

Herdsmen Invasion and their Impact on the Church in Ukum, Benue State

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Abstract

The article examines herdsmen attacks and their impact on the Church in Ukum. The paper is a qualitative research thus, it employed secondary sources of data and adopts descriptive and analytic methods. Descriptive method was used to describe the herdsmen attacks while analytic method was employed to analyze the impact of the attacks on the Church in Ukum. It was found in the study that, the phenomenon of herdsmen attacks has a negative impact on the activities of the Church. Herdsmen attacks like other acts of insecurity have a profound impact on the economy, social and religious life of the Ukum and the state in general. It has thwarted the socio-economic growth of the state through killings, destructions of farms and property, destruction of schools and religious gatherings. The Church has suffered these destructions and it has hindered its growth. The activities of the Church especially in rural communities have been affected by the attacks as the fear of been attack has kept Christians in such areas away from gathering freely and reaching out to the members to encourage them. The study therefore recommended that, government should implement the anti-open grazing law and encourage ranching. The government must also ban the Fulani herdsmen from moving about with rifles. Also, the Church on its part should continue to pray and seek intervention on the issue of herdsmen attacks. Church leaders too need to educate their members on safety measures that will help minimise the destructions that is cause by the herdsmen attacks in the state.

Keywords: Herdsmen Attacks, Church Impact, Insecurity, Socio-Economic Consequences, Anti-Open Grazing Law.

Introduction

Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria have emerged as a pressing and multifaceted issue, significantly impacting various aspects of society. These attacks, often involving pastoralists seeking grazing lands for their cattle, have escalated into a complex security challenge, leading to widespread violence, displacement, and economic disruption. The pastoralist-farmer conflicts, exacerbated by factors such as competition for resources, historical grievances, and weak law enforcement, have been particularly prominent in regions like the Middle Belt and North Central Nigeria (Aworinde & Ajayi, 2017; Ochonu, 2018). The violence associated with herdsmen attacks has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of communities, and displacement of populations, creating a profound humanitarian crisis (Onapajo & Olayode, 2017).

The impact of herdsmen attacks extends beyond immediate security concerns, affecting the economic, social, and religious fabric of the affected regions. Economic activities,

especially agriculture, have suffered due to destruction of farmlands and crops, leading to food insecurity (Ibeanu, 2018). Additionally, the attacks have disrupted social and religious gatherings, with communities living in constant fear and insecurity (Olayiwola, 2019). The interplay of these factors poses a formidable challenge for governance and societal stability, demanding comprehensive and nuanced solutions to address the root causes of these conflicts (Onapajo & Olayode, 2017; Ibeanu, 2018).

Benue State and Ukum local government in particular was known to be a peaceful place where all economic and religious activities were carried out peacefully. The Church was growing steadily as evangelism was carried out without security threats. However, the phenomenon of herdsmen insurgency in recent times has become a source of concern to government, Non-Governmental Organizations, communities and families. This is due to the negative socio-economic and religious consequences of the attacks. The effects of herdsmen attacks have become persistent in especially in rural areas where security presence is not adequate. Not only that these attacks have some socio-economic effects, they also constituted an impediment to Church growth in rural areas as it affect the work of evangelism, Christian activities and the overall Church growth and development. The incessant attacks by herdsmen on farmers in Ukum have caused a lot of damages in terms of loss of human lives and properties. The Church like other aspects of the society has suffered some setbacks as the results of the incessant attacks especially in rural areas by the herdsmen as the attacks intensifies, the work of evangelization, Christian gathering and Church growth and development is increasingly becoming difficult. This becomes necessary to examine the impact of herdsmen attacks on the Church in Ukum Local Government Area an imperative one.

