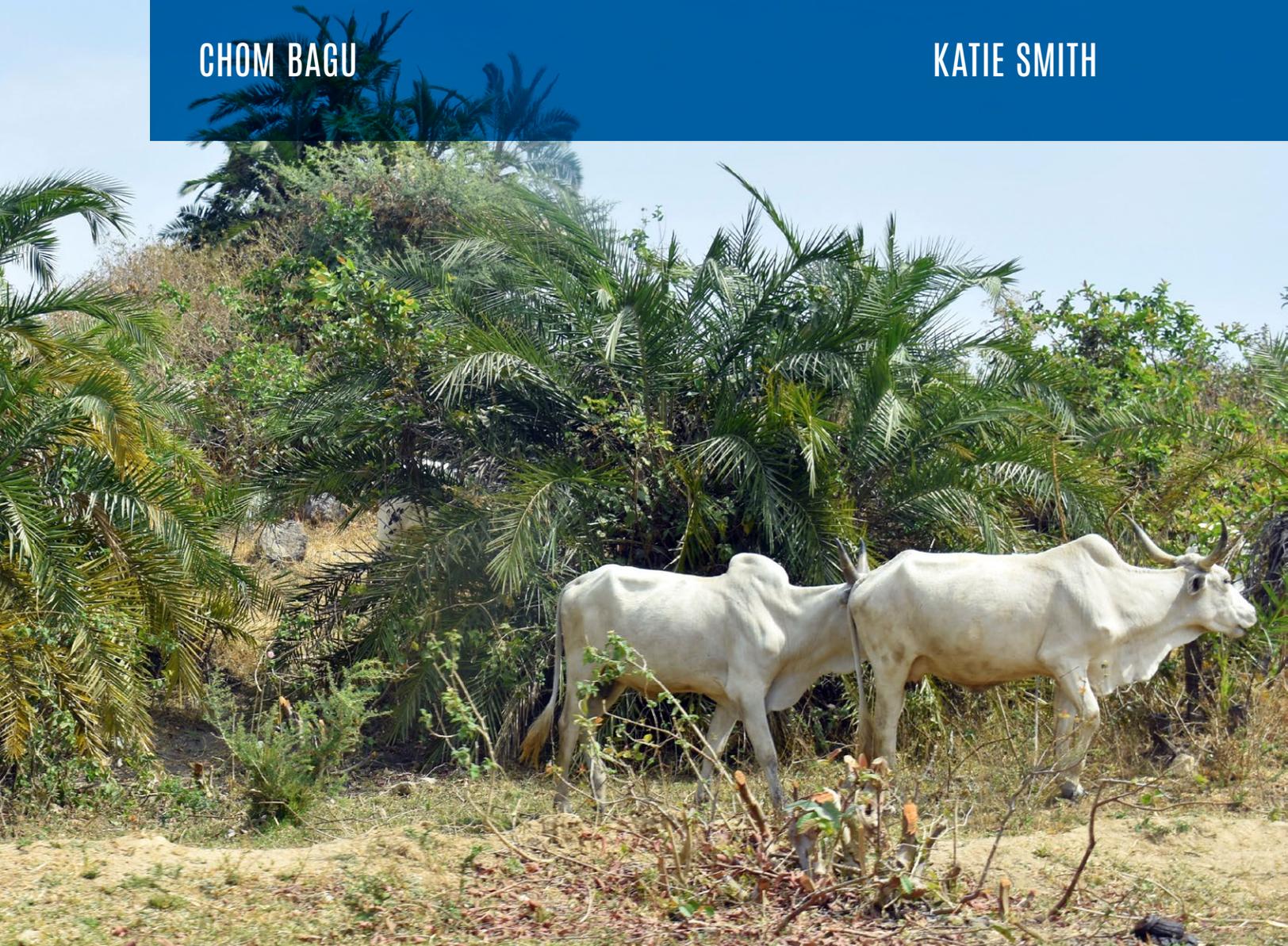


PAST IS  
PROLOGUE: **CRIMINALITY &**  
**REPRISAL ATTACKS**  
**IN NIGERIA'S MIDDLE BELT**

CHOM BAGU

KATIE SMITH



---

PAST IS  
PROLOGUE: **CRIMINALITY &  
REPRISAL ATTACKS  
IN NIGERIA'S MIDDLE BELT**

---

CHOM BAGU

KATIE SMITH

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

---

Chom Bagu is Senior Peace and Conflict Advisor for Search for Common Ground in Nigeria. He previously served as Search's Country Director in Nigeria, was a conflict advisor for USAID, and is a journalist by training. He is based in Abuja, Nigeria. Katie Smith is a Policy Research Associate for Search for Common Ground, based in Washington, DC.

This report is issued by Search for Common Ground as part of a series highlighting policy insights from peacebuilding experts around the world, identified through our network of staff and partners. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone and do not represent the institutional position of Search for Common Ground.

For further information on Search for Common Ground or this report, please write to Search for Common Ground's office in Washington DC, 1601 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20009, or call the Communications Office at **+1 202-265-4300** or visit our website, [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)

