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**Crop Farmers’ and Herdsmen Conflicts: Is Restructuring a way out?**

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**Abstract**

The progress of Nigeria is largely dependent on the socio-economic climate. Such climate comprises of the social stability, agricultural productivity, and economic viability. A lot of events have occurred that seemingly, serve as impediments to this desired progress, and thus, the seeming stagnancy or perceived threats to progress has led to calls for the restructuring of Nigeria; one of such incidences has been the reoccurrence of the farmers and herdsmen clashes in some parts of the country. This paper sought to put in perspective some current issues regarding the farmers-herdsmen conflict such as decimation of lives and properties, the issues of Government’s attitude towards the crises etc. Some clarifications on the concepts of restructuring, as well as the concept of Fulani-herdsmen as it applies to specific groups rather than generalizations were given. The paper zooms in on whether or not restructuring-especially as it will impact on security and curb the conflict-is a plausible way out given the claims that the conflicts have political, economic, religious and ethnic overtones and claims towards it. The submissions and review of the submission for restructuring was given. The paper concludes with recommendations of what type of restructuring is needed, where necessary.

*Keywords: Crop-farmers, Herdsmen, Restructuring*

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Crop farmers’ and Herdsmen conflict has been a cause for great economic and social concern not only for Nigeria but also the international community. These conflicts have caused a range of concerns not only for the communities involved, but the nation at large. Such concerns range from

the socio-economic implications like losses on income/resources/yield, destruction of properties and loss of lives etc. There are also ethno-religious concerns; the perception that some of these crises are ethnic cleansings or acts, perpetrated based on religious intolerance.

The social, economic and political tensions created as a result of numerous escalations of violent conflicts have raised fundamental national questions for the survival of the Nigerian State (Bello, 2013). The failure of the state to manage and resolve such conflicts has put a question mark on the suitability or relevance of the federal structure sustained by Nigeria as a country. This has therefore, led to calls for restructuring to be made in recent times. Leme (2017) is of the opinion that the unfortunate crises have been further magnified by the exaggerated accounts (especially by media outlets, both locally and internationally), motivated by ethnic and religious undertones which has led to increased misunderstandings and level of distrust amongst Nigerians.

Since the year 2017, the debate on restructuring has intensified amongst the proponents and opponents of the restructuring ideology. The outcome of this clash of ideas has even degenerated into conflicts of different sorts: interest, words, physical violence that have consequences on human lives and property, as well as attempts to sabotage the political system of the country. This paper therefore, attempts to weigh in on the debate, primarily reviewing the issues at hand, as well as what the option of restructuring implies and its plausibility.

## **2.0 CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW**

For the purpose of clarification, it is imperative that this paper provide a succinct scholarly review of certain terminologies, with regards to this discourse.

**Herdsmen:** Herdsmen are a group of people, popularly regarded as pastoralists and nomadic cattle rearers. They are interchangeably regarded as the Fulani group (this is regarded as a misnomer). The Fulani group however, is a very significant component of the Nigerian economy. They constitute the major breeders of cattle, the main source of meat/beef, the most available and cheap source of animal proteins consumed by Nigerians. In addition, over 90% of the nation's livestock population which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP and 3.2% of the nation's GDP is

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owned by the Fulani (Eniola, 2007). Abass (2012) noted that they are the mainstay of the meat and milk industry, accounting for about 90% of cattle ownership in Nigeria. Fulani herders travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture. Though they dwell in colonies referred to as *Ruga*, many of the Fulanis continue to maintain pastoral lives. Some however, particularly in Hausa-land gave up their nomadic pursuits, settled in existing urban communities and were converted to Islām. This has often made it difficult to differentiate them from the Muslim Hausas of Nigeria (Idowu, 2017). Characteristic of their nomadism is the fact that they are often armed and visibly move about with weapons (like daggers, machete, arrows, guns etc.) to protect their livestock. Though it is still debatable the extent to which the entirety of the Fulani herdsmen populace is violent, recent views about the group has been much to conclusion that they are violent in nature and their association to the killings informs their description as the world's fourth deadliest militant group (GTI, 2015; Mikailu, 2016). The reference to herdsmen in this paper therefore is limited in use to those involved in crop-farmer conflicts and those associated with the killings rather than to the entirety of the Fulani race.

**Restructuring:** the concept of restructuring has been made to refer to so many things. According to Ogih (2017), restructuring means, having decentralized governance. In other words, the federal government vesting more powers on the state government. According to Stephen (2017), restructuring is the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that makes up a system and redefining the interrelationship between them in such a way that the entire system performs more efficiently. This restructuring can be political in terms of; state and local government area creations or mergers so as to enhance resource control, regional autonomy, power devolution etc. It could also be economic restructuring, educational restructuring which could involve curriculum changes, building of institutions, social restructuring, accounting restructuring, administrative restructuring, restructure of security apparatus etc. This paper however, uses the word 'restructuring' with regards to its political implications or political restructuring. Ahmed, Norafidah & Knocks (2017) refer to political restructuring bi-dimensionally: political re-configuration of the country and devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes.