Statement of the Problem

While existing scholarship has investigated the broader socio-economic and political implications of herders' attacks, a conspicuous gap exists concerning the localized impact on religious institutions, specifically the Church. The persistent violence and conflicts between herders and local communities, including instances of destruction, displacement, and economic disruption, necessitate a focused inquiry into the unique challenges faced by the Church in Ukum. Understanding the intricate dynamics between herders' invasion and the Church is crucial for crafting targeted strategies that enhance the Church's resilience, community support, and its role in fostering healing within the local context. The Church serves as more than a place of worship; it often acts as a social anchor, providing guidance, support, and community cohesion. However, the specific impact of herders' invasion on the Church's activities, congregation, and broader community engagement remains largely unexplored. Addressing this research problem will not only contribute to scholarly conversations on the localized effects of herders' attacks but will also provide actionable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and religious institutions to develop effective responses and interventions in Ukum and similar regions facing the ramifications of herders' invasion. The research problem at the heart of this study, "Herdsmen Invasion

and Their Impact on the Church in Ukum, Benue State," addresses a critical and underexplored dimension of the pervasive herders' invasion phenomenon in Nigeria. This research problem gains significance in light of the societal centrality of religious institutions, particularly in regions like Benue State.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

- i. To examine the perpetrators of herdsman onrush
- ii. To evaluate the impacts of herdsman attacks on the growth of the church in Benue State.

Literature Review

The impact of herdsman attacks in Nigeria has garnered significant attention in academic discourse due to its far-reaching consequences on various facets of society. Scholarly research has delved into the root causes, dynamics, and repercussions of these attacks, particularly in regions such as the Middle Belt and North Central Nigeria. Studies by Aworinde and Ajayi (2017) and Ochonu (2018) have explored the historical, socio-economic, and political factors contributing to the escalation of conflicts between farmers and herders, providing valuable insights into the complexities of the issue. These conflicts, often characterized by violence, displacement, and economic disruption, have posed substantial challenges to governance, security, and social cohesion in affected areas.

The need for a focused study on the topic of "Herdsman Invasion and Their Impact on the Church in Ukum, Benue State" becomes evident when considering the localized implications of these attacks. While existing literature provides a broader understanding of the nationwide phenomenon, a granular examination is essential to comprehend how such incidents specifically affect religious institutions and communities at the local level. The study by Onapajo and Olayode (2017) highlights that herders' attacks have not only led to displacement but have also disrupted religious and social gatherings, creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among affected communities. This underscores the urgency of investigating the unique challenges faced by the Church in Ukum, Benue State, and evaluating the implications on its activities and growth.

Moreover, economic repercussions resulting from herdsman attacks have been a recurring theme in the literature. Ibeanu's (2018) examination of conflict and displacement dynamics emphasizes the impact on agriculture, with destruction of farmlands leading to food insecurity. This economic dimension adds complexity to the multifaceted consequences of the attacks, and it is imperative to explore how such economic disruptions specifically affect the Church's activities and the overall socio-religious landscape in Ukum.

The literature also sheds light on the broader societal implications of herders' violence, making the case for targeted investigations into its effects on religious institutions. Olayiwola's (2019) research on farmers/herders conflicts in Nigeria emphasizes the causes and implications on food security, indicating the far-reaching consequences on the overall

well-being of communities. A study centered on the Church in Ukum can provide nuanced insights into how these societal challenges manifest within the religious context, influencing worship practices, community engagement, and the overall role of the Church in times of crisis.

While studies have called for comprehensive solutions to address the root causes of herders' conflicts (Onapajo & Olayode, 2017; Ibeanu, 2018), the localized impact on religious institutions has received limited attention. This study on "Herdsman Invasion and Their Impact on the Church in Ukum, Benue State" was thus essential to fill this research gap and contribute valuable data for formulating targeted strategies to mitigate the unique challenges faced by religious communities in the aftermath of herders' attacks.

Furthermore, an examination of the literature underscores the need to consider the broader socio-political context within which herders' attacks occur. Bruce (2016) critiques the secularization thesis, pointing out how religion, in this case, plays a significant role in shaping perspectives and responses to conflicts. In the specific context of Ukum, where the proposed study is focused, understanding the interplay of religious dynamics and the impact of herders' attacks on the Church requires a nuanced exploration of the religious landscape.

The study by Massaro (2000) titled *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* offers insights into the role of religious institutions in responding to societal challenges. While not directly addressing herders' attacks, Massaro's work highlights the potential for religious teachings and institutions to influence social justice and action. Applying such perspectives to the proposed study could provide a framework for evaluating how the Church in Ukum responds to the challenges posed by herders' violence and contributes to the broader societal healing process.

