



Herdsmen Activities And Socio-Economic Development In South-East, Nigeria, 2015-2021

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ABSTRACT

The Free movement of herders across neighbouring communities and regions for the purpose of grazing has constituted a serious nightmare and security threat in the country. Because there is a deviation from the primary motive of cattle rearing enterprise to an undefined attacks and inhuman mayhem on armless and defenseless communities and farmers. This deviation therefore resulted into unhealthy activities of pillaging, raping, killing, destruction of farm amongst others by herdsmen, which thus inhibit free movement of the people in the affected areas, particularly in the South-East Nigeria. The study leveraged on the propositional trappings of structural functionalism theory as its analytical framework of study. The study relied on documentary method for data gathering, and content analysis for analysing the materials generated. The study affirms that the activities of herdsmen which manifest in form of incessant killings, destruction of farmlands, kidnapping, raping amongst others undermine socio-economic development in South-East Nigeria. Thus, recommended among other things that the implementation of anti open grazing law with stifling penalties as a legal framework to curtail the barbaric activities of herdsmen in South-East Nigeria.

Keywords: Herdsmen, Socio-economic, Killings, South-East, Kidnapping

INTRODUCTION

Imperatively, free movement of herdsmen across the neighbouring communities and regions for the purpose of grazing has constituted a serious nightmare and security threat in the country. This follows a deviation from the primary motive of cattle rearing enterprise to undefined attacks and inhuman mayhem on armless and defenseless farmers. Herdsmen activities ranging from pillaging, raping, killing, destruction of farmland and produce, and kidnapping are so worrisome in recent times in the country as this creates fears amongst the armless farmers on one end, and also led to abandonment of farming system, which is the bedrock of socio-economic development in the country on the other end (Obi, Chinweze & Onyejebu, 2018). Historically, Fulanis are mass inhabitants or descendants from Middle East and North Africa widely dispersed in all parts of Africa, but most predominant in West Africa and are nomadic in nature (Ajibefun, 2018). Before now Fulani herdsmen were peacefully coexisting with their neighbouring and host communities all over the country. For instance, communities in the North, South and elsewhere in Nigeria never had serious disagreements with Fulani herdsmen in the past, this which led to an economic beneficial gentlemen and mutual relationship with the host communities, with a common practice of inviting herdsmen to the farms after harvest for purpose of enriching the farmlands and possibly secure the bumper harvest on one end, and also feed their cows and cattle with the harvest waste on the other end (Gadzama, 2018).

Worrisomely, herders who were originally friendly and armless and only operate with mere staff sticks to control their cattle suddenly became a thorn, nightmare and enemies to farmers and host communities all over the country, thereby attacking farmers and the communities, with sophisticated assault weapons such as AK-47 (Ajibefun, 2018). This has intensified within the period under review—2015-2021, with several communities and regions been viciously attacked. For instance, from Agatu in Benue State, Akure in Ondo State, Bukuru area in Plateau State, Oke Ogun area in Oyo State, Gassaka and Bali local government areas in Taraba State, Uzouwani L.G.A in Enugu State, Oguta L.G.A, Imo State, Ohaukwu L.G.A, Ebonyi State to

Akuku Toru L.G.A, River State amongst others (Obi, Chinweze & Onyejebu, 2018; Onyejiuwa, 2020; and Okutu, 2021). Akin to the above, Ogunbiyi (2018) argued that everywhere they go, sorrow, tears and blood trail them.

Consequently, Okereke (2012) and Bello (2013) (in Obi, Chinweze & Onyejebu, 2018) observed that farmers no longer peacefully go for their daily farming activities due to fears of Fulani herdsmen. Furthermore, the incessant terror attacks of Fulani herdsmen on the peasant farmers not only led to daily loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers no longer freely go to farm and harvest their farm produce, but also have pitched ethno-religious conflicts in the country in some parts of the north and southern Nigeria in general; and between Christians and Muslims.