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Najakku (2016) views it from a resource control perspective and how the various levels of government and region can engage in resource control for unity and development sakes. Political restructuring in the context of this paper therefore, refers to the systemic reform and re-organization of the existing political structure in the nature of practice and in the way it relates to the social, economic, religious and other aspects of the polity.

### **Crop Farmers and Herdsmen Clashes: An Overview**

According to *Crisisgroup.Org* (2018), The conflict causing factors of the farmers' herdsmen conflicts are usually considered to be factors such as climatic changes (frequent droughts and desertification); population growth (loss of northern grazing lands to the expansion of human settlements); technological and economic changes (new livestock and farming practices); crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling); political and ethnic strife (intensified by the spread of illicit firearms); and cultural changes (the collapse of traditional conflict management mechanisms). A dysfunctional legal regime that allows crime to go unpunished has encouraged both farmers and pastoralists to take matters into their own hands. Bello (2013), states that, "Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers conflicts have remained the most predominately resource-use conflict in North-eastern Nigeria." This is evidently so because land by nature is a limited resource and the nature of the pastoralists is of high land-resource utility. Crop farmers are equally almost totally dependent on land for their production. This over-dependence by both parties gives rise to resource-competition between these two agricultural land user-groups, and though ideally, this relationship ought to be symbiotic, it has however in recent times degenerated into series of hostile conflict and social friction in many parts of the county which has usually resulted to the decimation of lives. The crop farmers-herdsmen conflict has generated issues that serve as propellers to the call for restructuring. Some of these issues include the following:

**The consequences of the conflict on lives and properties:** The implications and consequences of these conflicts are quite numerous and disheartening. According to Burton (2016), over 1500 human lives (from both conflicting parties; herdsmen and crop farmers) and 3200 cows have been lost due to the conflict. This is probably the most pressing issue of all; the loss of human lives and property. Other prevalent issues include the inestimable destruction of Crops. For example,

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Ofuoku and Isife (2009) state that “more than 40 million worth of crops are usually lost annually due to invasion of cattle in the South South region of Nigeria, especially Delta and Edo States.” The resultant effect of this on the farmer is multi-dimensional; Not only does it lead to scarcity of food and impede on the survival of such communities, but also serves as a huge source of discouragement to these farmers since there is a loss of morale, loss of zeal and fervor towards farming.

**The Attitude of Stipulated Security Outfit towards the conflict:** In many cases, there have been claims that the security forces are either compromised or not committed to the process of defending lives. This has led to one conflicting party, feeling insecure and thus, the resolution to take up arms to defend themselves. The possession of these arms usually fosters attacks and reprisal attacks within the conflict zones. Olugbenga (2013) states that the failure of security agencies to control the excesses of the herdsmen, has caused the youth in various communities of Ekiti State, to on several occasions launch reprisal attacks on the cattle rearers’ abodes (-Gaa-), sacking them and destroying their property. These reprisal attacks have been experienced in other parts of the country especially in farming communities. These reprisal attacks are usually justified by either the claims of a non-commitment by the government or slack attitude in dealing with the matter.

**The Issue of Distrust and Suspicion amongst Conflicting Parties:** According to Burton (2016) the majority of the members of the expanse Fulani ethnic group are solely pastoralists without connection to militant violence. Even these peaceful ones, however, are largely viewed with suspicion and anger by the sedentary communities on whose land they take their cattle, largely as a result of the actions of the violent group. This has created distrust and altered the mutual relationship that has existed between them and most of their host communities.

**The Issue of Governmental Inaction or Perceived Passiveness in Addressing the Conflict:** Another issue is the seeming inaction of the Nigerian government towards the herdsmen violence and some manifestation of double standards by the government in dealing with the issue. Adamu and Ben (2017) cited an interview with a member of the Movement against Fulani Occupation

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(MAFO) that, this inaction from the government has allowed the culture of impunity to grow. Consequently, this has led to rising of indigenous or local community security outfits since there is a seeming absence in the provision of government security in defending against the herdsmen attacks.

**The Issue of a Framework that ‘Seemingly’ Encourages and Favors One of the Conflicting Parties over the Other:** Another issue is the proposal and policy framework underway to establish grazing fields for the herdsmen. The purpose of which is to prevent clashes between the herdsmen and farmers and possibly, serve as a lasting solution. Two of these are the concept of **Grazing reserves** and the **‘Ruga’ Settlement**.