The literature reviewed has established the multifaceted nature of herders' attacks, encompassing economic, social, and political dimensions. This complexity necessitates an in-depth investigation into how these dimensions intersect within the specific context of the Church in Ukum, Benue State. Understanding the nuanced impact on the Church's activities, congregation, and role in the community will provide essential data for developing targeted strategies to enhance resilience and foster healing.

The literature reviewed not only emphasizes the urgency of addressing the broader issues surrounding herders' attacks in Nigeria but also highlights the specific need for localized studies that explore the unique impact on religious institutions. The proposed study on "Herdsman Invasion and Their Impact on the Church in Ukum, Benue State" is well-positioned to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge, guiding policymakers, community leaders, and religious institutions in formulating effective responses to the challenges posed by herders' violence in the region.

The Concept, Church

According to Anjov (2007), the word Church has different interpretations that include the following: Literal meaning. *Ekklesia* literally meant "called-out," yet to what extent this

sense applied in its general usage is unclear (45). It was a political term which applied to an assembly of citizens “called-out” for a particular purpose. In Christ, the New Testament teaches that those who follow Christ are “called-out” by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14 RSV). It is clear from the above that an *ekklesia* is a group or assembly of people. So any reference to a “church” must be understood to be referring to people—not a place, a building, a cathedral, or a little country chapel. It is under this usage that there are many Churches like the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church Living Faith Church and Deeper Life Bible Church among others.

As used in this study, the Church is a community of believers in the Lord, Jesus Christ. It represents a microcosm of the larger society to which it is called to mirror the love of God as demonstrated in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. The Church is also called to serve humanity through the love of God that it has received and shares with other members of the society. It is a group of people who worship together as a congregation and are united in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Herdsmen Onset

Herdsmen’s violent activities across the breadth and width of Nigeria clearly reminisce the Jihad of 1804 and bear the mark of expansionist tendencies. According to Abdulkarkindo (2017) *et al.*, Christians have been killed, injured and displaced. Christians have seen their villages, farms and houses taken over by the Muslim herdsmen. As referenced in the Nasarawa report, a Hausa-Fulani Muslim nomad is reported to have argued: “*Komai na Allah ne. Ko wane fili na Allah ne, ba naku ba, ba na kafirai ba, na Allah ne*” (Everything belongs to Allah. Every piece of land belongs to Allah and not you, it is not for you infidels but for Allah.) (31).

In the same vein, Jang, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Birom Educational and Cultrual Organisation (BECO) criticized the killings in Plateau State. Jang described the killings as “heinous crimes against his people, genocide, and an attempt to forcefully take over and occupy the ancestral land of the Birom nation”. His position is further strengthened by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which also described it as a deliberate attempt to conquer and occupy the land of the people's ancestral heritage. The BECO also shares the same view, noting that it had addressed the media over three different occasions where it cried out to the state and federal governments that the Fulani have driven out the Biroms from over 10 of their villages and farms, and are now forcefully occupying them, but nothing has been done (Adinoyi, 2019).

The above narrative also lays credence to the standpoint that sees the herdsmen as the spiritual arm of Fulani quest for territorial expansion. Again, Adamu an Ben (2017) argues that, herdsmen violence among indigenous groups especially across Nigeria in recent times has also been geared towards the fulfillment of Fulani expansionist quest which was a vision of Ahmadu Bello. Quoting Ahmadu Bello, he maintains that: the new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the north as willing tools and the south

as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us and never allow them to have control over their future (40).

From the above narratives, it is safe to say that herdsmen murderous activities in Nigeria is geared toward the fulfillment of Ahmadu Bello's vision which revolves around ensuring that Nigeria's landscape- political, religious, and socio-economic space is controlled and dominated by the Fulani and at the centre of this are the Fulani herdsmen (Odey and Okuta, 2020:3). This explains why herdsmen are always fearless and destructive. In fact, they can be described as merchants of death considering the violence they have perpetrated on innocent indigenous population.

