a lasting solution to the crisis.

All this has defied any known attempts to find peace among the hitherto two ethic groups. So far there are about 200 displace persons from Gwer west, Makurdi, Guma, Logo and Agatu local governments who have become homeless.

The consequence has been epidemic, deaths, food and water scarcity, lack of proper medical attention and so on. Children and women are mostly affected as there is problem of malnutrition and miscarriage.

Agbom called on the state government to set up camps for the displaced persons so that it would enable spirited individuals to donate relief materials. He also called on the federal government to intervene or else Tiv people will be wiped out completely.

The Tiv farmers said they have decided to defend themselves now that it seems government cannot protect them. How they will defend themselves is not know but a Tiv farmer Tor Unongo, said there are many ways that the Tiv people would defend themselves.

But for now the crises rage on.