**a. Grazing Reserves:** The concept of grazing reserves has been endorsed both by the regime of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. These grazing reserves were to serve as short and mid-term plans until ranching is adopted by the herdsmen. However, this move has been perceived as a tacit endorsement favoured towards the Fulani herders especially by the central and Southern states. However, establishing grazing reserves in consenting states will improve livestock production and management as well as minimize contacts and friction between herders and farmers.

**b. The RUGA Settlement:** In addition, the issue of the RUGA settlement policy recently surfaced and sparked controversy alongside. The Ruga Settlement is a proposed rural settlement scheme of federal government, intended to provide a designated place with basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, road networks, veterinary clinics, markets among others. The aim is to curb the incessant clashes between herdsmen and host communities. It was initiated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in preference for the National Economic Council (NEC)’s National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP).

The stiff resistance this policy met by its opponents was fuelled by at least, the following factors:

i. Firstly, the term ‘Ruga’ is a Fulani word, making it unsuitable for a national ranching policy.

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- ii. Secondly, the policy was conceived and its legal framework drawn up in secrecy, which further aroused suspicions of ethno-regional groups already agitated by perceived Fulani imperialist inclinations.
- iii. Thirdly, since the cattle business is currently dominated by the Fulani ethnic group, those opposed to the Ruga settlement scheme naturally see it as nothing but a disguised attempt at Fulani expansionism.
- iv. This perception of Fulani expansionism has been reinforced by the fact that President Muhammadu Buhari is of the Fulani ethnic group.
- v. Also, the Ruga policy and the intense opposition to it is partly a function of the crisis of federalism in Nigeria. There is no reason why it should be a federal government project. The state governments who legally control all the land within their jurisdiction should have been left alone to enact ranching laws if they so desire as a state like Benue has done (Ayobolu, 2019).

**The Implications of the ‘Violation’ of the Federal Character System as an Evidence of Sabotage:** Adamu and Ben (2017) while quoting Solomon Asemota (SAN) state that “according to a senior advocate of Nigeria, 88% of the federal appointments into very significant security and national administration posts have been for northern Hausa-Fulani Muslims, with only one coming from the southwest, who is also a Muslim, but making up the remaining 12%. Appointed northern Hausa-Fulani Muslims include: The Inspector General of Police Chief of Army Staff Minister for Defense Minister for Internal Affairs National Security Adviser (NSA) Director General, Department of State Services (DSS) Commandant General, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corp (NSCDC).

### **3.0 FARMERS’- HERDSMEN CONFLICT: IS RESTRUCTURING AN OPTION?**

Given the issues highlighted above, this paper attempts to review the option of restructuring with regards to the Crop Farmers’-Herdsmen conflicts. The conflict has become an issue of grave concern, primarily because of its consequences to human lives and property; the losses, decimation or deaths. A fundamental human right is that of life; a fundamental responsibility of every Government is that of protecting or securing those lives. This section will therefore, deal with the option of political restructuring and how it will impact on the security of lives and property.

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Generally, proponents of the restructuring option argue from political and economic standpoints. In other words, restructuring will gender for political stability and economic progress by encouraging hard work and competition among the federating units hence allowing each unit to develop at its own pace (Stephen, 2017). The farmers'- Herdsmen conflict has been given both religious and ethnic labels as earlier stated. Some sections of the Federating sector claim that since the Fulani's are predominantly Muslim and Hausa, it is some form of ethnic and religious genocide. Though such ethnic and religious overtones are given to the conflict, it is however to be noted that political stability and economic progress is not a function of ethnic homogeneity or religious purity. For example, Somalia is a nation in which over 90% of the population speak the same language. Also, Somalia is 99% Muslim by religion, yet it is one of the most unstable countries in the world (Stephen, 2017). At the basest, one can argue that insecurity is a contributing factor to these conflicts. Bello (2013) states that, since insecurity gives ways to conspiracy, conflicts are inevitable. The object of security is to primarily advance the well-being and possessions of the persons involved; while the survival of the state is secondary. In other words, when the character and nature of the state do not seem to protect the security of the citizens, their freedom and choices completely shift away from the state to individuals or groups as the foci of security. Proponents of restructuring therefore argue for a decentralized state and community police system. The submission is that, these attacks and counter attacks are usually successful because the communities have no control over their own security and the central policing system seem inefficient to be trusted in managing local security. According to Bello, (2013), issues bordering on local community security, safety and development are paramount in the enhancement of governance and increase or decrease in agitation for control of resources as well as encroachment of the rights of others. All these have implications for survival and struggles between or amongst communities. Furthermore, there is a disjointed form of responsibility and sense of duty by most security officers since they share little or no cultural ties with the communities where they are posted to serve. In addition, there are communities that are void of police presence and thus, security of the people and their properties is absent. There are claims that even the vigilante groups in most communities have proven more effective than the federal police system.