The Phenomenon of Herdsmen Onset

The phenomenon of conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria like other parts of Africa has become a subject of concern to many scholars. For this reason, different scholars have written on this issue. This section is an attempt to examine the various contributions made by different individuals on the issues under study. Christopher notes that, the herdsmen's conflict, like other conflicts in Nigeria, such as the Maitatsine religious conflict, OIC conflict, Sharia conflict and Boko-Haram terroristic activity, have adversely affected religious activities such as night vigils, midweek services, Sunday services and open-field crusade, particularly night vigils, which are believed to be one of the most powerful means of attacking Satan, evil spirits, witches and wizards and occult men and women (Odey and Okuta, 2020:2-3). This author captures the depth to which herdsmen terrorist attacks have affected religious development in Nigeria. His position is indeed relevant to the present study because it shades light on subject matter.

Adetula (2018) observes that, the frequent attacks on the farmers and citizens of Nigeria these days by the herdsmen is terribly alarming. Herdsmen were known to wreak havoc in certain communities in Nigeria, but now the rate at which they are committing these crimes has increased exponentially. This threatens the peace, security and unity of the nation as one geographical entity and will retard growth and development in all spheres of people's lives (34). This author points out the fact that, the attacks on communities in Nigeria by the herdsmen is at alarming rate and stressed that it is a threat not only to the unity of the country but also to the growth and development of the country.

Ngbea and Ngbea (2019) submitted that, most of the killings by the herdsmen are concentrated in the Middle belt (North central) states that are dominated by Christians. For example Benue a Christian state with few Muslims concentrated in towns is badly affected, an agenda that the suspected Fulani herdsmen want, to fulfill Usman Danfodio Jihad by conquering the entire state through Islamization policy thereby exercising political control and power over state (15). This author introduced an important motivating factor in understanding herdsmen terrorist attacks in the Middle belt particularly, Benue State which is to conquer the state and Islamise the people of the state. He sees the conflicts not just as a struggle over land and other resources but as a religious agenda of the Islamic state. This view is important because, the effects have already been felt by the Church as the attacks

have hindered the effective growth of the Church in the areas under attacks thus relevant to the present study.

Davidson Edieya (nd) notes that, the Fulani herdsmen have clashed with farmers in central Nigeria for decades over the use of grazing lands. The dispute between the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers stems from the herdsman's necessity for increased grazing land and the farmers' expanded use of farmland in traditional Fulani areas. The farmers accuse the herdsmen of allowing their livestock to graze upon growing crops and contaminating watering holes. The Fulani justify their actions as necessary, accusing the farmers of denying them land when there are no other options. From only 63 killings in 2013, to 1,229 killings in 2014, the Fulani terrorists have become the "fourth deadliest terror group in the world" (4-7). The author makes it clear that, the volume of killing carry out by the herdsmen has qualified them to be labelled the fourth deadliest terror group in the world.

Herdsmen attacks is an example of conflict thus must have a negative impact on the society. Stagner (1995) defined conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings desired goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not yet by both; each party mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, desire objective or situation and each party perceive the other as a barrier or threat to such goal (67). Stagner's view on conflict helps us to understand only the reason why conflict occur which is struggle over goals but fails to provide us with the details regarding the nature and effects of the conflict. The view even though limited gives an ideal of what conflict is.

According to Coser (2001), conflict is a struggle between parties over desirable value. According to him, conflict refers to struggle over values or claim to status, and scarce resources, in which the aim of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desire value, but also to neutralized, injure or eliminate their rivals (56). One critical defining element is the presence of two or more actors struggling to secure a thing adjudged to be valuable of which gained by any actors, amount to a loss or deprivation to the other actors. The benefit goes with the successor together with access to or control of the value and deprivation of insecurity follow the denial of access to such value. Coser's view gives us a good understanding of the factors that can trigger conflict and reasons why people resort to conflict as well as the nature of conflict. The author's view is useful in understanding conflict like the one between herdsmen and farmers conflict because, the two parties also engage in conflict due to the struggle over resources like land and water for their various activities. This view is relevant in understanding herdsmen attacks which is also connected with struggle over land and domination. In this wise, Vanderlin, opined that, element of all conflict is the existence of result scarcity where the wants of all actors cannot be fully satisfied and where the quest for such resources result in conflict behavior (11). This view like that of Coser (2001) is essential in understanding herdsmen and farmers conflict in Benue State

In line with the above views, Wilson, and Hanna (1979) maintained that, the term conflict usually refer to a condition in which one identifiable group of human being in a given environment (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political

among others) is engage in conscious position to or more identifiable human groups because they are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals (61). This position also adds to the understanding of what makes conflict inevitable. Wilson, and Hanna (1979) made a distinction between types of conflict in farmers' nomadic relationship. He differentiates between disputes among individual and group conflict of interest and violent while; dispute refers to disagreement between two or more persons or groups (108).