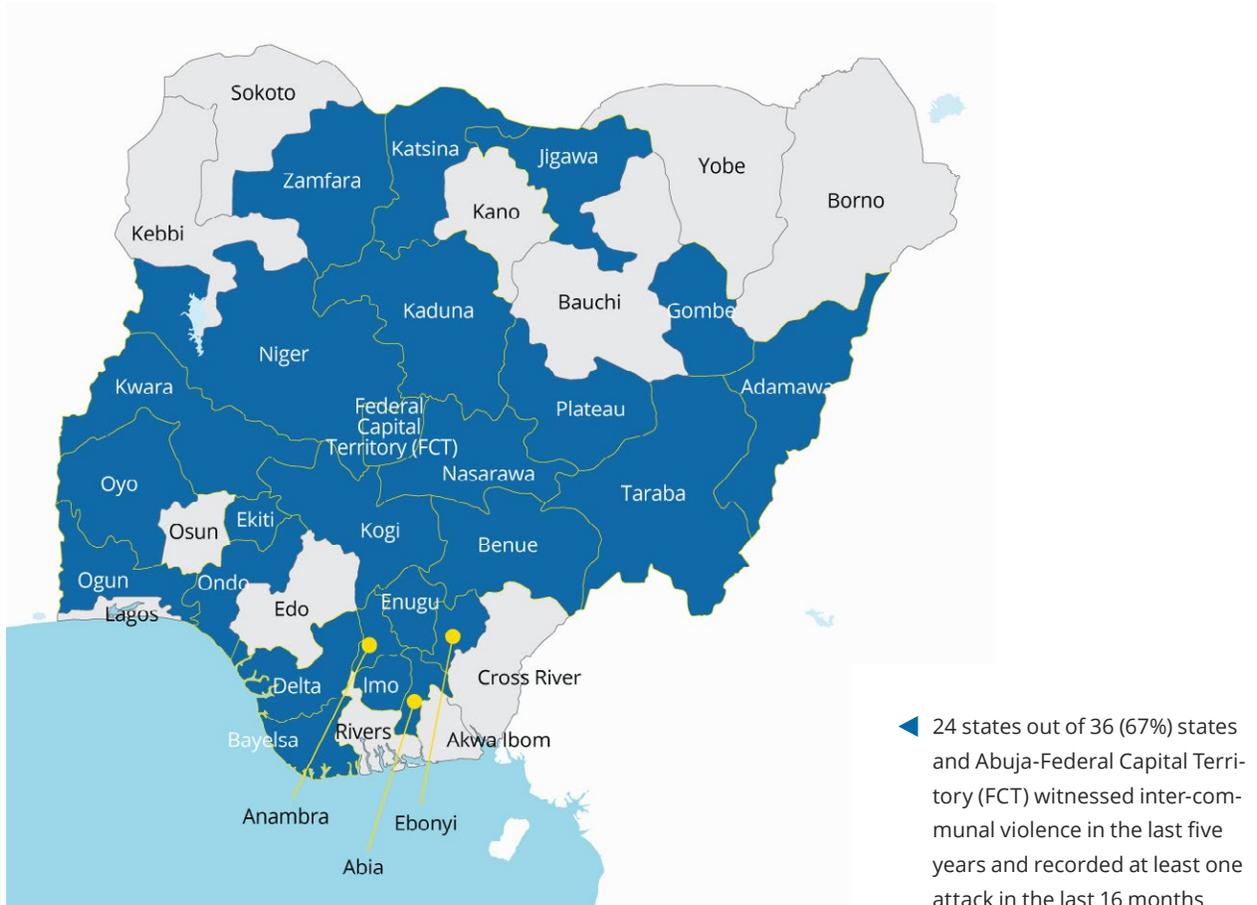
© 2017 Search for Common Ground

This publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or nonprofit purposes without special permission from Search for Common Ground, provided the reproduction includes this Copyright notices and the Disclaimer below. No use of this publication may be made for resale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from Search for Common Ground. This publication should be cited as follows: Bagu, Chom and Katie Smith. (2017). Past is Prologue: Criminality and Reprisal Violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt, 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities in Central Nigeria are locked in a worsening cycle of violence between largely Christian farming communities and predominantly Muslim pastoralists, most of whom are ethnic Fulani. Environmental degradation, population growth, and regional instability have altered migration patterns and pushed herders further southward during seasonal migrations. Limited access to arable land and unreliable water sources have increased natural resource pressures, resulting in blocked grazing routes and destruction of farmland by Fulani cattle. In addition, the price of cattle has drastically increased resulting in larger herds being handled by an increasingly professionalized and weaponized herding community. In response, organized gangs of criminals have coalesced to profit off cattle theft and trade in a vast and lucrative stolen cattle syndicate. These have accounted for violent clashes that have claimed thousands of lives.

Widespread impunity for these violent clashes has allowed these gangs of bandits to instigate violence, appropriate blame, and rob and rustle cattle for personal gain. Political opportunism plays an important role in the conflict as well, as local traditional, political, and religious leaders often manipulate public sentiments and encourage violence for political expediency. Land and rustling disputes have a deadly tendency to spark self-perpetuating cycles of indiscriminate reprisal attacks playing out along ethno-religious fault lines.



**Key Takeaways:**

1. Farmer/herder violence is neither an ethnic nor religious conflict, but rather a competition for resources playing out on ethno-religious lines in a fragile country characterized by impunity and corruption;
2. The current violence emanates from brutal responses to land disputes and attacks on livelihoods (crops and cattle), triggering self-perpetuating cycles of indiscriminate reprisal confrontations;
3. Gangs of criminals, often youth from farming and herding communities and/or local bandits, take advantage of growing insecurity, fear, and cyclical attacks to loot villages, engage in highway robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain. Both farming and herding communities suffer from this criminality;
4. In Northwest Nigeria, criminal gangs are reportedly engaging in organized rural banditry to profit off livestock theft and trade, leading to the displacement of the local (predominantly Muslim) population and livestock theft forcing them to migrate southward; and
5. Environmental degradation, population growth, increasing cattle prices, and regional instability influence and exacerbate farmer/herder conflict dynamics.

**Key Recommendations:**

1. Support by government and development actors to farmer/herder communities at the local level to dialogue, and strengthen engagement and intercultural understanding of each other and reach local peace agreements to coexist, share land resources, and resolve disputes;
2. The Nigerian government needs to ensure community input into any policies on grazing routes, ranches, and/or reserves. Development actors can support the government with capacity to do this and advocate for adequate provision for sensitization and awareness campaigns with communities, to ensure ownership of planning, implementation, and maintenance of solutions;
3. Private and public investments in green energy, water conservation, and cattle value-chain development can help to curb driving and exacerbating factors of land disputes;
4. Government at state and federal levels need to deal decisively with impunity and ensure perpetrators of violence are tried in courts and victims get redress to avoid reprisal attacks; and
5. Further research is needed on the extent to which criminal gangs and “conflict entrepreneurs” are responsible for current levels of violence as opposed to community members exacting extrajudicial justice.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

3	About the Authors
4	Executive Summary
7	Introduction
8	Evolution of Farmer/Herder Relations in the Middle Belt
10	Resources in Competition
10	Economic
12	Political
15	Land and Environmental
16	Response of the Nigerian Government and Security Forces
18	Opportunities for Engagement
19	Economic Engagement:
20	Political Engagement:
22	Social Engagement:
23	references

## INTRODUCTION

---

Conflicts between farmer and herder groups are not unique to the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, or Nigeria alone.<sup>1</sup> In fact, farmer/herder conflicts are emerging and disrupting communities in Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Mali, and across West Africa region. Environmental changes, political instability, and security concerns are forcing pastoralists into new communities in search of adequate pasture to feed their cattle.

In Nigeria, farmer/herder conflicts have expanded beyond the Middle Belt and begun to affect communities in the Northeast, Southeast, and South south. These communities have not historically hosted migratory pastoralists and find themselves unprepared to handle land disputes as they arise. In already unstable environments like the Niger Delta, protracted farmer/herder violence has the potential to aggravate pre-existing tensions. If the violence remains unaddressed, or improperly dealt with, farmer/herder conflicts have the potential to undermine community relationships across Nigeria, destabilizing the country and the region.