In attempt to ameliorate and curtail the security threat posed by the herders and other security challenges by groups such as cultism, banditry, vandalism, amongst others, state governments in partnership with the security agencies and federal government launched series of security operation under different code names--vigilante (informal community policing) aimed at tackling the menace of insecurity in the State, particularly in the highly volatile areas of the country such as Enugu, Ebonyi State amongst others in South-East Nigeria (Ladan & Iguda, 2019; and Mudasiru & Fatai, 2020). However, even with such security strategies in place, the herders' security menace never hitched but intensified with more attacks on the host communities, killings and kidnappings everywhere they go. For the instance, the recent attacks by the herders in Plateau, Kogi and Benue in the Middle Belt region between 2016 till date leaving over 800 lives dead and thousands displaced (Ojo, 2017; World Watch Monitor, 2020) this which led to a memorable popular *Black Friday* in Benue state in 2016. Furthermore, more attacks and killings were also observed in the south-eastern Nigeria, with particularly reference to Aguleri/ Umuleri in Anambra State, Umuahia and Isuochi in Abia State, Ukpabi-Nimbo in Enugu state amongst others, killing about 40 indigenes, and four communities in Ishielu L.G.A., Ebonyi State with over 25 innocent rural dwellers massacred in cold blood amongst others (Nwosu, 2017; Abugu & Onuba, 2015; and Okutu, 2021).

In view of this, the study sought to interrogate the menace of herdsmen activities and how it undermines socio-economic development in south-east geo-political zone, 2015-2021, thus leading to untold hardship and food insecurity in the zone and Nigeria at large.

The study area

South-East Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria originated in 1995 with the recommendation of Alex Ekwueme under the military administration of General Sani Abacha from the former Eastern region of country, following the political division of the country into three in 1950s (Udeh, 2019). The area has five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, with eight-five Local Government Areas and a population of over thirty million predominantly Christians (Udeh, 2019). Agricultural activities are well known in the area because the area is endowed with arable land, with large food production of yam, cassava, rice, cocoyam, maize and cash crops of palm-oil, rubber, cocoa amongst others. Apart from agriculture as its mainstay of economic activities, particularly for the rural dwellers, the region is also well known for its commerce and trading activities with micro, small and medium industries. With the aforementioned agricultural, arable and fertility of the area, the Fulani ethnic group wished to displace the people by diplomatically waging war against the people through incessant attacks, killing, kidnapping and raping the women even in the broad day light with impunity. Without the government being genuinely committed to curtail such menace possibly because the President—Buhari is a Fulani origin and would take side because the perpetrators of acts are his kinsmen. This therefore emboldened the terror activities of killings, raping and kidnapping by herdsmen in south-east, thus causing fears and restriction of free movement of people and their daily socio-economic activities. This therefore undermine the socio-economic development of the area—south-east.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a documentary method of data collection. Documentary method provides us with relevant documented and written materials already in existence even though they were not produced precisely for the direct use of the researchers (Obasi, 1999) (in Mbah & Obiagu, 2019), but can find it useful for usage. To this end, we sourced data from documented materials such as books, book chapters, journal articles, official documents, newspapers, magazines, internet materials and unpublished papers amongst others.

Akin to the above, the study also adopted content analysis for the purpose of analyzing the documented materials generated through secondary source of data collection. Accordingly, Abeng (2017) noted that content analysis is a structured technique for valid analysis of documents in which the researcher first constructs a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories that can be used to analyse documents, and then records the frequency with which each of these categories is observed in the documents studied. Furthermore, content analysis is a research technique for objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952, p. 489), thus, this is very apt for this study due to its complex nature.

Theoretical Framework

In order to properly explain how the activities of herdsmen undermine socio-economic development in South-East Nigeria, through incessant attacks, killings, raping and kidnapping of the rural communities and farmers with impunity in south-east Nigeria, the study adopted structural functionalism theory as its analytical framework of study. The theory is a derivative or an offshoot of system theory, and was associated by an English philosopher and biologist, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who compared the similarities between the society and the human body. He argued that as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, also the various parts of the society should work together to keep the society functioning (Spencer, 1898) (in Mbah, 2014). The theory was further developed and used by an earliest sociologist, Emile Durkheim to explain how societies change and survive over time. Furthermore, he argued that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim, 1893) (in Mbah, 2014), and that society is held together by shared values, languages and symbols. The theory was further made popular by an association of political scientists--Gabriel A. Almond, William C. Mitchell and David Apter.