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Therefore, such vigilante and local community systems should be legalized (Restructure Nigeria Group, 2017). This approach though very commendable opens up room for other issues. If the police is to be decentralized, at what level will the officers be trained? Will they receive the same quality of training in each state? What measures will be put in place to ensure adequate funding giving the disparities in the revenue of each state? Would there be a levelled remuneration structure for all states or all might be peculiar to each state? How will the issue of migrants and indigenized individuals be handled during recruitment? What is the guarantee that there still wouldn't be compromises within the security outfits and clashes of interest? What happens to multiethnic or multi-religious states; how will conflicts be managed when there are religious, ethnic or religious overtones to it? The complexity to the issue of decentralised security seems more of a challenge in itself. The federal police system, though might be argued that it promotes a sense of no obligation due to little or no community ties, it must be seen also that it promotes integration and diminishes the strength of bias and sentiments, since the police have no ties actually to the community. The issue of vigilante groups also gives rise to other issues; what criteria must a group meet to become a legalised group? To what level must a vigilante group be armed; what and how? Who funds the vigilante group? What happens when there are clashes of interest or role overlaps between the police and the vigilante groups? What structures are put in place to ensure that these groups do not go over and above their jurisdiction? How would issues relating to border, boundary and territorial conflicts and disputes be addressed? The authors are of the opinion that while local and indigenous groups must be encouraged to defend and protect themselves without going out of the confines of the law, a centralized police system when optimally and rightly operational is seemingly a more justified position. According to Ogih (2017), the issue of restructuring security is of the opinion that, the state government can easily manipulate the security forces to work to its sole purpose and to the disadvantage of the opposition parties which ultimately also leads to injustice. Secondly, the advocacy for the decentralization of the security might as well be a convenient means for those agitating for the secession of the country.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Farmers'-herdsmen conflict is a torn in the flesh of Nigeria as a nation. Economically, it is a draining force; socially, it is a destructive force; religiously, it is a dividing force. The issue is one that cannot be overlooked by the nation as a whole. The pressing nature of the issue has called for restructuring, especially because of the security challenges and gaps that are felt. Some argue that the conflicts are politically motivated; others call it ethnic cleansing and an endless list of names.

Given that pertinent questions and issues are still lingering, with regards to the plausibility of adopting the restructuring approach in dealing with the issue of security. The authors here are of the opinion that restructuring is not the best option for curbing the farmers'-herdsmen clashes; though salient reasons have also been given for consideration.

In addition, it could be stated also that an attitudinal problem is at the core of the problem; attitude towards lives and property, attitude towards other beliefs and values aside ours, attitude towards collective nation building etc. a negative attitude always draws negative results, encourages intolerance, feeds greed, and the list of other vices.

In addition, on the basis of the issues raised earlier, the following recommendations are made with regards to:

**The Consequences of the Conflict on Lives and Properties:** The provision of security to lives and properties cannot be overstated. It is of paramount importance that lives are secured. The object of security is to primarily advance the well-being and possessions of the persons involved.

**The Attitude of Stipulated Security Outfits towards the Conflict:** In order to handle this issue, the researchers are of the opinion that there should be more elaborate security arrangements for herders and farming communities especially in the north-central zone: this could involve the incorporation and utilization of local or indigenous security outfits that will operate within the confines of the law. There must be strict laws governing the possession and use of firearms as well as collaborative cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries' security forces.

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**The Issue of Distrust and Suspicion amongst Conflicting Parties:** In order to handle this, Peace and Conflict Resolution techniques must be heavily engaged. Local and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms have proved effective in both averting violence and helping communities recover from conflict. Different parties comprising of the aggrieved and neutrals must come together to monitor, identify, discuss and manage potential threats can be particularly helpful. These also can be used to help farmers and pastoralists explore mutually beneficial ways to coexist.

**The Ranching and the RUGA Settlement Issue:** Given the factors that have generated the stiff resistance, a more diplomatic approach could be engaged. Part of this approach could include an avenue for national dialogue. This dialogue will afford all stakeholders at different levels to make input. This participatory approach can serve as a factor to enhance the adoption and implementation of such a policy, given that better understanding, greater confidence and deeper knowledge of the subject matter would have been achieved. This will also minimize misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the policy, especially by saboteurs.

**The Implications of the ‘Violation’ of the Federal Character System as an Evidence of Sabotage:** However, as much as the concept of Federal Character – which pays attention to the fact that every region must be represented at the federal level, is to be considered, more emphasis must be placed on competence and merit. Rather than asking ‘where’ a person is from, a more appropriate question can be ‘what’ the person has to offer to the nation. Thus, attention must be paid to merit and competence when it comes to non-elective policy making positions or economic managers and administrators.

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