*At its core, this is neither a religious nor an ethnic conflict, but rather a resource-based conflict playing out on ethno-religious lines in a fragile country characterized by impunity and corruption.*

Violent conflict between farmers and herders is not new, but neither is it inevitable. While the violence is spreading to communities across the country, the intensity of violence remains fiercest in Nigeria's volatile Middle Belt region.<sup>2</sup> The Middle Belt has been locked in a worsening cycle of violence between largely Christian farming communities and predominantly Muslim nomadic pastoralists, most of whom are ethnic Fulani. Although tensions have been developing for some time, inter- and intra-communal conflicts over access to land and resources have often been coopted by political and social considerations to become intractable, provoking and manipulating deep divisions at the heart of Nigeria's identity. When these resource disputes interact with political and social tensions and turn violent, they have a deadly tendency to spark self-perpetuating cycles of indiscriminate reprisal attacks.

While conflict between pastoralists and farmers have a complex and deep-rooted history, at its core, this is neither an ethnic nor a religious conflict, but rather a resource-based conflict playing out on ethno-religious lines in a fragile country characterized by impunity and corruption.

---

1 This paper will refer to herders and pastoralists interchangeably, but refer to those who rear and herd cows for their primary source of livelihood

2 The Middle Belt is generally considered to include the Nigerian states of Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Taraba, Adamawa, as well as the southern parts of Kaduna, Kebbi, Bauchi, Gombe, Yobe, and Borno state. It is also sometimes referred to as North Central Nigeria.

## EVOLUTION OF FARMER/HERDER RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE BELT

The Fulani are the primary pastoralist group in Africa and have roots in West Africa as far back as 900 A.D. The largest Fulani populations reside in Nigeria, where they make up a considerable portion of the population, with over 18 million people and 270 clans.<sup>3</sup> For centuries, farmers and herders have lived in relative harmony, benefiting off symbiotic partnerships to keep cropland fertile and cattle well-nourished. Herders seasonally migrated their cattle in search of lush grass, available water sources, and profitable markets for their cattle, often near villages and farms. In turn the cattle provided critical dung fertilizer that nourished the soil for crop production, leading to high yields. Farmers and herders both benefitted in the exchange of grain for dairy and crop residue for manure. Despite this interdependence, land disputes were common and tribal leaders and Ardos (leaders of Fulani clans) developed conflict mitigation/resolution mechanisms to compensate losses and share resources. Over time, economic, political, and environmental changes eroded this mutually beneficial understanding between the two groups in this fragile region, where the Muslim-majority north converge with the Christian-majority south. Figure 1, below is a map of the Middle Belt.



**FIGURE 1:** Map of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria

3 Majekodunmi, Ayodele O., Akinyemi Fajinmi, Charles Dongkum, Alexandra P. Shaw, M., and Susan C. Welburn. 2014. Pastoral livelihoods of the Fulani on the Jos plateau of Nigeria. *Pastoralism* 4, (1) (11): 1-16, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1726764382?accountid=11243> (accessed January 19, 2017).

Prior to Nigeria's independence and demarcation of new state boundaries, the regional government of the North levied a farm tax on farmers and a cattle tax on herders. Farmers were taxed a flat fee on their farms and herders paid per head of cattle. Tribal chiefs from each community would collect the tax from their constituents and deliver to the local authorities, where funds were channeled to community development and local government authorities. The tax was a source of revenue generation for the region, and it enticed communities to lure herders to stay alongside them and imparted some sense of responsibility in the wellbeing of the herds. In turn, the tax instilled a sense of belonging and entitlement for the pastoralists to remain and utilize the land to graze their livestock. However, by 1980, both taxes were abolished and the regions ceded ownership of the land to the state governments, dramatically altering the relationship of pastoralists and sedentary communities.<sup>4</sup>

Local government leaders were almost always representatives from the farming communities, so when the farm tax was abolished, it did not fundamentally alter farmers' relationship to the leaders, community, or land. However, for herders, the tax represented a compact between themselves and the sedentary communities, which afforded them a role and a level of acceptance in the community. When the tax was abolished this compact disintegrated and altered the perception of herders as dues-paying members of society to outsiders infringing on farmers' land.



**FIGURE 2:** District and Village Heads from Riyom LGA, Plateau State

4 Jangali: Fulani Pastoralists and Colonial Taxation in Northern Nigeria Author(s): A. G. Adebayo Source: The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1995), pp. 113-150 Published by: Boston University African Studies Center Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/221307> Accessed: 06-03-2017 14:48 UTC

The introduction of artificial fertilizers in the 1970s and 1980s, and its intensive utilization by farmers in the 1990s, further weakened this previously symbiotic relationship. Farmers could now effectively fertilize their fields without reliance on the manure of grazing herds. Synthetic fertilizers also allowed for the increased production of new crops - maize, sugarcane, and Irish potatoes - which are fertilizer-based and produce no useful crop residues coveted for cattle feed.<sup>5</sup> By the onset of the 21st century, most farming in Nigeria relied on artificial fertilizers, further altering the relationship between farmers and herders from symbiotic to competitive. Migratory herds of cattle were now seen as a nuisance rather than a necessity.

## RESOURCES IN COMPETITION

Political changes and agricultural advancements contributed to the collapse in inter- and intra-communal relationships. Since 2000, the most recent outbreaks of violence have taken on a significantly different dynamic, influenced by skyrocketing demand for and price of cattle, politicization of ethno-religious identities, and diminishing land resources. The ramifications of identity politics and struggles for resource control (both political and economic) in urban areas have influenced the interactions of farming and herding communities throughout the Middle Belt. Furthermore, environmental degradation, security challenges, and rural banditry of the Sahel and Northwest Nigeria have increased organized cattle rustling and forced new waves of migration deeper and deeper southward.

### ECONOMIC

Increased population growth has resulted in both the rapid expansion of subsistence farms surrounding villages and rising demand for cattle, to feed growing populations. The number of cattle increased dramatically from 6 million to 66 million between 1961 and 2006.<sup>6</sup> As demand for cattle increased, the price of cattle skyrocketed (see figure 3). Imported cattle breeds can be sold for an average cost of 430,000 to 525,000 Naira (USD \$1300-1700) and local cattle can be sold for an average price between 100,000 to 200,000 Naira (USD \$300-650).<sup>7</sup> This increase in price has introduced new pastoralist trends, including increased herd sizes, professionalization of herding (hired cowboys to manage herds), and weaponization for self-defense and herd protection.