The application of theory

Nigerian state is a profound example of society with complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts (structures) working together to maintain stability in the society. Particularly, with the output functions which are mainly the activities associated with the policy-making and implementation unit through rule-making functions, rule-application functions and rule-adjudication functions (Mbah, 2014). However, the failure of these output functions, particularly by the structure or body saddled with the responsibility *of the rule-making and rule-application functions* thus can result in the state of lawlessness in the society. In this regard, the bureaucracies in most modern political systems are the governmental structures responsible for the application or the implementation of the rules or policies made within a functional political system.

Therefore, the failure in function by the rule-making unit and implementation structure leads to hostility, lawlessness in the security. In a more clear term, the government of every country, particularly Nigeria has the sole responsibility for making law and policy upon which certain unlawful actions can be curtailed on one end. And also upon which peace, equity, justice and security can be maintained in the society on the other hand. Punish the offenders through the law enforcement agencies. The failure of the government of Nigeria to genuinely consider the persisted undefined herders terror attacks in the society as unlawful is not only threats to socio-economic development of the country, but also threats to human life. By genuinely introduce a policy upon which the terror activities of the herdsmen can be arrested has emboldened their evil and inhuman attacks on the armless innocent citizens in the society. The lack of genuine will by the federal government of Nigeria to addressing the persisted herders activities through laws and policies may not be far contend from ethnic politics, as the president is a Muslim Fulani extraction who also surrounded his administration with his kinsmen, particularly the very key positions of the state. Who also anchored his administration on sentiments and ethnocentrism, and uses the political power for family and religious patronage. This therefore becomes a justification upon which the herders brutally attack and kill the rural communities and farmers with impunity in the south-east Nigeria who are majorly Christians on one hand. Also, the incessant killings of the farmers, raping, and kidnapping amongst others appear the contributing factor upon which farmers abandoned their farming activities for fear of being raped, kidnapped or killed in the process on other end. This therefore not only undermines socio-economic development in the south-east Nigeria, but also undermines national development of the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical background of Fulani

Etymologically, Fulani originated from the word 'fula', and are ethnic group who are mostly shepherds and cattle herders (Ajibefun, 2018; Gordon, 2000) (in Ningxin, 2018, p. 1), who are large inhabitants widely dispersed virtually in all Africa territories, particularly in West Africa. Affirmatively, the group is a descendant from Middle East and North Africa, whose origin is traceable with the Berbers of North Africa around the 8th or 11th century AD (Anter, 2015). And largely spread to most parts of West Africa and some parts of Central Africa between AD 900-1900 (Anter, 2015), and predominantly Muslims by religion. The group is majorly nomadic in nature, herding sheep, goats and cattle across the dry grass lands of their environs, upon this they were described the major pastoral nomadic group in the world (Ajibefun, 2018).

Furthermore, the group also extended to Nigeria, particularly the northern region of the country through the series of event called the Fulani Jihads, and conquered a greater part of the Northern region in the jihad (holy) war between 1804 and 1808 (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). They are known as Fulbe in Gombe, Fulbe in Adamawa, Fulbe in Sokoto, Fsulbe Mbororo, and Fulbe Borgu (Kasarachi, 2016). The Fulani are the major breeders of goats, sheep and cattle and other livestock ventures in the country. Akin to the above, the group is indisputably representing a significant part of the country's economy. In agreement with the above, Ajibefun (2018) contends that the Fulani maintained over 90% of the livestock production which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP, and 3.2% of the entire GDP in Nigeria (Fabiya & Otunuga, 2016).

The Fulani herdsmen mostly move with their cattle's from one destination to another in search of grazing land especially in the dry season. In the quest for grazing, the herders often have southward movement of the herds along rivers and stream valleys, especially from October to December of every season marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season (Iro, 1994) (in Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). Similarly, between January and February is usually the harmattan period through which the herders spent longer hours searching for water stable areas to grazing their herds. Between the months of March and April are usually characterized as the toughest period for the herdsman and their cattle, as it is the hottest period in the grazing calendar (Ubi, 2020). Because of the nature of this period, the herders prefer to move their cattle only in the evenings and nights, while May and June usually mark the end of dry season and vegetation begins to appear. This is usually the end of southward movement, and the northward movement begins from July. The period of northward movement—July is usually characterized by heavy rainfall, but cattle breeding season, more milk production with shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production, and farmers-herdsmen conflict is therefore triggered (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019) due to destruction of farmland therein.