A violent conflict involves mayhem, the destruction of lives, arising from dispute. A conflict of interest on the other hand is seen as the adoption of opposing views and concern by different actors which usually take from a non-violent competition for control of resources in a given area. Conflict between crop farmers and nomadic herders in Nigeria especially Benue state, usually result to loss of lives and properties. Hence, an understanding of the causes and effects of conflict between farmers and nomads in the host communities is an important step towards realising the goals of socio-economic development policies in the region.

A History of Herdsmen Attacks in Benue State

The killings by the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria have been recorded in states like Nasarawa, Benue, Enugu, Taraba, Ebonyi, Plateau and Ekiti state. Of all these states, however, the state which has suffered the greatest in the hands of the animalistic Fulani is Benue state. Although there had been clashes between farmers and herdsmen in the state even in the late 90s and in the very early 2000s, the killings increased exponentially between 2013 and 2018. According to statistics provided by the Institute for Economics and Peace, 1,229 people were killed in 2014, up from 63 in 2013 and Benue State seems to be the most attacked state in the country in recent times. Barely five days to the end of Governor Gabriel Suswam's administration in May 2015, over 100 farmers and their family members were reportedly massacred in villages and refugee camps located in the state. According to reports, in July 2015, suspected herdsmen attacked Adeke, a community on the outskirts of the state capital, Makurdi. In December 2017, six persons were killed at Idele village in the Oju Local Government Area.

On the 1st of January, 2018, 72 persons were killed in Benue state by the Fulani herdsmen who later claimed that the attack was prompted by the anti-open grazing law signed by the governor of the state, Governor Samuel Ortom, aimed at checking the destruction of farmlands and crops by cattle. Shortly after the burial of the victims of this attack which displaced about 2,000 people and left not less than ten seriously injured, 19 persons, including two Catholic priests, were again massacred in the state by Fulani herdsmen on the 24th of April, 2018. There are only a few local governments in the state which have not suffered attacks and killings by the Fulanis. This being so, no one feels safe any longer in the state especially those living in rural areas which are the most vulnerable places. Even after these killings, attacks on farmers by the Fulanis in the state are still being recorded, despite attempts by the government to end the menace, by deploying security personnel to the affected areas of the state. In support of the claim that security was deployed to the

affected areas, *Vanguard* (2018, February 14) reported that: "In Abuja, on February 9, 2018, the press service of the President told reporters that the Nigerian Government policy of some land transferring for pasture is not Fulani colonization. Nigerian Government sent troops to the central regions of the country to suppress insurgent groups and to stop clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen. The troops will be deployed in the central states of Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nasarawa, and Niger, as well as in the northwestern state of Kaduna from February 15 to March 31, 2018".

The declared goal of the military operation is to stop the outbreaks of armed banditry, people, and livestock kidnapping, as well as clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen because of arable land and pastures. In 2014, according to the Global Terrorism Index report, Fulani militants killed more than 1,200 people and then headed the list of the most fanatical terrorist groups in the region, according to the BBC. However, many notable persons in Nigeria have stated that these attacks were carried out not by Nigerian Fulani herdsmen but, by herdsmen from other parts of Africa and the Middle-East. Concerns have, therefore, been raised as to the true identity of those behind the attacks. Many with dissenting views believe they may be members of the Boko Haram sect, masquerading as Fulani Herdsmen. A few others, including the Nigerian military, have said they are herdsmen from other parts in West Africa and not Fulani. While the latter may be admissible due to porous Nigerian borders and poor immigration surveillance, especially in northern parts of the country, it is very difficult to correlate the activities of Boko Haram terrorists to those of the Fulani Herdsmen. Boko Haram has utilised explosives carried by suicide bombers or hidden in a target, but accounts by victims of the herdsmen crisis have shown that the Fulani Herdsmen are mainly concerned with gaining greater access to grazing lands for livestock. In fact, following the February 2018 attacks in Benue, the leadership of the Fulani group openly admitted that the attacks were carried out by its members. The question of who actually is behind the killings in Benue state has, therefore, since been answered since the head of the Fulanis' cattle breeders association called the Miyetti Allah has always claimed responsibility of the attacks. Many Nigerians believe the president has deliberately shied away from commenting on the crisis, as it is widely known that he comes from the Fulani ethnic group. Following attacks by herdsmen in Ekiti State, the governor of the state, Ayodele Fayose, encouraged his people to take up arms in self defence. He also gave the go-ahead to vigilante groups in the affected areas of the state, charging them to kill any Fulani Herdsmen attempting to rape their wives or kill their children.