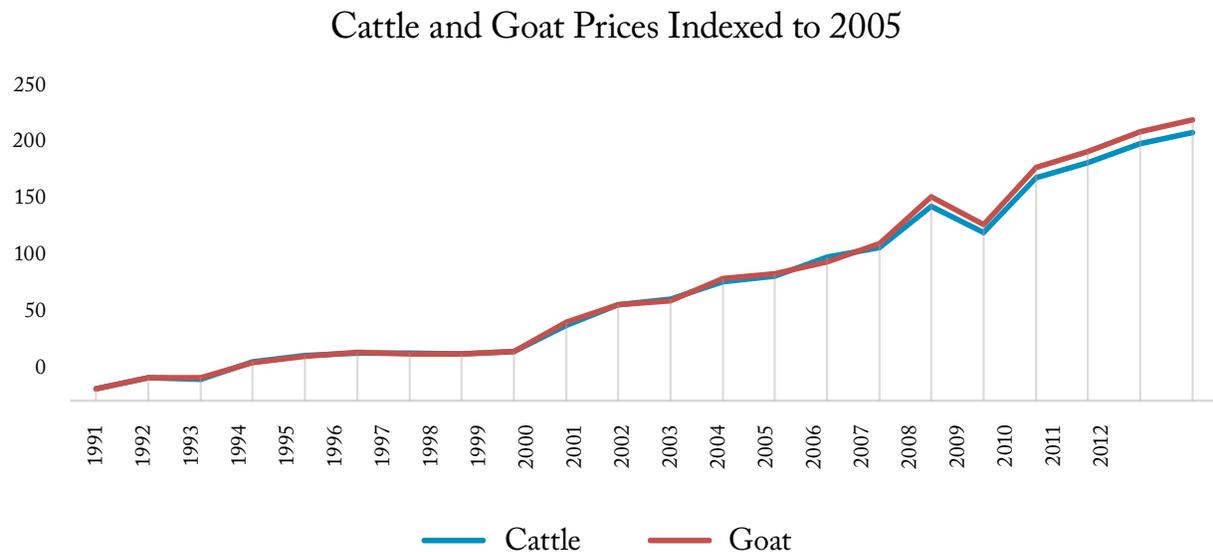
*Imported cattle breeds can be sold for an average cost of \$1300-1700, and local cattle can be sold for an average price of \$300-650.*

5 Majekodunmi, et al. 2014

6 "Africa Review Report on Drought and Desertification," 2007.

7 Smith, et al. 2017

While many herders continue to keep their cattle for self-subsistence, increasing monetary value of cows has brought more sophisticated players into the game looking to make a profit on raising and selling cattle. Local political elites, retired military officers, and other wealthy individuals will purchase or receive cattle and then hire pastoralists to manage the cows for them. In many cases, these are cattle-less Fulani who are given their own cattle in repayment for herding another's cows. These hired herders are then responsible for protecting the cattle from theft, injury, and disease and are oftentimes armed by their bosses for these purposes.



**FIGURE 3:** Increase in cattle and goat prices, Source: FAO STAT, 2014.

The skyrocketing price of livestock in the past decade has also attracted criminals who look to rustle cattle for profit. High youth unemployment and limited outlook for improved livelihoods has enticed many youth into criminal activities. The syndicates for stolen cattle are vast and cash involved is fast. Thus, the high price of cattle has also brought in new more sophisticated groups of rustlers, coordinating attacks to profit off cattle theft and trade. In Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara, Kebbi, Niger, and Kaduna States, in the Northwest, 'conflict entrepreneurs' are taking advantage of the Boko Haram violence in the Northeast and general insecurity in Nigeria to engage in widespread 'rural banditry.' These gangs of criminals instigate fear and violence to raid communities for livestock and plunder. They often attack during the middle of the night and create chaos, burning homes and shooting guns in the air, to cause people to flee and more effectively maneuver cattle out of the community.

These groups have a keen interest in maintaining the current levels of violence and instability. The motivation of their attacks serve dual purposes- theft and drawing more communities into instability. The 'conflict entrepreneurs' stand to economically benefit from the continuance of violence, and therefore seek to reinforce divisions, often by inciting violence themselves. In some cases, mixed communities of farmers and herders not engaged in reprisal violence, are absorbed into hostilities after spoilers staged attacks and attribute culpability to another group.

The violence has led to the displacement of predominantly Muslim populations and looting of livestock, forcing herders to migrate southward to protect their cattle. Here, criminal elements provoke inter-communal tensions, exacerbating instability and deepening social divides. As the herders, move southwards, the bandits have followed them looting livestock and raiding new host communities. When the bandits attack the host communities, the victimized communities often see this as an attack by the migrating herders and perceive the attacks to be a northern, Muslim invasion. Instead, the herders are often victims themselves to the same raids. In southern Kaduna, Governor Nasir El Rufai affirmed this characterization that “the killings in southern Kaduna by suspected herdsmen is pure criminality and had nothing to do with ethnicity and religion.”<sup>8</sup>



*Criminal elements interact with regional, political, ethnic, and religious tensions, exacerbating instability and deepening social divides.*

Politicians, security forces, and other influential individuals are also considered to play a role in the continuation of fear and division. As mentioned previously, often these people own cattle and hire others to manage their herds. In some cases, the owners are perceived to be in association with law enforcement to galvanize constituencies of support and/or justify needs for additional military budget lines.

Sensationalized and inflammatory rhetoric by the media and religious leaders often characterize the violence through regional, religious, and ethnic terms. Hate speech, incendiary rhetoric often motivates communities to take up arms in defense and stage attacks on the designated aggressor. For instance, in January 2017, a clergyman in Ekiti state called on Christians to take up arms to defend themselves against Fulani herdsmen ‘attacking’ Christians in Nigeria. The video then went viral eliciting a range of emotive responses from followers and religious leaders alike threatening peaceful coexistence between religious groups in Nigeria.<sup>9</sup>

## POLITICAL

This increase in criminality has taken advantage of the dramatic escalation in ethnic tension and violence over the past 15 years in Plateau state, the heart of the Middle Belt. Until the early 1990s, ethnic confrontations in Plateau state were of equal or lesser scale to ethnic conflicts in other parts of Nigeria. However, persistent issues of indigeneity and competition for political influence have escalated and expanded inter-communal conflict beyond city limits.<sup>10</sup> An estimated 7,000 people killed between 2001-2011 and up to 250,000 people displaced. The recent history in Plateau State is echoed in other parts of the Middle Belt with markedly heightened ethnic tensions and outbreaks of violent communal conflict.

8 Benjamin, 2016.

9 Search for Common Ground, 2017

10 An indigene is considered to be a person who belongs to a community, either by birth or ancestry; whereas, non-indigene is considered to be someone who leaves their place of normal residence to ‘settle’ in a new area. Issues of indigeneity, or ancestral heritage, are prominent across Nigeria, but Plateau state is particularly associated with this issue. The Nigerian Constitution does not include any provision for indigeneity, only citizenship to the country of Nigeria.