Fulani herdsmen attacks in South-East Nigeria

Affirmatively, the Igbos are the most accommodating and hospitable extraction in Nigeria, this is so because they are majorly merchants dispersed all over the continents of the world. To buttress this, there is hardly any community where Fulani herdsmen are not found in the five eastern states of Abia, Enugu, Anambra, Imo and Ebonyi. However, despite this spirited hospitality extended to strangers, particularly the Fulani nomads, the region has been severely brutalised by the accommodated herders. Attacks which appeared to be a daily routine, particularly in the rural communities and armless and defenseless farmers on one end, raping, killing, kidnapping and destroying farmland and produce of the people in the region on the other hand. For instance, in Abia state, attacks on local farmers have become a huge threat to human security. As a result many communities in Abia, with particular reference not limited to Uzuakoli in Bende Local Government, Ehem and Akanu in Ohafia, and Umuechieze in Umunneochi have been severely brutalised and sacked during cases of deadly clashes between rural farmers and the cattle breeders (Nwaopara & Okoli, 2015).

Similarly, the recent recurrent attacks on the farmers in the country, particularly in the south-east has posed grave implications on human safety and security especially as it affects farmers in the South-East of Nigeria, because of lack grazing boundaries for herders. In relation to the above, Okeke (2014) aptly contends that Fulani herders graze virtually in every state in the region with impunity with no regret and consideration, destroying crops, causing traffic, raping women, beating up hunters on one end. They frequently wage deadly armed attacks on villages where there is the slightest resistance to their depredations on the other end. Also, it was reported that in Enugu state in 2009, suspected Fulani herdsmen attacked Ezeagu communities in the state and killed not less than scores of women farmers in their farms (Abugu & Onuba, 2015). Furthermore, Anabara State was not let out of the situation, particularly communities like Aguleri/ Umuleri axis, where Fulani herdsmen have been banned from entering since 2012 due to their undefined attacks and terror to the

communities (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). In the same vein, the damages caused by Fulani herdsmen in Abia communities of Umuahia and Isuochi also led to their expulsion from the areas, after having witnessed orgy of violence and crisis of greater magnitude caused by Fulani herdsmen (Abugu & Onuba, 2015). Accordingly, Nwosu (2017) observed that on 25 April, 2016, suspected Fulani invaders attacked and sacked Ukpabi-Nimbo, a town in Enugu state, killing scores of over 40 indigenes. Similarly, Ebonyi State has been a hotbed for such internecine carnage having recorded over 10 Fulani herdsmen attacks in all the 13 Local Government Areas of the state, with over 100 deaths majorly farmers in the rural areas, and large farmland been destroyed in the recent time (Ubi, 2020). The above narratives and more have been the situation in the south-east Nigeria, reported in the different headlines of National Dailies each of which refers to a separate event that occurred between 2015-2021: "Crisis looms between Abia community and Hausa/Fulani herdsmen" (The Daily Post, June 10, 2015). "Fulani herdsmen invade Ohaji"; "Fulani herdsmen storm Enugu, robed and raped women" (Oodera, 2015), "Fulani herders sacked communities of Ebonyi State" (Sun News, April 2020), amongst others (Ubi, 2020). Pitiably, in all these developments, the government of Nigeria through its security agencies whose primary duty is the protection of lives and properties have not done enough to find a lasting solution to the confronting menace of herdsmen and their deadly terror activities in the country, particularly in south-east Nigeria.

