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Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria

Ibrahim Baba[α] & Chaminda Abeysinghe[σ]

Abstract- Conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria is an age long phenomenon which became severe shortly after the transfer of power from Military to Civil Rule in the country on 29th May 1999. In its current stage, the conflict has assumed religion features and thus serving as one of the major threats to Nigeria`s national security. This research examined some of the effective strategies that can be adopted in the proper resolution and management of the conflict. It was conducted with the used of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Closed ended questionnaire was administered on sixty respondents systematically chosen among Farmers, Herdsmen and Local Government Officials selected from the six states located in the North Central Region of Nigeria. The questionnaire were administered by the Researchers and all were completed by them and returned back to the Researchers who analyzed data collected through this method with the used of Positive Correlation Analysis (PCA). Promotion of religious tolerance and well as the establishment of effective mechanism for conflict resolution and management in the region were found out as part of the effective strategies for resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria. The Researchers recommended that forum and congress for promoting religious tolerance and harmony among Farmers and Herdsmen be established in the six states across the North Central Region of Nigeria. They also recommended that existing traditional institutions across the region should be empowered to effectively resolve and manage conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen.

Keywords: conflict, farmers, herdsmen, north central, Nigeria.

I. Introduction

Over the last year, the threat of the Boko Haram insurgency in north east Nigeria has gradually waned, yet a more deadly and far-reaching conflict has emerged. Over 100 people across three states (Benue, Kogi and Plateau) in north central region have been killed by suspected herdsmen. Attacks later became incessant and brutal. In February 2016, over 300 people died in a single attack on a community in a central state of Benue, from the herders commonly called the "Fulani Herdsmen". In the same state, hundreds of people have been killed in several attacks since then. The conflict is an old one but one that has suddenly spiralled out of control. The nomadic herdsmen have cattle but declining space to feed them on. Farmers accuse the herdsmen of using their land to graze their cattle and infringing on their rights. Herdsmen have complained of that the the land available to graze has decline, in part, blaming communities for restricting the land available to them (Akinwotu, 2016:1).

Geo-politically, Nigeria is made up of six geo-political zones with the North-Central Region having six states which include: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states. Nigeria`s Federal Capital Territory Abuja is also located in the region of the country. The region lies completely in the central portion of Nigeria. And it central location account for part of the reasons why it is often call the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The region is a combination of two vegetation belts. Half portion of this region fall within the Sudan savannah while the remaining half within the Guinea savannah (GohChe Leong and Adeleke, 2014:112). The vegetation of the region is a wonderful blessing to the people of the area-for it bestowed on them, a fertile soil conducive for serious agricultural production. Grasses in this region which are green and fresh throughout the seasons provide one of the best foliage's for animal consumption in the whole of Nigeria and sub-Saharan region of Africa. Grassland in the Benue and Niger rivers troughs provide the best grazing site in the country and the whole of western Sudan. The agricultural potentials of the region ahead of other parts of the country is glaring and Benue in particular with food production capacity sound enough to feed the whole of West African sub-region is code named the "Food Basket of the Nigerian Nation". Nigeria`s two major rivers (Rivers Benue and Niger) flow across the region and this additional reason make the region richly endowed in water resources and fertile land suitable for crop and animal production. Niger State within the region boast of three gigantic Dams (Kainji, Shiroro and Gurara Dams) providing Hydro Electricity Power to all the six geo-political zones in Nigeria.

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Source: Google (2017)

Figure 1: Geo-political Zones of Nigeria

Farmers have their crops to protect and Herdsmen their livestock to protect. This simply implies that value of land for both crop and animal production is increasing across Nigeria.But then, Herdsmen have been present to varying degree in all the thirty-six states across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria including Abuja the nation`s Federal Capital Territory. And in all these regions, conflict between them and farmers have been reported on several and different occasions. But the occurrence of such confrontation in the north central region of the country surpassed that of the other regions of Nigeria put together. The pressure on land is increasing the movement of herdsmen from the Sahel region of the country to the vast grassland in the central area of the country. This increase in movement is often accompanied with pressure on available land in the central region of the country. The scale of deaths incurred have always created tensions on how a seemingly previously contained conflict could lead to massacres that today stands as one of the major threats to national security, peace and unity in Nigeria. Investigating alternative measures that can be adopted to avoid future re-occurrence of the conflict is the task which the Researchers intend to achieve in this research.