*In 2014 and 2015, Keana town in Nasarawa state experienced high levels of inter-communal violence. Social discord and land management issues erupted in attacks on surrounding communities – destroying homes, killing persons, and inciting reprisal attacks.*



**FIGURE 5:** Ardo Sodangi, right, in his office with Mallam Isa Oji

*Ardo Sodangi is the paramount ruler of the Fulani tribes for all Keana local government area (LGA), Nasarawa state. In 2015, Search provided the platform for the development of a Stakeholders' Forum tasked with the responsibility to mediate and resolve community grievances regarding land issues.*

*The Ardo serves as the Chairman of the Forum and decreed that all Fulani grievances should first be brought to him for discussion with the representatives of the farmers. The same was requested of the farming community to their representatives. When there are issues that arise, the Forum members travel together to resolve the problems peacefully. Since the training, Ardo Sodangi and Public Relations Officer for the Farmers, Mallam Isa Oji, reported that there have been no instances of violence between herding and farming communities in Keana and the surrounding communities.*

In Jos North, the capital city of Plateau state, the population consists of predominantly Christian Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere ethnic groups, among others, considered to be 'indigenes' of Jos, and the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, considered to be 'settlers' or 'non-indigenes.' A status of 'indigene' provides certain privileges and access to political, economic, and communal resources. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, 'indigene' and 'non-indigene' tensions escalated, partially triggered by the creation of Jos North Local Government Area. The delineation of the area to include almost exclusively Hausa Muslims was perceived to give them disproportionate political influence. As they struggled for political influence and leadership roles within the local government, indigeneship became a political tool to attract and solidify support. Because the 'settlers' are almost entirely Muslim and the 'indigenes' are predominantly Christian, the manipulation of these identities increasingly played out through ethno-religious discrimination, segregation, hate crimes, and intra-communal violence. Widespread riots and outbreaks of violence resulted in over 1,000 deaths in 2001.<sup>11</sup>

As the conflict in Jos North took on a predominantly religious character, the violence spread outside of the urban areas to more rural areas of Plateau and neighboring states. Fulani communities generally lived outside of more urban areas; however, as the violence expanded from the city center, more rural Christian communities saw the Fulani as an 'Islamic threat.' Herdsmen increasingly became victims of cattle theft and personal attacks, including targeted attacks on Ardos of various Fulani tribes. Reprisal attacks from afflicted members of the Fulani community followed this initial outbreak of violence. Revenge attacks continued and became cyclical exacting victims from both groups. During and after the 2008 elections, contested local government chairmanship elections incited rioting and clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs in Jos North. At least 400 people were killed and over 10,000 people displaced and another round of reprisal attacks was triggered.<sup>12</sup>



*There is no certain evidence that Fulani groups have a single political goal*

These political underpinnings are not direct causal motivations for current farmer/herder violence, but these events instilled deeply seeded hostility, fear, and reproach towards the perceived aggressors. This hostility and fear fueled further attacks. Rumors of communities caching weapons and pastoralists arming themselves for self-defense, prompted preemptive attacks out of fear that the other side would attack first. Revenge attacks and cattle rustling during this time often played out on ethno-religious lines. The grief and resentment of these historical attacks has more deeply entrenched perceptions of perpetrator and victim, while the ongoing violence cultivates the fear of imminent attack. There is no certain evidence that Fulani groups have a single political goal and they generally carry out their lives independently of other clans. Despite distinct ethno-religious fault lines, the driving factors of current violence do not originate from religious theology or cultural hegemony, but rather from the real or perceived need to protect themselves or their livelihoods.

11 Krause, 2011. Human Rights Watch, 2001.

12 ICRC, 2008.

## LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL

Conflict in the Middle Belt is often triggered by attacks on livelihoods. The livelihoods of both farming and herding communities are dependent on reliable access to arable land and water sources. Increased competition for these resources often amplifies local political, economic, or religious skirmishes and competitions for power. So, that when cattle routes and reserves are encroached with farms and cattle destroy crops or block traffic, these resource-based disputes take on a socio-political characteristic.

Nigeria's population nearly doubled between 1990 and 2015, from 95 million to 182 million.<sup>13</sup> Population growth is expected to continue to be high, with population estimates of 440 million by 2050.<sup>14</sup> With the introduction of synthetic fertilizers and crops able to be produced during the dry season, alongside growing demand from increasing populations, farms have expanded throughout the Middle Belt. From 1990 to 2014, the area harvested increased by nearly 97 percent, from 8.4 million acres to 247 million acres in 2014.<sup>15</sup> In many cases, the influx of subsistence and commercial farms have encroached on traditional or gazetted grazing routes and reserves. Farmers and herders alike need access to reliable water sources and arable land to maintain their livelihoods; however, agricultural expansion and increasing resource pressures have broken down previous land sharing arrangements and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

Desertification, deforestation, and water shortages have caused soil erosion and drought conditions in much of the Lake Chad Basin, which has compelled some herders from Niger, Chad, Mali, and northern Cameroon, to move further south and stay longer in Nigeria during their seasonal migrations. The Sahara Desert is advancing southwards at a rate of nearly half a mile per year, resulting in desertification of almost one-fifth of the total Nigerian land area.<sup>16</sup> Nigeria has lost over 90 percent of its native tree population due to deforestation practices initiated during the colonial era and nearly halved the native tree population between 2000 and 2010 alone.<sup>17</sup>



*During the past three decades, average rainfall in Nigeria has decreased by 30 days*

Extensive deforestation and shortened rainy seasons have diminished soil quality causing increased erosion, reduced grazing foliage and pastures, and diminished crop yields. In the past three decades, the rainy season in northern Nigeria has dropped to 120 days from an average of 150 days of rainfall.<sup>18</sup> Over 30 million people in the four surrounding countries are dependent on Lake Chad for water. However, the surface area of Lake Chad has decreased from 15,500 square miles to 840 square miles from 1963 to 2001 – a decrease of nearly 95 percent.<sup>19</sup> This has increased the competition for already scarce water resources and Nigerians are increasingly more dependent on groundwater to meet domestic and agricultural needs. This is overburdening the water