Herdsmen activities and socio-economic implications in South-East Nigeria

Most often, the Fulani herders seek to settle in fertile greenish areas to rear their cattle through migration, by so doing destroy large farmland and produce. When this migration continued to be dictated by economic and socio-political factors, increased trends of conflicts between the herders and their host communities (farmers) became inevitably escalated (Ajibefun, 2018). This therefore resulted in loss of lives, properties, farmlands and crops every year in Nigeria to Fulani herders, particularly in the South-Eastern Nigeria. The conflicts or contestations between Fulani herdsmen and farmers came into existence as a result of encroachment of farmlands by the Fulani herders attempting and grazing on farmlands with no sense of ruefulness. Under this situation Nigeria in general and South-east in particular is regarded as being under a severe internal and security threat, as it has political, economic and environmental dimensions (Ajibefun, 2018). Each of these dimensions has critical influence in undermining the stability of the nation on one end, and also has the capability of mutilating the national development of the country on the other end; and can be traceable to many factors in which the Fulani-herdsmen appear to be major protagonists. Most worrisomely, in the recent time is the rate of pillaging, raping, killing, kidnapping, and incessant inhuman and terror attacks in the South-east Nigeria. For instance, stories are found in the national dailies on daily basis how Fulani-herders strategically attack several communities and rural dwellers, with sophisticated assault guns-AK-47 in the communities of south-eastern states, with particular reference to Ebonyi and Enugu States which have turned to hotbeds of herders menace. This oftentimes leads to wonton loss of lives of majorly women rural farmers, destroying large farm produce worth millions of Naira, and displacing and sacking entire communities.

Consequently, this posing serious threat to the people of the region, particularly the rural dwellers who are majorly farmers on one end, and disrupting other socio-economic activities as kidnapping and raping intensified. Accordingly, Okereke (2012) and Bello (2013) (in Nnaji & Samuel, 2019, p. 33) contend that "farmers can no longer farm peacefully because of Fulani herdsmen". In relation to the above, Kasarachi (2016, p. 194) observed that:

Serious conflict has erupted between Fulani herdsmen and farmers leading to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers for fear of attack could no longer go to farm to harvest their farm produce.

Furthermore, this following other series of attacks in the communities of Ebonyi state leading to total displacement of such communities and its residents between 2020 and 2021. Ubi (2020) contends that such attacks cannot be compared to boko haram and bandits attacks put together in some states in the northern region. Similarly, the attacks, raping and kidnapping by Fulani herders have become so worrisome as it worsened on daily basis, thus leaving the rural dwellers, particularly the farmers in cage with fears of not freely engaged in their farming activities, move around their environments and even to engage in their normal traditional weekly markets to sale their farm produce, all for the fear of being kidnapped and raped in the process. Similarly, other economic activities such as schools, transportation business amongst others are also

placed on hold, as they operate on the mercy of their predators—herdsmen. This therefore resulting in the untold famines, inflation and high cost of living, as costs of food items appear so high in the market in the region in particular and Nigeria in general.

Meanwhile, this recent waves of herders menace in Nigeria not only destabilising the rural dwellers through the destruction of their farmlands and crops on one end as observed by Kasarachi (2016), but also disrupting socio-economic, religious and educational activities, political instability and threatening the national unity of the country on the other end. For instance, according to Ajibefun (2018) who argued that the incessant attacks and killings by herdsmen in many communities in south-eastern states have not only inflicted in fears amongst the rural residents, forced thousands of people to abandon their homes and farmlands for safety on one end. But also have enforced many state governments to close down several socio-economic activities such as school, places of worship, markets amongst others in the intensified attack prone areas like Isiagu and Ohafa in Ebonyi state; and Nimbo in Enugu state which have become the hotbeds of the herders attacks in the region (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). It is against this reality that Sule (2021, p. 541) asserts that the herders terror in the society is so alarming that “there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is at a crossroad and gradually drifting to a conflict prone society against its cooperate existence”. Further argued that the social implication of herders’ unethical engagement of daily raping of women, robbery and kidnapping with ultimate intent for ransom cannot be overemphasised in the contemporary society of the country, as the stigma of being raped is indelible in the mind of the victims. Thus, the menace of Fulani-Herdsmen appears to have dire implications on the socio-economic development in the states attacked and Nigeria in general, as this has forced many farmers to unwillingly abandon their normal farming activities. For instance, according to Ajibefun (2018, p.134-135):

In the states where the Fulani herdsmen and farmers crisis is pervasive, the property destroyed and cases of rapes slog their economic and social opulence back by several steps. Besides the destroyed properties, socio-economic life in those states is usually grounded to a halt as people could not freely go about their farming and socio-economic activities for fear of being killed. The overall implication for sustainable development is that the farming, economic and social activities seem to be fast deteriorating. Also, a substantial part of the country’s budget has been spent on the compensation of families who lost their relations to the Fulani herdsmen and farmers crisis. Also, huge amount of money is being spent on weapons and ammunition acquisition so as to equip the military to handle the situation on ground. All these seem to have affected Nigeria’s economy.