II. Statement of Problem

Governmental efforts towards the resolution of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria have not been effective till date. Every attack and clash between the two land users is often accompanied with the deployment of government security personnel's to affected community who are shortly withdrawn after the conflict subside creating avenue for launching of fresh attack more severe than initial one. All attacks witnessed in the region is also escorted with the formation of committee of men by the government to among other objectives investigate the cause, effect and give recommendations on prevention. Committee reports on the conflicts have not succeeded in directing government into adopting appropriate strategies required to resolve and manage the situation in the region effectively. Instead of reducing, the conflict

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keep increasing with time. Fresh attacks and counter attacks as well as retaliations for previous or initial attacks keep exacerbating the magnitude of the conflict. And the view that existing state measures have failed in ameliorating the situation necessitated this research so as to come up with effective strategies on how the ageing conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria can be Resolved and managed.

III. Research Questions

This research raised and answered a number of questions basic among which include:

1. What are some of the strategies that can be used to effectively resolve and manage the conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria?
2. What are the major steps the government need to adopt in order to effectively resolve and manage the conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria?

IV. Research Objectives

The followings are the objectives of this research:

1. To examine some of the effective strategies for resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria.
2. And to also find out major steps the government can adopt in order to effectively resolve and manage the conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria.

V. Literature Review

Social and economic restructuring has turned the countryside into a far more complex space than it once was. In the past, the economic dominance of agriculture and other resource exploitation industries and the relative stability of rural communities meant that hegemonic discourse could represent the rural as a homogenous space and that such homogenizing representations were taken as the basis for rural policy and the organization of rural life (Woods, 2016:210). The north central region of Nigeria boast of several communities which are rural in nature and settlement patterns. And with such settlement patterns and natural vegetation which the region is blessed with, common sense will understand it that farming is the major occupation of the people of this region of Nigeria. The identification of rural communities in north central Nigeria with agriculture simply meant that agricultural interests were prioritized in rural policy by government of the six states situated in the region. It also implies that mainstream rural life in this region of Nigeria is organized around farming. Although, this simple representation of the life of the people of the north central region of Nigeria has been exploded as a result of persistent conflict over farmland, grazing sites and water points between farmers and herdsmen in several communities across the region.

Thousands of Herdsmen move south ward every year in search of pasture for their livestock. This mobility has led to a series of clashes over land that have killed more than 350 people in agrarian communities located in north central Nigeria in 2016. The conflict is exposing a growing problem that has attracted less international attention than Boko Haram and the militants threatening oil production in the Niger Delta region. Fertile land is becoming scarce across Africa`s most populous nation and conflict over this dwindling resources is likely to intensify (Reuters, 2016:1). The Farmers must plant their crops undisturbed: The Herdsmen must feed their cattle. That is the dilemma (Punch, 2016:1). Poisoned inter-communal relationship, effects of desertification, shrinking of the Lake Chad and cattle rustling threatening the lives of nomads are causes of their conflict with Farmers in several cases in communities across the north central region of Nigeria (Kawu, 2016:2). Nigerian government ineffective environmental policy itself is not helping matters in this region of the country. Herdsmen are most often identified with grazing in the grassland of the Sahel region in the country`s north east region before desertification and insecurity promoted by Boko Haram start pushing them south ward in search of available pasture for grazing their livestock. If effective environmental policy to tackle desertification which is encroaching into Nigeria`s north east region at greater velocity had been adopted and implemented, the pasture land in the north-east region would have been greatly sufficient for the Nomads to graze their livestock without pushing south ward. And this will have averted to a serious extent the problem of frequent occurrences of conflicts in the north central region where they are forced by desert encroachment to move to annual.

The North Central region has witnessed sharp spikes in violence surrounding Farmers-Herdsmen conflict and other critical junctures. The region has some of the highest levels of violence involving Farmers and Herdsmen in Nigeria. Benue, Kogi and Plateau states which are just three of the six states in north central region have experienced more Farmers-Herdsmen conflict than the all the states in the country put together (Nwgavi, 2013:1). In nearly all states in the north central region of Nigeria, Fulani herdsmen graze where they like, destroy crops, block traffic, rape women, beat up hunters, and not too infrequently, wage deadly armed attacks on villages where there is the slightest resistance to their depredations. Fulani herdsmen are becoming a dreaded group in North Central region of Nigeria-a minority that intimidates the majority: a minority that the majority is organizationally powerless to