In Benue state, the vigilante groups and members of the Joint Task Force have not been able to stop the Fulani from carrying out their attacks especially because the Fulanis are more armed than then. In a bid to end the protracted plight of his people, the Governor of the state, Gov. Samuel Ortom signed the anti-open grazing bill into law in order, thereby placing a ban on open grazing in the state. This, however, only worsened the plight of the Benue people because attacks which came after the bill was passed were bloodier, and the leader of the Miyetti Allah, without mincing words, has announced that the attacks were staged as a result of the ban placed on open grazing in the state.

The impacts of these killings on agriculture, however, are seldom quantified or analysed in depth. Yet agriculture tends to be one of the main economic activities in developing countries, contributing on average between 10 and 20 percent of national GDP in lower-middle-income countries and over 30 percent in low-income countries (FAO 4). According to Mercy Corps, the incessant attacks have a drastic effect on food security (qtd. in Eyekpimi 2018:1). It becomes highly imperative therefore to consider the agricultural impact of the herdsmen killings on agriculture in Benue state, Nigeria, and even Africa generally.

The Perpetrators of Herdsmen Onrush

Herdsmen are mostly Fulanis, even though non Fulanis also rear cattle. Fulanis are nomadic people who speak the Fula language. They inhabit many countries in West Africa, but most of them are concentrated in the North of Nigeria and Senegal. Their origin is said to be connected with Egypt, and centuries after centuries, they migrated with their herds in the West Africa savannas occupying new territories. Today, they occupy so many states in Northern Nigeria. In line with this, Eyekpemi (2018) asserts that "the Fula people also known as Fulani in Hausa language, are a mass population widely dispersed and culturally diverse in all of Africa, but most predominant in West Africa. The Fulani generally speak the Fula language. A significant number of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry grass lands of their environment, keeping isolate from the local farming communities, making them the world's largest pastoral nomadic group. They are massively spread over many countries, and are found mainly in West Africa and northern parts of Central Africa, but also in Sudan and Egypt. The main Fulani sub-groups in Nigeria are: Fulbe Adamawa, Fulbe Mbororo, Fulbe Sokoto, Fulbe Gombe, and the Fulbe Borgu" (23). In Nigeria, the Fulanis are majorly herdsmen or nomads, moving up and down with their cattle in search of greener pastures and more conducive environments for their cattle. They exchange livestock products for agricultural products and they also take farmers' livestock for grazing in exchange for offspring and farming products.

Due to the peculiarity of the activities of the herdsmen, and their movement from one place to another in search of pasture, the herdsmen have reportedly encountered cattle rustlers and made complaints to the relevant authorities who fail to investigate the issue, hence their purported reason for carrying arms about. During their journey, they frequently trespass farmlands owned by locals in their host communities, destroying crops and valuables. Attempts by farmers to prevent them from causing havoc are met with stiff and violent resistance. Most times, given that the herdsmen are always armed to the teeth, the farmers are overpowered, injured and killed, while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking these opportunities to steal, rape, raze houses and kill innocent members of the communities they pass through. As such, Nigeria as a nation has been submerged in a severe internal socio-economic and security threat. At a more general level, the threat has special economic, political, environmental, and, especially, agricultural implications. Each of these dimensions has greatly affected the

nation's stability and can be traced to the Fulani-herdsmen and farmers clash or the herdsmen attacks (Olugbenga, 2017).