13 World Bank, 2016.

14 Kochhar, 2014.

15 FAO, 2015

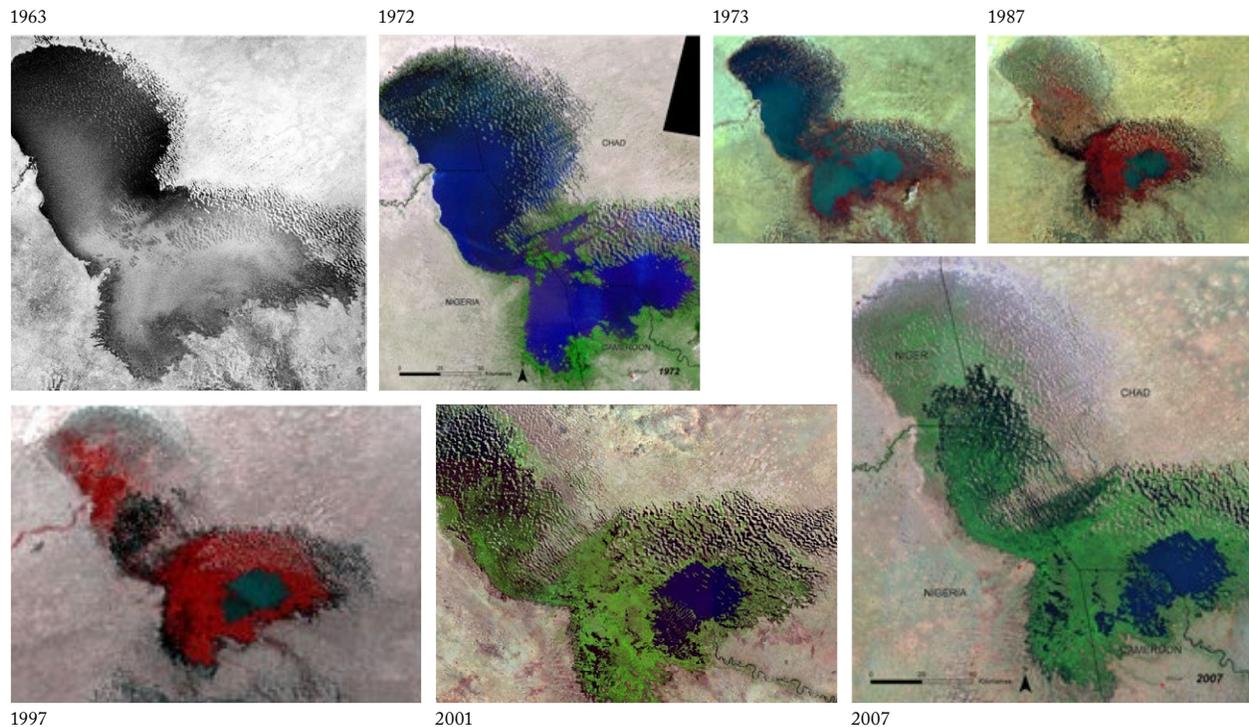
16 Olagunju, 2015.

17 FAO, 2010.

18 Odiogor, 2010.

19 Franzen, 2001.

table and retarding its natural replenishment rates.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, these practices reduce the vitality of the soil to support farms or livestock, leading to migration in search of better soils, water sources and livestock pastures. Figure 6, below is a map showing the decrease in Lake Chad surface area since 1963.



**FIGURE 6:** Lake Chad from 1963-2007

Diminishing land and water resources both contributes to and results from the increased migration of pastoralists further south. The deepening southward migration has been happening for some time, increasing the frequency with which farmers and herders come into contact and conflict. Nigeria's government officials have documented the shrinkage of more than 800 bodies of water as a contributing cause of violence.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the degradation of the environment, and its associated impact on dependent communities have not been met by appropriate responses.

## RESPONSE OF THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES

An overstretched and fragile Nigerian government and security force are reacting to these outbreaks of violence by implementing patchwork and often adversarial responses to violence instead of addressing the underlying drivers of conflict. The responses to the current conflict dynamics have largely been reactive in nature and

<sup>20</sup> Olagunju, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> "Security: Fulani Herdsmen Are Not All Nigerians," 2014.

prone to political manipulation. In many cases, the responses exacerbate pre-existing mistrust and tensions.

Government and security forces are seen to be unresponsive to warning signs and reports of attack. On the one hand, security responses to reports of ongoing attacks are delayed and attacks usually finish before security agents arrive. After attacks occur, perpetrators are rarely apprehended or prosecuted.

Security forces are sometimes seen to be complicit in the perpetuation of violence - through direct theft or turning a blind eye to the rustling and sale of cattle. In other cases, security themselves are responsible for outright attacks on civilians. There have been instances of unwarranted and unsubstantiated attacks from federal troops and local police on both farming and herding communities suspected of being responsible for violence. These attacks disintegrate relationships between citizens and the security forces and create cultures of mistrust. In these cases, abusers are not held accountable and no justification or reasoning is provided to the victims, increasing herders' feelings of persecution.

The relationship between the security agents and communities also changes depending on the branch of the security forces – police are often perceived to have a better relationship with the farmers, whereas herdsmen are perceived to have better relationships with the military. In addition to fostering a widespread culture of impunity, these types of practices exacerbate feelings of persecution, provoke social divisions, and reinforce mistrust of security forces.

On the other hand, local government responses have often been perceived as biased or self-interested. Proposed policies, such as grazing reserves and ranches, are often perceived as being power grabs by local elites and usually never make it all the way to implementation. Local communities have often felt they were not consulted, or adequately consulted, in the previous allocation of the grazing reserves and the government has fallen through on its responsibilities for enforcement and upkeep.<sup>22</sup> And as such, there is much resistance to the idea on both sides. Farmers feel the allocation of land will be taken from current farm land and keeps a perceived enemy nearby. Alternatively, herders worry that they will be easy targets for cattle theft and are mistrustful of government upkeep and enforcement. A reserve in Wase LGA serves as an example. It spreads across parts of Plateau, Bauchi, and Taraba states, and was designated specifically for grazing. However, various dams and irregular rainfall drained the water resources and dried up the grass. The government had agreed to periodically fumigate against a large infestation of tsetse flies, but neglected this over time, creating an inhospitable environment for herding.

---

22 Grazing reserves were established by the Northern Nigeria Regional government in 1965, which sectioned large swathes of land, such as the Ruma-Kukar-Jangari in Kaduna state, to be used exclusively for herders to graze their herds. While initially regarded as a legislative solution to conflict over competition for land resources, herders often eschew grazing reserves, which were not maintained and lack nutritious grass and plants, in favor of migratory grazing in search of healthier pastures.



**FIGURE 7:** Lake Chad from 1963-2007, Source: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, 2001 and 2007.

In addition, distribution of resources at the local level are often politicized and reinforce feelings of persecution and exclusion. In Riyom LGA, in Plateau state, for instance, 370 boreholes were appropriated for distribution among three districts. Of these, only two were allocated to Mahanga district within the LGA, where mostly members of the Fulani community reside. Perceptions of resource injustice and marginalization further chip away at the fragile relationship between Fulani herdsmen and farmers.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the country there is growing tension between and among communities – along regional, social, ethnic, religious, and economic lines. Yet, instead of addressing these tensions and underlying factors to instability, the core policies and practices of the government have further exposed Nigerians to vulnerability. The government is putting out wildfires rather than working to identify risks and preventing the fires from beginning at all. Weakness in the criminal justice system, poorly funded local government structures, corruption, and detached federal policies have eroded trust between communities and government, further weakening the ability of government to mitigate tensions within and between communities.