Against the above, Ezeogidi (nd) contends that it is no longer news that Nigeria has overtaken India as the poverty capital of the world, but what could be news is that the activities of the terrorist groups, particularly the Fulani herdsmen are contributory factors to the dwindling economic rating of Nigeria in the Global Economic Index analysis. Furthermore, the activities of herdsmen resulted in the emigration of many Nigerians to a more peaceful environment even within the African continent for safety and greener pasture. Thereby running into the risk of becoming asylum seekers in the strange lands like Libya, South-Africa and other western countries just to mention but a few (Ubi, 2020). Similarly, Ubi (2020, p. 2) noted with dismay that:

The number of Nigerians living outside Nigeria is more than doubled between 2013 to 2018, from 465,932 to 1,030,322. In 2020, nearly two thirds of Nigerian emigrants (61.4%) were residing in more remote areas in Europe. Whereas in 2013 only 33.8 per cent of Nigerian migrants lived outside the country. From 2015 to 2018, this had increased to 52 per cent, and further 56.7 per cent in 2018. This increase of Nigerians outside the country is a function of the failure of Nigerian government to guarantee the safety of lives and properties of its citizens.

This obviously undermines the overall economic fertility and national development of the country as its citizens who are capable of working to increase the work-force of the nation struggled out of the country for safety, as against their own blessed country-home. It is against this lacuna that unethical herdsmen attacks were described as economic and national development antagonistic phenomenon that ought to be discarded in its entirety for the sake of growth and development of the country (Ubi, 2020).

DISCUSSION

Killing of farmers and abandonment of farming activities

It is a well known fact that the Fulani is an ethnic group of the West African Savannah, with some of its members in town and cities engaging in farming and trading (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). With a larger proportion of them as cattle herders. The group integrated in some parts of the northern Nigeria having conquered a greater part of the areas through series of Fulani Jihads event popularly known as Jihad holy war between 1804 and 1810 (Horton, 1972; Adeleye 1971; Last, 1967) (in Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). Presently, the group--Fulani or Fulbe represents an indisputable significant component of the country's economic soul, because they constitute the major breeders of cattle, which is the main source of meat most available and cheap source of animal protein consumed in Nigeria (Eniola, 2007). As a matter of fact, the name Fulani has become synonymous with grazing and cattle ownership not only in Nigeria alone but also in the West Africa sub-region (Aliyu, 2015), because they have no other jobs than herding and farming.

In the course of promoting their cattle rearing business, the Fulani-herdsmen have traditional annual herding cycle seasons of southward and northward season movement. According to Nnaji and Samuel (2019), the group begins with the first southward movement of the herds along rivers and stream valleys from October to December marking the end of rainy season and beginning of dry season. While January to February is often the harmattan season, which is usually characterised by longer grazing hours, herd splitting and more frequently visits stable water source areas. Furthermore, the months of March and April are usually the toughest season for the herdsmen and their cattle, as it is the hottest period is the grazing calendar (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019), during this period the herdsmen rather herd their cattle only in the evenings and nights due to the hostility of the season. Usually, the months of May and June marked the end of dry season and the beginning of vegetation; also the very beginning of northward season movement of cattle herds. From this period up till September is usually known as the peak of rainy season, and also characterised by cattle breeding, more milk production and shorter grazing hours, cattle herding coincides significantly with arable crop production (Iro, 1994) (in Nnaji & Samuel, 2019), upon this triggers farmers-herdsmen clashes.