Before now, the herdsmen have been known to wreak havoc in certain communities in Nigeria, but now, the rate at which they commit these crimes has increased exponentially, especially in Benue State of Nigeria. Benue State, also known by its appellation, Food Basket of the Nation, for being the highest food producing state in the country, being one of the middle belt states in Nigeria, is inhabited predominantly by the Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede. The state is a very rich agricultural region, which chiefly grows crops like yam, potatoes, cassava, soya beans, groundnut, guinea corn, maize, sesame, rice, flax, etc., and perennial crops like palm trees, oranges, cashew, and mangoes. The state shares boundaries with states like Enugu to the south-west, Taraba to the east, Nasarawa to the north, Kogi to the west, and Cross-River state to the south. The state also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon. As at 2006, it had a population of about 4, 253, 641. Agriculture is the mainstay of the state's economy, engaging over 75% of the state farming population, and most of the people of the state dwell in rural areas where there is plenty of land for farming. It is the richness of the Benue soil, the hospitality of the people, and the arable land fit for cattle grazing that attracted the Fulanis into the state as far back as the 19th century. For years, clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and the Benue farmers were not very serious until in the 2000s.

Impacts of Herdsmen Attacks on the Growth of the Church in Benue State

Herdsmen attacks like other acts of insecurity has a profound impact on the economy, social and religious life and the people of the state. It has thwarted the socio-economic growth of the state through killings, destructions of farms and property, destruction of schools and religious gathering places. The Church in Benue state has suffered these destructions and it has hindered its growth. The Church normally carry out the work of evangelism through Christian gatherings, house fellowships, visitations and outreach. The activities of the Church especially in rural communities have been affected by the invasion due to the fear been attacked which has kept Christians in such areas away from gathering freely and reaching out to their members to encourage them. The activities of the Church like monthly Bible studies, choir practices, elders' quorums meetings and other ways of evangelizing but now this cannot be done in some communities due to the fear of being attack by the herdsmen.

Given the historical account of Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad, and the religious coloration of herdsmen attacks that is, the perception that Muslim herders attack predominantly Christian farming communities, many have referred to herdsmen activities as a jihad, and herdsmen as jihadists. The Benue state Governor (Duru, 2019: 3), Prof Wole Soyinka (Adetula, 2018), the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and scholars such as Adamu and Ben (2017:14-22) did argue that herdsmen attacks were a declaration of Jihad. In their 2018 report, *The Nigerian Voice* (TVN) made use of the phrase "Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen" to buttress their argument that herdsmen attacks are targeted at Christian population. A

historical evaluation of some Jihads such as the jihads against the crusades (11th - 14th AD); Sori and Karonke Ali in Guinea (1720s); the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio in northern Nigeria (1804); SekuAhmadu in Mali (1818) but to mention a few, all had common elements which betray the notion that herdsmen are on a jihad mission.

First, they were borne out of a collective effort of the Muslim community - sedentary and pastoralist. Two, there were usually a call or rally cry for support from the Muslim community. Thirdly, they aim to establish as an end result a Muslim society. Forth and importantly, they all had identifiable leaders. But in the case of herdsmen, they do not have an identifiable leader, nor have they made a rally cry for support against "identified infidels." Their claim is 'fight for resource control' and not the establishment of an Islamic society. Categorically, the elements of a jihad are lacking with regards to Herdsmen attacks. Thus, they are not Jihadists, nor do they engage in any acclaimed Jihad. At worse, they are religious extremist, and this owes largely to the nature and targets of some of their attacks. The issue of Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria could be perceived from a standpoint of religious extremism. There exist numerous accounts of herdsmen attacks on Christian worship centers, leaders, and in communities that are predominantly Christian. Eighty-three of the one hundred and eleven (83 of 111) studied cases of Herdsmen attacks in 2014 occurred in Benue, (southern) Kaduna, Plateau, Kogi, Niger, and Nasarawa states, and in these locations are numerous communities populated with a religious identity (Christianity) which is at variance with the religion of herdsmen which is Islam (Ochonu, 2018). More so, these places form the impermeable fringes for the 1804 jihadists and therefore constituted the traditional boundary between Muslim north (caliphate) and Christian south.

In 2018, states most hit were Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and (southern) Kaduna which are overwhelmingly Christian territories. Thus Ibeanu (2018) buttressed the above by stating that "herdsmen - farming communities' violence in Nigeria is deepened by Muslim - Christian differences" (17). On the 24th of April 2018, herdsmen attacked Ayar - Mbalom village in Gwer East of Benue state, killing seventeen worshippers and two priests. This attack has a negative impact on the Church and its growth in Benue State.