The government of Nigeria needs to tackle the issue of violence, and particularly the role of youth, in a holistic and comprehensive manner. The United States Government should support the Nigerian Government to adopt a more holistic, preventative approach to security and violence reduction.

## ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT:

**Develop and Invest in Nigeria's Domestic Cattle Supply Chain:** Local breeds of cattle are not commercially viable for ranching, as they produce very little milk and poor quality beef. Local breeds would need to be systematically cross-bred with foreign breeds for largescale ranching to be successful. Additionally, while the dynamics of pastoralism are indeed changing, it is unlikely that the habits and traditional migrations of pastoralists will change without intensive outreach and education initiatives. Land needs to be designated and contained in a consultative manner, while the herding community needs to be engaged in a way that showcases the advantages of ranching. There are many herds in Nigeria that are being lucratively ranched – those of President Buhari and other prominent politicians and ex-security officials, for instance.

Ongoing agricultural reforms provide an opportunity to bring innovation and diversification of livelihoods to herders. The cattle supply chain in Nigeria is almost entirely managed by the private sector. But, the public sector used to manage slaughterhouses, meat markets, tanneries, and inspections and there is room for them to reinvigorate their role in this sector. Together, public and private investments can help to reinvigorate the sector, improve its efficiency, and regulate its supply chain. The United States, for example, could include and support the animal production sector in its Agricultural Cooperation Agreement with Nigeria, to make it more productive and viable.

Currently, there are few, if any, organized and structured transportation arrangements for either livestock or fresh meat in the local markets.<sup>23</sup> It is more lucrative to walk a cow from North to South to sell in the southern market, than it is to slaughter the cow in the North and ship it to the South. As there are more and more migrations into southern Nigeria, investments in slaughterhouses, refrigerated trucking and railcars, and surrounding livelihood, such as tanneries, can help to mitigate the number of southward migrations. At the same time, it can help in job and infrastructure creation, expansion of distribution networks, and fulfill a demand for high-quality beef and leather goods.

**Formalize and Strengthen the Organization of Cattle Markets:** Local cattle markets are generally unorganized to the extent that there is no collation of what is brought in to be sold and what has been purchased. Across the country, there needs to be support for local governments to organize their cattle market – determining what is being sold, by whom, and to whom – and to ensure that trades occur within this system. For instance, in Jos, the local government has banned personal sales of cattle outside the market as a method to curb illegal sale of rustled cattle.

Local Fulani clans have unique ways of branding their cattle that links them to their owners (e.g. folding ears, cutting tails, etc.). While these markings are understood within their clan, these markings are not tracked or communicated outside the clan, so that markings clear to Fulani are not so to security forces or others. Communication of these internal markings or development of branding techniques that can be communicated to security forces and the various LGAs, can serve as a mechanism to track cattle and ensure

that stolen cattle are returned to their owners and that cattle are sold lawfully.

**Invest in Green Energy and Environmental Protection:** Migratory patterns will likely continue to change and environmental degradation needs to be addressed to help reduce the flow of herders south from the Sahel. One of the greatest sources of desertification in the north is using timber for fire and fuel. Nigeria is considered one of the most severely deforested nations, and over 70 percent of Nigeria's population depends on firewood for fuel.<sup>24</sup> Nigeria is considered one of the most severely deforested nations with an annual rate of 3.73 percent deforestation between 2000 and 2010. The introduction of innovations such as solar power or gas stoves can begin to lessen the impact on the environment. Regional and international actors, at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), and United Nations (UN) levels, should negotiate and agree upon actions to address root causes of environmental degradation and desertification across the region.

### **POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:**

**Support a “Peace Architecture” Approach to Local Community-Led Security:** While farmer/herder violence is present in many communities in the Middle Belt, each occurs at a local level. Steps to build locally owned peace within communities by linking empowered, cohesive, and inclusive communities to government representatives can help to mitigate violent responses. Incorporation of traditional leaders into decision-making and dispute handling roles is important, as traditional rulers and Ardos hold considerable power and authority over members of their tribes, many times more than local government authorities. Government leaders often recognize the power of the authorities, calling upon them to respond to issues of insurrection or frustration to appease the people, yet their incorporation into formalized community management is limited.

By developing inclusive and participatory platforms for dialogue and conflict management, community leaders can take responsibility to reach agreements, share land resources, and develop dispute resolution techniques and procedures in conjunction with local authorities. For instance, in Keana LGA, Nasarawa state, Search supports community forums, consisting of representatives from the farming and herding communities that jointly receive and respond to grievances. Since the members of the forums received the training and implemented this dispute handling mechanism, there have been no reports of violence relating to farmer/herder grievances in the town or its outlying communities.

Both farming and herding communities also generally provide refuge for those that are known to have committed crimes against the other. Often there is non-reporting of plots or early warning signs because people are unsure of where the information is being channeled and what actions will be taken. Indeed, there is also a tendency to perceive group inclusivity as safety, and that fear of isolation from their community constricts people from divulging information against one of their own. Platforms and solutions which place the onus of security on the community can help to disrupt non-reporting and the explicit or in-explicit acceptance of criminality.

**Enhance Community Participation in Potential Development of Grazing Reserves and Ranches:** First, the Nigerian government has proposed several bills in the National Assembly for the establishment of grazing reserves or ranches.<sup>25</sup> So far, none of these bills has been passed and none may be passed because they are often perceived to be associated with regional, ethnic, and/or religious interests. There is resistance to the idea of ranching on both sides, but for different reasons. Farmers question where the land will be designated from and fear having reserves close to towns amid current security concerns. Alternatively, herders question their maintenance of vegetation in designated reserves, the ability to manage disease, and security concerns on their vulnerability to attack and theft. Main concerns revolve around security from cattle rustlers, types of vegetation in designated reserves, and management of disease. But there is also resistance to change and a history of government negligence in following through on supportive maneuvers to development of the cattle industry. To make these solutions viable, they must have local ownership and buy-in to the development, implementation, and maintenance of such an operation. Widespread forums on the prospect of ranching need to be completed at the local and national level, incorporating nomadic education initiatives where appropriate to include the perspectives and experiences of all involved parties.

Local governments can also consider various manners of re-establishing the attachment of pastoralists to the towns, this may include actions such as re-instating cattle and farm taxes, the distribution of vaccines to cattle, or formalized cattle markets. These measures can also help to increase data collection and tracking of herds from one community to another. Activities can build off government support, such as that of the Director General of the National Boundary Commission, who has stated that “reintroducing cattle tax will go a long way in addressing clashes between... herdsman and farmers in the Middle Belt and other states.”<sup>26</sup>

**Increase Security Sector Accountability and Improve Security-Citizen Relationships:** Community trust with security forces – both local and federal agents – remains very low. Members of the security forces are sometimes seen as being complicit in crime or attacks, aligned with a particular community, or at minimum non-responsive. Many communities possess stories of human rights abuses committed by security forces, often with no accountability, response nor restitution. Ongoing security reforms provide an opportunity to strengthen the security forces and address the problems of endemic corruption and human rights abuses. Stringent accountability measures should be incorporated and enforced into all areas of the security sector. As part of this, there should be specific outreach and inclusion of civil society, traditional leaders, and community members to reconcile past grievances and build trust and understanding moving forward. Platforms such as community security architectures can help to bring security forces and the community together with the joint purpose of security.

