

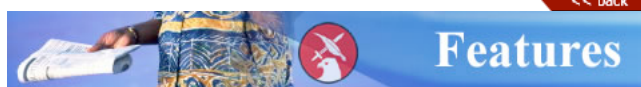
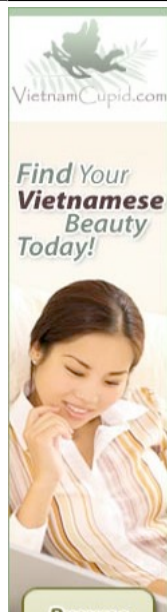


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## Any End to Farmers-Herdsmen Clashes?

By Danjuma Michael, 12.28.2008

A recurring incident that gives several people sleepless nights in Katsina State is the frequent clashes between farmers and Fulani cattle herdsman. While council chairmen where such incidents occur commit time and resources to quell or check clashes, farmers and herdsman fear when either of them becomes victim of the other in a clash or reprisal attack.

Such was the case of a 70-year-old man, Alhaji Nagangara and four others who were killed in recent clash that erupted in three villages of Gidan Bakori, Barde and Kwantakwaran in Bakori council area of the state. According to reports, the elderly man was killed in a reprisal attack by farmers to avenge earlier killing of four people by Fulani herdsman.

It was learnt that the attackers set the man's house ablaze with eight other neighbouring houses burnt to ashes. Usually human casualties and property running into millions of naira are lost as result of these clashes.

THISDAY investigations showed that the Fulani herdsman and farmer conflicts occur more often than not and at times unreported, with proliferated cases during harvest seasons, between months of October and December and sometimes beyond. Several of the state's council areas are hosts to these clashes, including Kafur, Bindawa, Faskari, Danmusa, Katsina, and most all the council areas bothering Niger Republic.

During the second week of December, barely a week after three people had lost their lives in a farmer-Fulani cattle-herdsman clash in Katsina, one person was killed in Mairuwa, Faskari council area which left many injured. Last November, in Yashi, Danmusa council area, another clash left four persons dead, while several others sustained various degrees of injuries. Some months ago in Bindawa council area, farmers and Fulani herdsman conflict left one person dead and several farm produce worth thousands of naira destroyed.

Again in December, clash broke out in Dutsen-Bori, Kanya village; Kafur council area, where four people died and property worth several thousands of naira destroyed. The story goes on and on.

A recent country report on human rights and labour released by the Bureau of Democracy (USA) on Nigeria says, "Clashes between herdsman and indigenous farmers were common as they competed for diminishing land resources during the year. Farmers expanded their croplands onto traditional cattle migration routes, while nomadic herdsman moved herds from overgrazed land onto farm areas."

The Fulani herdsman/farmers conflict is not just limited to the state alone. Nigerians are witnesses to similar clashes that occurred and continue to occur in Kano, Kogi, Benue and Adamawa for example. It is an issue that observers within and outside Katsina State are trying to call attention to for lasting solutions to be proffered to stop the loss of lives and property.

To check recurrence of the conflict, Chairman of the state's Standing Committee on Cooperation between Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen, Alhaji Nuhu Abdulkadir recently cautioned farmers encroaching cattle routes to desist from such acts and vacate the areas or face sanctions.

Abdulkadir, who gave the warning while addressing village and ward heads in Bakori council area, said the committee received report of unwarranted behaviours by Fulani herdsman which may cause conflict with farmers in the area.

He noted that the encroachment and complete blockage of cattle routes are always responsible for farmers-Fulani herdsman clashes and called on village and ward heads to desist from conniving with farmers to encroach cattle routes and forest reserves, as traditional rulers found doing so would face the wrath of the law.

On its part, the state government recently appealed to farmers and cattle herdsman alike to shield their swords as the conflicts only result to loss of lives and property. It called on them to live in tolerance and peaceful coexistence which was in the interest of all stakeholders.

The state government said both farmers and Fulani cattle herdsman should see themselves as serious stakeholders who have a lot to offer in the well being and overall development of the state. It also said that while farming and animal rearing form the bulk of economic activities in the state, it is behoves on them to realise that dividends of their investment could only be enjoyed by the state when they resolve to live in peace and harmony.

It went on to say that recent clashes which resulted in loss of lives, crops and injuries in some parts of the state would have been avoidable had they resolved to exercise patience and restraint among themselves; that state government would on its part take all necessary measures to avert future clashes in order to prevent human and material loss that often characterise such clashes.

Council areas where these conflicts occur apply similar measures of addressing the issue; first, a committee is set up after a clash to determine perpetrators and victims, as well as look into cause of conflict. This is done with the collaboration of relevant security agencies in the area. Then recommendation is given that farmers should avoid encroaching existing forest reserves and cattle routes.

Next, that people should report suspicious movement of man and cattle, and farmers should not take laws into their hands by trying to confront herdsman whose cows wander into farmlands and eat their produce. During this process, relief materials are donated by affected councils to victims, and a district or traditional head is invited to admonish people on the necessity of living in peace and eschewing conflicts.

Sometimes, media awareness creation is sponsored by stakeholders, especially government, on how to deal with a situation where herdsman and cattle wander into farmlands. It could be in form of drama or feature presentations. Some of the council areas buy utility vehicles for the security persons in their areas with sponsoring of vigilante groups to complement efforts at checking spread of conflicts in their areas.

Despite state and council's efforts at dealing with the issue, sections of society are yet to be convinced about level of diligence and seriousness being invested on the matter.

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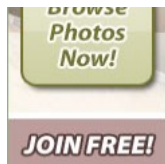
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Observers have given stakeholders a low mark in terms of trying to address recurrence of clashes. They say that more ought to have been done as several people every year get killed, loose limbs or a loved one, have their property looted or burnt, while harvested produce and animals are wasted through violence. They say the State House of Assembly should enact laws that would squarely address the issue, and that stakeholders should not just pay lip service to the matter. An observer, Shaibu Dangere who was at one of the scenes of conflict, made an appeal that a law should be enacted that would deal with anyone found wanting in cattle routes' encroachment while sign posts should be erected to indicate borders of state government forest reserves.

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