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confront (Okeke, 2014:73). Although, beside land matter and encroachment into farms as well as destruction of farm produce which communities in north central region have often accused herdsmen of, Fulani herdsmen have also accused communities of encroaching on grazing routes and exploitation of herdsmen when demanding for compensation as a result of destruction of farm produce by cattle (Fasona et al, 2016:99).These counter accusations are signs of how prepare both parties involve in the conflict are to protect their interests and further their stand on this issue in the region. Conflict keep springing up across the region between Farmers and Herdsmen occasionally. But each of the conflicting unions always have reason to justify its stand and position-development that is making the management and settlement of the ageing conflicts difficult in the region. In every communities where they have carried out attacks in the region, Fulani herdsmen posits that they are forced by conditions to retaliate in order to make grazing successful for them ins such communities. As both parties involve in the conflict always have reason for striking, attention will then have to start shifting to the government whose responsibility it is to make all regions of the country peaceful and conducive for its citizens to live and to carry out their occupation without molestation.

The ageing nature of the conflict in the North Central region of Nigeria between Farmers and Herdsmen does not only calls for an urgent review of public land use act adopted since 1979 in the country. It requires multiple approaches for it causes and effects are also numerous than a single factor. Blench (2014:24) posits that:

> "In North Central Nigeria, traditional rulers undoubtedly play the most significant role in both managing conflict informally and arranging peace-making meetings when matters get out of hand. However, their power in the community is highly variable and in some areas, they are opposed by youth's groups, while elsewhere their power is being subverted by local government officials. Nonetheless, traditional rulers are more accountable and responsible than any other group. But they get little support from official channels, notably state governments"

Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in north central region of Nigeria which is a current bout remain a serious issue of debate among Nigeria watchers. Some have depicted the conflict as a continuation of ethno-religious struggles that predate the colonial era. However, the relative absence of such widespread bloodshed throughout much of Nigeria`s post-independence history suggests more contemporary factors are to be blame. Specifically, it appears the upsurge in Farmers-Herdsmen conflict stem from the confluence of four development: the ongoing expansion of land under cultivation, environmental degradation across Africa`s Sahel region, the decline of traditional authority figures, and the recent rise in large scale cattle rustling (Baca, 2015: 61). Ethno-religious struggle as a factor in the ongoing conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in Nigeria`s North Central region to me does not have basis. It is a contradiction of the actual factors fabricated by political elites to give the conflict tribal and religious affiliation so as to make Fulani tribal group and Muslim hated in the central region of Nigeria. North West and North-East states dominated by Fulani and Muslim and which are in no way under any threat of religious domination by different groups and faiths have also at different times experienced series of conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in their various communities. Farouk (2015:28) submitted that:

> "Zamfara state in the North-West region of Nigeria carved out of the historical Sokoto Fulani Caliphate like many other states in Northern Nigeria, has a history of rampant conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen. One of the recent conflict between the two groups was reported in a village settlement closer to Kauran-Namoda where Fulani herdsmen raid left a community completely destroyed, 60 people killed and more than 200 displaced"

The review above demonstrated how necessary efforts must be make towards emanating with effective strategies that are going to create avenue for resolving and managing the conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria.

VI. Research Methodology

This research was conducted with the used of both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Secondary data were sourced through text books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, research papers presented in conferences as well as other electronic and print materials obtained through the internet. Closed ended questionnaire was administered on 60 respondents systematically selected from the six states in the North Central Region of Nigeria. Each state is represented by 10 respondents chosen from one of its local government area. Among every 10 respondents chosen, there were 4 Farmers, 4 Herdsmen and 2 Local Government Officials. The respondents were selected from the local government areas which have recorded more and frequent conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in their respective state. The questionnaire was administered by the Researcher in each of the six chosen areas at different time. But the questions which respondents were asked are similar in all the six locations. Data were also collected on the respondents' biography such as gender, age, marital status, religion, occupation and academic qualification. Biographic data collected were analyzed with the used of descriptive statistic. Positive Correlation Analysis (PCA) was used in

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analyzing the data collected through the administration of closed ended questionnaire. Statistical correlation was measured by coefficient correlation where numerical values ranges from Ho to -1.0 gave the indication of the strength of relationship was used. Such as:

r>o indicated positive relationship
r<o indicated negative relationship
r= +1.0 described a perfect positive correlation
r= -1.0 described a perfect negative correlation