---

25 For example, the National Grazing Reserve Law of 2016

26 Nwankwo, 2016.

## SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT:

**Increase Opportunities for and Conflict-Sensitivity Training and Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** Cultural and practical considerations limit the exposure of pastoralist and farming communities to each other, thereby inhibiting social--cultural understanding and feelings of shared victimhood on both sides. Locally owned peace requires breaking down divides, mistrust, and isolation and reframing the relationships between farming and herding communities. By exposing communities to alternative narratives and constructively addressing differences in joint activities, negative stereotypes will begin to be replaced by positive firsthand interactions and foster a greater collective understanding. Farmers and pastoralists are both returning slowly to their communities that have been attacked, but there remains significant mistrust and fear of attack. For instance, herdsmen that are returning to their original communities are wary of returning with their entire families, so do so alone with their cattle. However, when the farmers see the return of the herdsmen alone without their families, they are suspicious of their intentions and fear attack.

Reporting on attacks has used highly inflammatory language and often spreads unsubstantiated reports; further escalating tensions and undermining stability. Transparency and specialized journalism training on dealing with conflict can help to incorporate the needs and reports of all groups and balance the perceived imbalance of reporting from media. The drivers of violence are at a very high risk of being misunderstood by Nigerians and the international community alike. There is no certain evidence that Fulani groups have a single political goal and they generally carry out their lives independently of other clans. Rhetoric that equates ethnic groups such as Fulani, to terrorist organizations is not only unconstructive but also exacerbates the conflict and potential for violence. Inter-religious dialogues and platforms to counter these incendiary narratives can and should be incorporated.

**Areas for Further Research:** There is a need for further research on the constitution, practice, and strategies of the criminal gangs and 'conflict entrepreneurs.' In this research, the professionalization of herders for hire and their involvement in violent incidents should also be considered. So far, they have been involved in some degree of the devastation, but it is unclear to what extent they are responsible versus retaliatory reprisal attacks and other criminal groups. Further research can help to illuminate any fluctuations in violence based on situations where a herder is grazing his own cattle, the cattle of someone who has hired him, or has stolen the cattle. Increased information on the perpetrators and the driving motivations for violence can help the government, civil society, donors, and others to more effectively address and mitigate violent conflict.

## REFERENCES

- Benjamin, Isaiah. "Southern Kaduna Killings Act Of Criminality Not Ethnicity, Religion." *Leadership*. Leadership, 29 Nov. 2016. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://leadership.ng/news/561776/southern-kaduna-killings-act-of-criminality-not-ethnicity-religion-el-rufai>>.
- "Africa Review Report on Drought and Desertification." *United Nations Economic and Social Council*. United Nations Economic and Social Council, Nov. 2007. Web. [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd16/rim/eca\\_bg3.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd16/rim/eca_bg3.pdf). 23 Mar. 2017.
- FAO. "Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010." (n.d.): n. pag. *Food and Agriculture Organization*. United Nations, 2010. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1757e/i1757e.pdf>>.
- FAO. "FAO Statistical Pocketbook 2015." *World Food and Agriculture Organization*. United Nations, 2015. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4691e.pdf>>.
- Franzen, Harald. "Lake Chad Is Disappearing." *Scientific American*. N.p., 01 Mar. 2001. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/lake-chad-is-disappearing/>>.
- Human Rights Watch. "Jos: A City Torn Apart." *Human Rights Watch*. Human Rights Watch, Dec. 2001. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2001/12/18/jos/city-torn-apart>>.
- ICRC. "Nigeria: Red Cross Assists Victims of Sectarian Violence in Jos." *ICRC*. International Committee of the Red Cross, 04 Dec. 2008. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/news-release/2009-and-earlier/nigeria-news-041208.htm>>.
- Jangali: Fulani Pastoralists and Colonial Taxation in Northern Nigeria Author(s): A. G. Adebayo Source: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1995), pp. 113-150 Published by: Boston University African Studies Center Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/221307> Accessed: 06-03-2017 14:48 UTC
- Kochhar, Rakesh. "10 Projections for the Global Population in 2050." *Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center, 03 Feb. 2014. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/10-projections-for-the-global-population-in-2050/>>.
- Krause, Jana. "A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria." (n.d.): n. pag. *Geneva Declaration*. Geneva Declaration Secretariat, June 2011. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/regional-publications/GD-ES-deadly-cycle-Jos.pdf>>.
- Majekodunmi, Ayodele O., Akinyemi Fajinmi, Charles Dongkum, Alexandra P. Shaw, M., and Susan C. Welburn. 2014. Pastoral livelihoods of the Fulani on the Jos plateau of Nigeria. *Pastoralism* 4, (1) (11): 1-16, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1726764382?accountid=11243> (accessed January 19, 2017).
- Nwankwo, Ngozi. "Reintroduction of Cattle Tax Will End Herdsmen, Farmers Clash." *Nigerian Pilot: Nigerian Newspaper*. N.p., 05 May 2016. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://nigerianpilot.com/reintroduction-cattle-tax-will-end-herdsmen-farmers-clash-dg/>>.
- Odiogor, Hugo. "Special Report on Desertification in Nigeria: The Sun Eats Our Land." *Vanguard News*. N.p., 03 May 2010. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/05/special-report-on-desertification-in-nigeria-the-sun-eats-our-land/>>.
- Olagunju, Temidayo Ebenezer. "Drought, Desertification and the Nigerian Environment: A Review." *Journal of Ecology and the Natural Environment* 7.7 (2015): 196-209. *Academic Journals*. 4 May 2015. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://academicjournals.org/journal/JENE/article-full-text-pdf/4505E2154369>>.
- World Bank. "Nigeria: Population, Total." *The World Bank, Data*. The World Bank Group, 2016. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POPTOTL?locations=NG>>.
- Search for Common Ground, January 20 - 2 February 2017 Weekly Context Update
- "Security: Fulani Herdsmen Are Not All Nigerians," Channels Television, Mar. 21, 2014, <<http://www.channelstv.com/home/2014/03/21/security-fulani-herdsmen-are-not-all-nigerians/>>.
- Smith, Olanrewaju B., Abdou Salla, and Berhanu Bedane, eds. "Review of the Livestock/Meat and Milk Value Chains and Policy Influencing them in Nigeria." *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, 2016. Web. 23 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5259e.pdf>>.