Most significantly, south-east Nigeria is one of the fertile arable lands; rivers and stream valleys in the southern division of the country, upon this is the attraction of the large movement of Fulani herdsmen into the various communities in the region for grazing purpose. By so doing, the destruction of farmlands and crops become inevitable. In resistance of this act accounts or triggers bloody clashes upon which the farmers are often at the receiving end, particularly as it always results in the killings of the armless and defenseless farmers. This is not limited to a particular community in the affected states of the region, but an incessant reoccurrence in various communities of the five esteem states. With particular reference to the killings of seven farmers in Uzuakoli community in Bende Local Government, five in Ehem and Akanu in Ohafia Local Government of Abia State in February and May, 2015 (Nwaopara & Okoli, 2015) (in Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). He further noted of the severely stabbed to death of the husband and wife in Umuechieze in Umunneochi in March, 2016. In the same vein, Ubi (2020) noted that though conflicts between cattle herders and farmers have existed since the beginning of agriculture, but its increase is alarming in the recent time, particularly in the south-east where there have been several cases of deadly clashes between rural farmers and cattle breeders which pitifully have taken away many lives of the innocent farmers in the region. Worryingly, are the routine monthly killings in both Ebonyi and Enugu State in the recent time, particularly between 2015 and 2019 in which the States have recorded over 520 deaths majorly rural dwellers and farmers by suspected Fulani herders (Ubi, 2020). Below is the figure showing angry women protesting after such killings Enugu State.



Fig. 1 Women of Eziaagu L.G.A. Enugu on rampage after herders invaded their communities
Source: Edike (2017)

Consequently, the above narratives of the incessant killings of the people of the south-east Nigeria, particularly the rural farmers have not only created fears amongst the people of the region, but also have led to the abandonment of their normal farming activities for the fear of being killed in the process like other victims. Accordingly, Apu, Okore, Nnamerenwa and Gbede (2018) contend that Uzo Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu, which is well known as the agricultural hub of the state with over 42% rice production in the state is halted in its production as the rural dwellers have deserted to the cities after several killings in the area by Fulani herdsmen. In respect to the above, Okereke (2012) and Bello (2013) (in Ajibefun, 2018) firmly decried the act and maintained that the conflicts in most parts of the of the country, especially the Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes are largely uncalled for, as farmers can no longer go to farm peacefully and freely for the fear of Fulani herdsmen. Similarly, the recent culture of killings have been widely condemned by many sound-minded Nigerians, particularly as the south-east Nigeria has become one of the hottest hit of herdsmen attacks. The killings so far in the region in the recent time have left many communities handicapped as they are not only forcefully displaced of their farmlands, but also have lost their major source of livelihood (Ningxin, 2019).

Destruction of farmlands leads to untold hardship in South-East Nigeria

In a general term, destruction is defined as the tearing down or dismantling or killing of something, thus an act of causing pains on part of the recipients or victims. It is viewed as an unethical and unlawful act of terror and evil. Therefore, the destruction of farmlands is one of the unlawful activities of the herdsmen in the society. The group thus takes pleasure in exacerbating pains in the course of rearing their cattle through various terror activities such as killings, raping, kidnapping, destroying of farmlands amongst others in the society, particularly in the whole of the five south-eastern states without any sense of human reasoning and remorse. The openly rearing of cattle which ought to be blessings to the farmers by enriching the farmlands for yet another farming season has turned to be bane, as the herders graze even in the farmlands, destroying crops without boundary. For instance the figure below shows an empirical evidence of herdsmen openly grazing on farmlands with no pity and remours.



Fig. 2 Cattle destroying farmlands in Isi-agu, Ebonyi State

Source: Odunsi (2018)

The above and many more was the justification upon which the Anglican Bishop angrily condemned the acts and therefore asked President Buhari to declare killer herdsmen terrorist group (Brisibe, 2018). Similarly, Nnaji and Samuel (2019, p. 35) contend that “the most frequent causes of conflict between the nomadic cattle herders and sedentary farmers are illegal invasion of farms and destruction of crops by cattle, particularly during the planting season and immediately after the harvesting period”. However, looking at the above pictorial cattle destruction of farmlands, one may be justified to describe such as an *act of wickedness and witchcraftism*. Furthermore, Ezeonwuka and Igwe (2016) observed that Anyamelum and Awka North local government areas of Anambra State lost not less than 4 persons in February, 2016 on account of violent activities of the Fulani herdsmen in attempt to resist them from grazing in their farmlands. Similarly, the same resistance to graze on functional farmlands led to the killings of 7 in Eziagu communities of Enugu State; and sacking of seven villages of Ekwuru, Nimbo-Ngwoko, Ugwuijoro, Ebor, Enugu-Nimbo, Umuome and