The closer the coefficients were to +1.0 and -1.0, the greater the strength of relationship as specified below:

Value or rStrength of relationship
-1.0 to -0.5 or 1.0 to 0.5----------Strong
-0.5 to -0.3 or 0.3 to 0.5----------Moderate
-0.3 to -0.1 or 0.1 to 0.3----------Weak
-0.1 to 0.1----------Non-or very weak

The Researchers presented all the data collected in a tabular form as well as with the used of statistical instruments like graphs, histogram, pie charts, etc. All data presented and analyzed led to the emergence of results which were also discussed by the Researchers. And this in the long run led the Researchers into stating the major findings made by them in relations to Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria.

VII. Data Presentation and Analysis

Below is the presentation of data in relations to the respondents' demographic status:

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variables	Farmers		Herdsmen		LG. Officials	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	18	30.00	24	40.00	6	10.00
Female	6	10.00	0	0	6	10.00
D2=Age						
20-25	4	6.67	6	10.00	2	3.33
26-30	6	10.00	4	6.67	2	3.33
31-35	8	13.34	8	13.33	4	6.67
36-40	4	6.67	4	6.67	2	3.33
41-Above	2	3.33	2	3.33	2	3.33
D3=Religion						
Islam	0	0	24	40.00	4	6.67
Christianity	22	36.67	0	0	6	10.00
Traditional	2	3.33	0	0	2	3.33
D4=Educational						
Non-formal Education	6	10.00	3	5.00	0	0
Islamic/Arabic	4	6.67	18	30.00	3	5.00
Primary	10	16.66	2	3.33	1	1.67
Secondary	3	5.00	1	1.67	5	8.33
Tertiary	1	1.67	0	0	3	5.00
D5=Marital Status						
Married	17	28.34	20	33.34	6	10.00
Single	2	3.33	4	6.67	2	3.33
Divorced	2	3.33	0	0	2	3.33
Widow	3	5.00	0	0	2	3.33

Source: Field Survey (2017)

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Table 1 as given above shows that 80% of the respondents are male while 20% of them are female. Out of this number of respondents, 20% are within the ages of 20-25, 20% fall between the ages of 26-30 while 33.34% are between the ages of 31-35 and 16.67% are between 36-40 years old. Only 9.99% of them fall between the ages of 41 and above. Also, table 1 reveals that 55% of them 46.67% are Muslim i.e. Islam as popularly referred to while 46.67% are Christian and 6.67% belong to traditional religions practiced across the North Central region of Nigeria. In terms of educational qualification, 15% of them had Non-Formal Education while 41.67% of them had Islamic and Arabic Education. Also, 21.66% of them had Primary Education and 15% had Secondary Education while 6.67% of them had Tertiary Education. Married people formed 71.68% of the respondents while single people are represented by 13.33% of the respondents. Divorce (s) form 6.66% of the respondents while 8.33% of the respondents are widows who have lost either their wives or husbands to the ageing conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in communities across the North Central region of Nigeria. Respondents are systematically chosen by the Researchers to ensure representation based on population.

Below is as contained in table 1 is the presentation of data collected by the Researchers on "Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in the North Central Region of Nigeria.

Table 2: Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of the Conflict

Strategies (S)	0.1	0.3	0.5	1.0
S1. Clear demarcation between farming sites and grazing routes across the North Central region of Nigeria will lead to effective resolution and management of conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the region.	2	5	3	50
S2. Adoption and implementation of effective land use and environmental policies by Nigerian government can result in effective resolution and management of the conflict.	3	5	5	47
S3. Proper policing of rural and agrarian communities in the North Central region of Nigeria can lead to effective resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in the region.	2	4	6	48
S4. Promotion of religious tolerance among Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria is an effective strategy for resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in the region.	2	4	4	50
S5. Stiffer arms possession and usage policy across Nigeria is an effective strategy for resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in North Central Region of Nigeria.	3	5	7	45
S6. Establishment of mechanism for settling dispute between Farmers and Herdsmen is an effective strategy for conflict resolution and management across the North Central region of Nigeria.	2	2	4	52

Source: Field Research (2017)

Table 2 as given above shows that strong relationship exist between S1, S2, S3, S4, S5 and S6 with Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in the North Central region of Nigeria. This is represented by 1.0 which is also 1.0=r>0 where r>0 showing strong relationship can also be interpreted as r>0=+1.0 where +1.0 represent perfect positive correlation between S1, S2, S3, S4 ,S5 and S6 Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in the North Central region of Nigeria.