Herdsmen were reported to have attacked a Christian burial ceremony in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue state which left forty-two persons dead. When both events were analyzed, the question left in the minds of many concerned Nigerians was "do such attacks not betray any notion of "a fight for resource control"? Although, some herders could be genuinely industrious, some elements within the bunch are obviously religious extremists. According to Reverend Emmanuel Atsue and confirmed by police reports, herdsmen shot at and injured Reverend Cornelius Pohah and beat up Stephen Bakari, stating the reason for the attack as being that they stopped them from grazing at the seminary ground. Such unprovoked violence on religious leaders, priests and worshippers could simply be interpreted as religious extremism.

When mass killings occur in schools, Churches, residential areas, markets places, parks, and/or in government institutions, they are usually accorded multiple narratives. But whenever they occur in religious centers, and the victim's religious coloration are at variant

with those of its perpetrators, there is usually only one interpretation for such attacks - religious motivated violence; and that, it seems, is what herdsmen onrush represent.

Based on reported evidence, Christians and Christian worship centers and communities have been the worst hit by Herdsmen attacks. Adamu and Ben (2017) provided an account of how "Abubakar Adamu (a Muslim victim of Herdsmen attack) was set free after he recited the shahadah and fatiha (Islamic article of faith and Quranic first verse). Thus, he submitted the base on the said interview that "herdsmen are Muslims and their victim are overwhelmingly Christians and they shout "Allahu Akbar" during their attacks (22). The shout of Allahu Akbar during some herdsmen attacks, alongside other evidence, lend credence to a religious motivated violence. In summary:

Some elements within the bunch of Herdsmen are religious extremist. In their attacks on farming communities, these lots are motivated by religious differences. They are may be jihadists or some of their attacks are borne out of religious extremism. A major problem posed by Fulani and herdsmen onrush is that farming activities in some parts of Nigeria have been put to a halt. After several turns of attacks and killings, the farmers have seen that their farms are no longer safe for them. Rather than submitting themselves to death, therefore, they stay at home and others who live very close to the affected areas even flee their homes in order to find security and safety. Farmers within this region find it hard to go to their farms as well as to get enough food crops to the market thereby, increasing price of commodity in the market and causing acute shortage of food supply. It is unarguably true that farmers' inability to go their farms will have an agricultural effect on the state and even the country or beyond. Food and cash crops supply will be cut down and there might even be an acute shortage of food and other necessary agricultural products in the state, the country, and even beyond. Herdsmen attacks and killings have also caused serious damage to farmlands.

Conclusion

The incessant invasions by herdsmen on farmers in Ukum in Benue State have caused a lot of damages in terms of loss of human lives and properties. The Church like other aspects of the society has suffered some setbacks as the results of the incessant attacks especially in communities by the herdsmen as the attacks intensifies, the work of evangelization, Christian gathering and Church growth and development is increasingly becoming difficult. There is need for the Church to work with the government in finding solutions to the problem of herdsmen attacks that is becoming an impediment to the growth of the Church in Benue State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made as ways of checking the incidence of herdsmen attacks in Ukum in Benue State:

- i. To end the attacks by herdsmen, the government should arise as a matter of urgency and implement measures that will effectively curb the unchecked killings of farmers by herdsmen.
- ii. The government should implement the anti-open grazing law and encourage ranching. Ranching is a worldwide acclaimed method of rearing cattle. It is the system of rearing cattle in ranches or fenced plots of land. When reared in ranches, cattle are provided with food, water, and other basic needs of theirs.
- iii. The government should also ban the Fulani herdsmen from moving about with rifles. The Fulani herdsmen attacks have been looked at by many as an agendum by Muslim extremists aimed at Islamizing the Benue people. As such, if even after open grazing is banned, and the herdsmen are still found carrying guns and other weapons, it will become as clear as crystal that they do not mean well. The government must therefore, after implementing the anti-open grazing law, make sure to place a ban on possession of rifles.
- iv. The Church on her part should continue to pray and seek intervention on the issue of herdsmen attacks. Church leaders also need to educate their members on safety measures that will help minimise the destructions that is caused by the herdsmen in the state.

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