Ugwuachara in Nimbo community of Enugu State, killing scores of rural dwellers majorly farmers on 25 April, 2016 (Ningxin, 2019).

However, with emphasis on its implications, the act of encroachment, intrusion and invasion of Fulani herdsmen leading to the destruction of large portion of farmlands in the region cannot be overemphasised, as it is the major cause of food insecurity not only in the region alone, but also in Nigeria at large. Because, south-east Nigeria is one of the major food producing regions in the country. For instance, as observed by Nnaji and Samuel (2019) that 75 percent of food production in Nigeria today comes from 12 arable crops chiefly dominated by rice, maize and wheat, upon which south-east Nigeria ranked overall second in such production after Middle-belt in north-central. He further observed that Nigerian agricultural production is dominated by rural based small scale arable crop producers who account for about 80% of total food requirement of the nation, upon which the south-eastern Nigeria produce not less than 21% of the total sum.

Similarly, Africa is an agrarian society richly endowed with fertile soil, however climate change, resource control, politics amongst other issues are contributing factors upon the total dependence on the other continents of world for food. Accordingly Nnaji and Samuel (2019) argued that the continuous crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria, particularly in the Middle-Belt and South- Eastern region can be attributed to the factors mentioned above, which have led to the extrajudicial slaughtering of the farmers on daily basis without remours. Furthermore, agriculture which is the mainstay of the economy of the local people is been disrupted by these conflicts, which not only resulting in the daily killings of the farmers alone, but also making live difficult and unbearable on both the immediate locality and the larger society that dependent wholly on the produce from the warring communities (Nnaji & Samuel, 2019). This therefore affects food supply in both quantity and quality. In consonance with the above, Mercy Corps reports 2016, affirms that the incessant attacks and killings of farmers in south-east Nigeria have not only impede drastically on food scarcity, but also have caused untold hardship and famine as farmers have abandoned their farming activities for safety and fear of herdsmen. Similarly, Adisa (2012) (in Nnaji & Samuel, 2019) contend that the recent food insecurity and costly untold famine in Nigeria in general is traceable to the terrors perpetuated by Fulani herders. This is so because a reasonable percentage of today's food comes from arable crops majorly dominated by rice, maize amongst others produced by rural farmers who are the major victims of Fulani attacks in the society.

CONCLUSION

Free movement of herders across the neighbouring communities and regions for the purpose of grazing has constituted a serious nightmare and security threat in the country. This is because there is a deviation from the primary motive of cattle rearing enterprise to an undefined barbaric inhuman mayhem on armless and defenseless communities and farmers. This deviation therefore resulted into unhealthy activities of herdsmen-pillaging, raping, killing, destruction of farm land and produce, kidnapping amongst others, which thus undermine socio-economic activities in the affected areas of the country, particularly in the South-East Nigeria, as the people no longer freely engaged in their normal daily socio-economic activities for fear of being killed, kidnapped and raped in the process. Furthermore, this therefore not only led to famine, inflation, untold hardship, but also undermine socio-economic development of the affected area—South-East Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general.

Thus, the study also revealed that incessant killing of farmers, destruction of farmlands, kidnapping, raping amongst others undermine socio-economic development in South-East Nigeria on one hand. And that the activities of herdsmen have emboldened by the failure of the security operatives to mount security surveillance, arrest and prosecute killer herdsmen in South-East Nigeria on the other hand. Therefore, the study hereby recommend among other things that:

- The implementation of anti open grazing law with stifling penalties as a legal framework to curtail the barbaric activities of herdsmen in South-East Nigeria.
- There should implementation of community-based security outfit properly armed with the modern sophisticated weapons.

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