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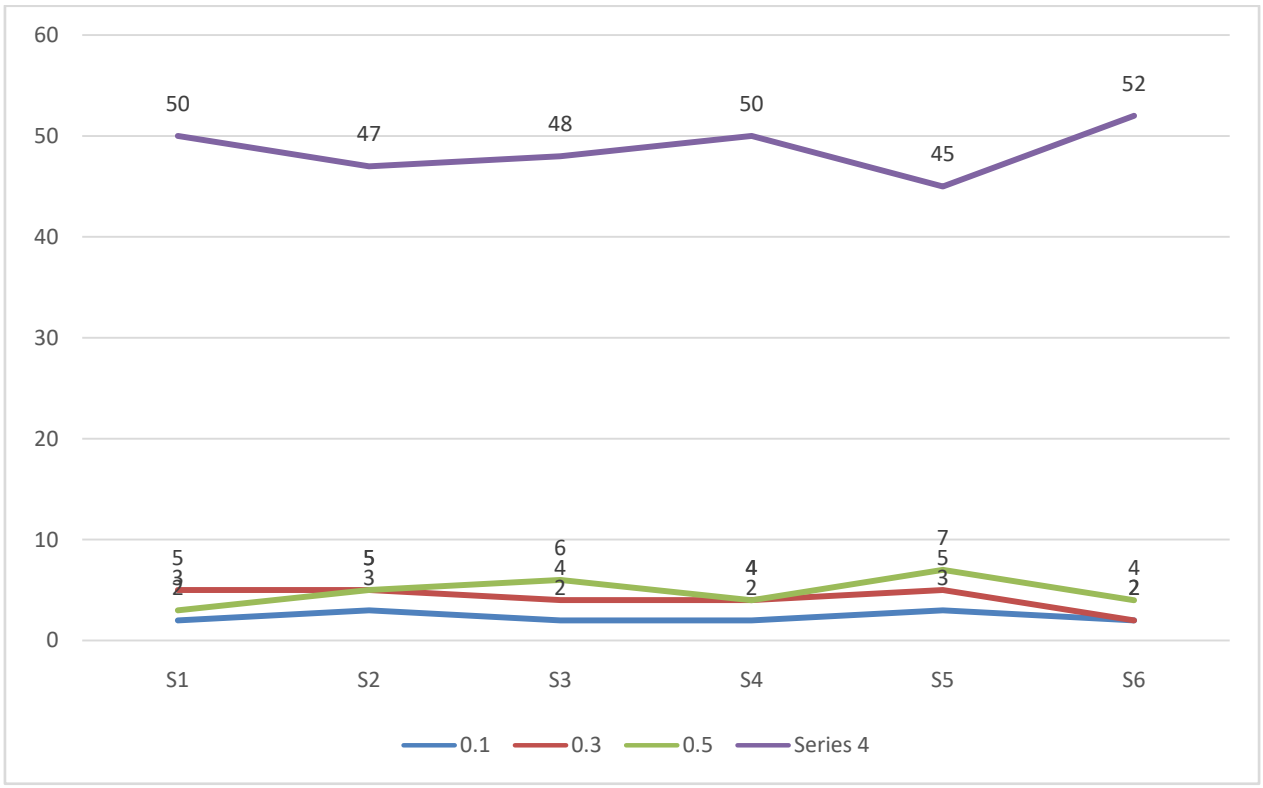

Source: Field Survey (2017)

Figure 1: Effective Strategies for Resolution and Management of the Conflict

VIII. Discussion of Result

Several processes an serve as effective strategies for resolution and management of the ageing conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria. Clear demarcation of farming sites and grazing routes across the region will serve as an eye opener to the both land users who often complain that there are no signs to show where farming sites actually are and grazing routes follow. Age long established grazing routes have been over grown by bushes and some taken over by development of public structures like markets, schools, hospitals, motor parks among others. And current generation of Farmers and Herdsmen have little knowledge on traditional method of carrying out their occupations. This result in constant trespasses on the land users into each other territories thereby creating frictions between the two land users. The Nigerian government environmental policy is a dormant policy which has failed to address environmental menace in the country. Desert is encroaching south ward into Nigeria at a very faster velocity as a result of poor measures towards afforestation. Water points are drying up especially in the far north as a result of global warming. And drought drying up available pasture up north is forcing Herdsmen South ward in search of greener pasture for their livestock. This drift has culminated in several frictions between the two land users especially in the Central Region of Nigeria. Policing system is not available in several communities across the North Central Region of Nigeria. This has continued to make such communities vulnerable to attacks by armed men and Herdsmen. Although in places where frictions between Farmers and Herdsmen have occurred, security personnel's were deployed and shortly withdrawn after the conflict subsided leading to fresh wave of attacks more severe than initial ones. Farmers and Herdsmen are divided along religion lines in the North Central Region of Nigeria. Majority of the Farmers are Christian while few others are Animist. Herdsmen are predominantly Muslims. This has made friction between them to quickly assume religious nomenclature. And with the exception of Plateau State, the other five states in the region have no established forum or organization promoting religious tolerance among persons of different religious background. As a result of age long insurgency in the North East Region of Nigeria as well as those in neighboring countries and the rebellions in Northern Mali, arms illegally find their ways into civilian possession even more than money and food in Nigeria. Traditional institutions were initially playing active role in settlement of conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen in the North Central Region of Nigeria. But this role has been punctured by party politics. And alleged partiality and manipulation of justice has made the both land

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users to lost confidence much confidence in the public judicial system. Politicized traditional institutions and alleged partial judicial system have left the region with ineffective mechanism for resolution and management of conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen. And this mostly result in frequent friction between the two agricultural land users as each try to retaliate by taking law into its hand. This however calls for urgent need to fashion effective strategies for resolution and management of the conflict.

IX. Major Findings

The Researchers made a number of findings basic among which include:

1. Promotion of religious tolerance will serve as an effective strategy for resolution and management of Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in the north central region of Nigeria.
2. Establishment of effective mechanism for settling disputes between Farmers and Herdsmen will serve as an effective strategy for resolution and management of conflict between the two agricultural land users in the North Central Region of Nigeria.

X. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the data collected and analyzed as well as the major findings made in this research, the Researchers recommended that:

1. Forums, groups or associations aimed at promoting religious tolerance among Farmers and Herdsmen be formed in all the six states across the North Central Region of Nigeria. This will go a long way in building religious harmony and tolerance between Farmers and Herdsmen in the region. The Federal Government of Nigeria through its Ministry of Agriculture and Forest Reserve should endeavor to establish a very clear demarcation between grazing routes and farming sites across the North Central region of Nigeria. The land use act of 1978 which established grazing routes across Nigeria is outdated and need to be reviewed to provide for new additional grazing routes across the country. It should establish a more modern use of land across the nation to accommodate innovating changes which has taken place in relations to land usage in the country after 1978. And also, Sound and effective environmental policies should be adopted and implemented to the maximum level by the Nigerian government. The policies should be designed to address environmental problems on geo-political basis across the country.
2. Effective mechanism for conflict resolution and management should be established across the North Central Region of Nigeria. Traditional institutions should be empowered to regain their previous status and recognition as active elements of conflict resolution and management in the North Central region of Nigeria. Recognize responsibility and status should be created for traditional rulers and their dependence on local government authority should be reviewed. Traditional institutions in the North Central Region do not have constitutional roles or duties. There is the need to create some constitutional roles for them. And this should include the informal resolution and management of conflict at the community level. Effective and proper policing system should be established in agrarian and rural communities across the North Central region of Nigeria. Communities without Police outposts should be provided with one. And state as well as local authorities across the region must be made to as a matter of must contribute certain percent of their statutory allocation and resources to the development and sustenance of security across the region. Nigerian government need to improve its border security system by recruiting more officers to ensure that adequate surveillance of the outstanding unmanned borders of the country are put under security checks, control and management. This should be supported with the adoption of a stiffer arms possession and usage policy in the country. Open mobility of persons with sophisticated weapons as well as the usage of same by persons other than the armed forces and other security officials should be seriously prohibited by the government. And finally, this research recommends that future land and natural resource use policy formulation and implementation must involve all the stakeholders or their representatives to avoid any cry of marginalization and non-inclusion in matters that affects them. If this is done establish rules relating to farming and grazing in the region and country in general becomes a regulation which all parties or agricultural land users must obey by virtue of their involvement in adopting such regulations. Ignorance of the rules cannot be claimed anymore by any party and this will lead to amelioration of the conflict.

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